



ANTICIPATING THE NEED TO Forgive

By A. Dean Byrd

We will be on the receiving end of hurtful remarks or actions countless times throughout our lives. Deciding ahead of time to forgive those who intentionally or unintentionally hurt us empowers us to move forward without bitterness or pain.

We are required to “forgive all men” (D&C 64:10). Christ is our example. As He hung on the cross, He prayed for the soldiers who crucified Him, saying, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34; see footnote c). As the Savior was ready to forgive even the greatest offenses, we can also prepare ourselves to forgive those who will hurt or offend us.

The following hypothetical example helps show how important it can be to make decisions in advance. A man is bitten by a rattlesnake. He must quickly make a choice: should he chase down the snake and kill it to avenge the offense, or should he

immediately tend to his wound? If he kills the snake, he will get his revenge on the creature that has caused him pain. However, this rash act would neither dull the pain nor delay the onset of the poison. If he chooses instead to address the problem and tend to the wound, he will not have his revenge—but he may save his life in the process. Choosing this course of action ahead of time helps him take lifesaving steps as quickly as possible and avoid prolonged suffering.

We can apply the same pattern when others hurt us with their remarks or actions. We can decide to forgive them in advance. While it is not likely that a rattlesnake will bite us, it is likely that we will be on the receiving end of intentional or unintentional negative remarks or actions from others many times in our lives. Anticipating that and forgiving ahead of time keeps the “poison” out of our system and spares us from unnecessary pain and suffering.

Deciding ahead of time to forgive those who hurt us—even intentionally—empowers us to move forward.



WE ARE REQUIRED TO FORGIVE

“A spirit of forgiveness and an attitude of love and compassion toward those who may have wronged us is of the very essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), “Of You It Is Required to Forgive,” *Tambuli*, Nov. 1991, 2, and *Ensign*, June 1991, 2.

Learning to Forgive

As a mental health professional, I am often called upon to assist priesthood leaders with those who struggle. That is how I came to meet Jared (not his real name). He was a 38-year-old married man who was “heavy laden” and burdened with care (Matthew 11:28). Jared had experienced years of disappointing experiences with the accompanying feelings of anxiety, depression, and worry.

As a child, Jared had been teased because he was a bit overweight. He had been a sensitive child, and the teasing had caused pain that had never gone away—even after he married and became a father. He recalled feeling disconnected from his peers throughout his childhood and adolescence, although he tried to fit in with others at school. He remembered even laughing along with those who teased him, only to feel sad when he was alone. He noted, “I know that it was just good-natured teasing for the most part, but afterwards I would repeat dialogues in my mind, thinking of what I should have said and of how to get even with those who were making fun of me.” Though his weight was no longer a problem, these earlier feelings lingered, and he often found that the old hurts returned.

Jared became increasingly frustrated with himself as he continued to struggle in his relationships at church, in the workplace, and especially with his own family members. He knew he would take little things personally even if the person hadn’t intended to hurt him. Jared would become angry with himself when he took offense too easily, and it seemed an insurmountable challenge to forgive both himself and others. In one of our meetings he said, “It becomes quite lonely when you have a battle with yourself and lose.”

Jared knew that he couldn’t overcome his emotions alone. He prayed earnestly that he could realize forgiveness for himself and those around him, and he started to take his problems to his Heavenly Father with increased faith in the Atonement of Jesus Christ. As Jared gradually began to embrace the power of forgiveness, the healing power of the Atonement seemed to be reflected in his countenance. As he fully engaged in the sincere process of repentance, he found a new self beginning to emerge. The change in behavior toward himself and others was almost palpable, and those around him began noticing a change in him. Gradually but assuredly, Jared began a movement toward the mighty change of heart. *Being* forgiven changed to *feeling* forgiven, demonstrating to himself and others the power of the believing heart. He found himself being reminded of the admonition to “humble yourselves before God” and to “ask in sincerity of heart” (Mosiah 4:10).

The scriptures, which had been Jared’s anchor and hope since his childhood, took on new meaning, not because the words were new but because a new Jared was emerging. He had often imagined the man he wanted to become but felt like a failure because he never measured up to his own expectations. Now he was learning to have forgiveness in his heart as he sought to forgive those who had hurt him in the past.

Jared realized that as an adult he had lost sight of the truth that he was a child of God. He had sung the song in Primary and had known the reality of it when he was younger, but he had somehow lost hold of that basic truth. He wanted that childlike knowledge to be an integral part of him again. He knew that if he once again believed he was a child of God, he could overcome the challenges he was trying to defeat. Jared remembered as a child being sensitive

to the promptings of the Holy Spirit; how he longed to be sensitive to those promptings now. He knew that having forgiveness on his mind, in his heart, and on center stage in his life would help him to reclaim that childlike trait.

One day as I talked with Jared, he related a new understanding he had gained from the story about the Lord forgiving the woman who had committed adultery. When the Lord said to her, “Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more,” she “glorified God from that hour, and believed on his name” (Joseph Smith Translation, John 8:11). Jared realized that once the woman had tasted of divine forgiveness, she was able to repent. Applying this interpretation to himself, he wondered if when he forgave others his forgiveness would likewise serve as a catalyst for them to repent.

From the reclaiming of the spiritual gift of forgiveness in his life, Jared shared the following gospel truths that had become important to him.

1. The Lord’s grace is sufficient

There is no struggle for which the Atonement is not sufficient. This did not mean that all Jared’s challenges would necessarily be resolved in this lifetime, but rather that the Lord’s grace is sufficient to cleanse, succor, and forgive. The challenges of mortality are constant for most of us, but His grace is an ever-present spiritual resource available to us all. And certainly, forgiveness emerges as a gift from the Atonement and can be freely accessed by all of us.

2. The infinite Atonement has no bounds

We cannot sink lower than the arms of the Atonement can reach, if we are willing to repent. What comfort this gospel truth brought



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to Jared! The blessings that come to us when we allow the Atonement to enter our lives are infinite. The Atonement helps us to discover our true selves with all of our divinity, and somehow as we develop a relationship with our Father in Heaven and His Son, Jesus Christ, we see ourselves and others as He does. When we see through the Savior's eyes, it becomes easier to forgive others and ourselves.

3. Our imperfections can become strengths

The blessings of the Atonement don't just cover our sins but extend to our imperfections and shortcomings. In short, we develop the courage to be imperfect as we strive for perfection (wholeness) in our lives. When we view ourselves and others through our spiritual eyes, we become more tolerant and forgiving of imperfections. We can screen out the negativity, the hurt feelings, the offenses. We can see people based on intent—giving them the benefit of the doubt and assuming their good intent. Sometimes when we feel hurt, offended, or frustrated, we frame what we see much like a frame around a photo. Forgiveness allows us to frame people and interactions differently. Jared soon learned that framing forgiveness around others and himself made his life's journey much smoother.

4. Our thoughts and actions determine who we become

One of the more valuable lessons that Jared learned from this new journey of forgiveness is that challenges don't determine who we are; rather, our responses to those challenges determine who we become. What a realization this was to Jared! It wasn't how people treated him; it was his response to that

treatment that determined the outcome of his life. When he greeted the treatment of others with forgiveness, he was able to move on. In fact, forgiveness empowered him to move on, knowing that he was taking the higher road.

5. God loves us and wants us to progress

Jared learned that the Lord loves us. He wants us to become like His Son and has made a way for us to become like Him. The power of forgiveness is critical to this process, helping us to erase the sins that beset us and to overcome the imperfections that seem so much a part of mortality.

We Can Decide to Forgive in Advance

The most powerful lesson Jared learned was something he and I called anticipatory forgiveness. Here is Jared's description from the pages of one of his journal entries:

"As I think of times I have had conflicts with my spouse or others, these conflicts usually have left me with two contrary feelings—first, a feeling of the need to convince the other person that I was right; and second, a feeling of rejection. Although I describe these two feelings as contrary, the one feeling would usually lead to the other. For example, the need to feel that I was right would lead me to feel bad, which would lead me to want to feel good about myself, which would lead me to desire the feeling that I was right. This cycle of feelings became a burden. While I do not understand completely why my personality fell into that cycle, I do know that it was likely based on my failure to appreciate the person I was.

"Anticipatory forgiveness has helped me to relieve, and in some cases remove, that burden in my life. Instead of nurturing those

feelings during times of conflict, my mind is now focused on listening to the other person and objectively looking at other issues that might be contributing to the conflict. In some ways, forgiveness has already occurred on my part, and I am ready to reconcile and move on. It's like putting on sunblock before going into the sun. The healing balm of forgiveness takes the sting out of the conflict and the hurt, and even soothes the pain.

"I believe that anticipatory forgiveness relates to those gospel principles surrounding the concept of forgiveness. I wonder about Christ's statement that we are required to forgive all men [see D&C 64:10]. I have often thought about the difficulty of this requirement for me. With my limited understanding, I wonder about forgiving those who have really wronged or hurt me. As I have thought about the life of Christ, I think He practices anticipatory forgiveness in the purest form. Because of his unique role in the plan of happiness, He has already anticipated my faults and frailties. He has the ability to see me as a whole person and judge me based upon my heart. When He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, it was at that time that anticipatory forgiveness was granted to me and to all men."

In Doctrine and Covenants 84:61, the Lord says, "For I will forgive you of your sins with this commandment—that you remain steadfast in your minds in solemnity and the spirit of prayer, in bearing testimony to all the world of those things which are communicated unto you." Herein is another expression of anticipatory forgiveness.

Perhaps we, like Jared, can learn to anticipate the opportunities to forgive and do as Jared learned to do—ask daily, "Whom may I forgive today?" ■



THE PEACE OF FORGIVENESS

"The blessings that flow from the gift of forgiveness are many. Chief among them is peace. . . . The forgiveness we offer to others and the forgiveness we receive from Jesus Christ lead us to Him and along the path to eternal life."

Elder Cecil O. Samuelson Jr. of the Seventy, "Words of Jesus: Forgiveness," *Liahona*, Feb. 2003, 29, and *Ensign*, Feb. 2003, 51.