

Give Forgiveness at Christmas

Christmas is a time of year when we make our list of friends and family to whom we want to give gifts. We usually start with our children and spouse and work our way out to our family, friends, and coworkers. As we do this, the list becomes larger and larger. It's no wonder that we can be overwhelmed at the COST of Christmas.

Christmas is a time of year when we make our list of friends and family to whom we want to give gifts. We usually start with our children and spouse and work our way out to our family, friends, and coworkers. As we do this, the list becomes larger and larger. It's no wonder that we can be overwhelmed at the COST of Christmas.

God paid a very dear cost for us to receive the gift of eternal life through Jesus. He gave His one and only Son so that we could have life. Most of us understand eternal life as being something that we will receive after we die. But that isn't the full meaning. You see, ETERNAL means endless, never-ending, everlasting, and timeless. The moment we accept the offer of Jesus' sacrifice of LIFE, we begin our eternal, never-ending walk with God. What that means is that God's life, His love, His peace, His joy, His compassion, is NOW part of who we are, and as we submit ourselves to Him, the Holy Spirit empowers us to be more and more like Jesus. That's the part of LIVING that I didn't understand for many years of my Christian walk—that I didn't have to survive on my own anymore because the Holy Spirit was IN ME to HELP ME live the Christian life.

One of the things that the Holy Spirit empowers us to do is FORGIVE. To some that sounds like an impossible task that even God would not ask us to do. After all, some of the people we don't want to forgive really did hurt us. But forgiveness is the MAIN thing that Jesus was born to give to us. We are all sinners who fall short of God's glory, and without the shed blood of Jesus, we are doomed not just to hell, but to live a life of misery, because separated from God our lives are hopeless. But Jesus offers us forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God. Now that is LIFE ETERNAL!

I believe one of the biggest reasons that people, even Christians, are miserable is because they refuse to let go of the hurts, disappointment, and offenses of others. They justify their pain and keep themselves and others locked in a prison of unforgiveness.

Peter had a problem with unforgiveness too. He wasn't exactly thrilled with one of his fellow disciples. One day (Matthew 18) he asked Jesus a question, "How many times must I forgive? How about 7? That sounds reasonable doesn't it?" Can't you just see Peter beaming with pride after answering his own question? But Jesus went above and beyond Peter's expectation and said, "How about 7 times 70?" I can just hear Peter. "You've got to be kidding me! You expect me to forgive this guy John, who by the way keeps bragging about how much you love him, 490 times? Why don't you deal with him about his pride and give me a BREAK!"

Jesus had a way of getting right to the heart of people's problems. The real issue here is that NO ONE, not even Peter who walked with Jesus every day, could love the unlovely and give forgiveness without the help of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was reminding Peter, and US, that apart from HIM we can't do anything.

Have you ever noticed that right in the middle of the word forgiveness is the word GIVE? Luke 6:38 says that whatever we give will be given back to us. Paul said in Galatians 6:7 that whatever we sow, which is also a form of giving, would be what we harvest. Jesus said that unless we forgive others, God wouldn't forgive us (Matthew 6:15). OUCH! Why do you suppose that we are required to do this?

I believe there are two main reasons that God requires Christians to offer forgiveness to others. First, we have been forgiven. All of our sins, which are many, have been washed away. They haven't just been covered over. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from ALL unrighteousness and sets us free from the power of sin and death. When we refuse to forgive others, WE, not them, are placed into a pit and our hearts become a seedbed for Satan's seeds of bitterness, depression, and offense. The longer we go holding on to unforgiveness, the more the garden of our heart becomes infested with the enemy's seeds! This is NOT the life that Jesus died to give us. This the enemy's plan to kill, steal, and destroy the love that God wants to shed abroad in our hearts!

Second, when we offer forgiveness to others who have hurt us, it unlocks the chains in their life for God to work in their hearts. This is exactly what happened in my own life many years ago. A person whom I had really mistreated chose to forgive and pray for me. I know in my heart that because of that, God did a work in my life! Jesus even said that those whom we forgive, their sins will be forgiven. That's pretty amazing that we have that much power!

One of the obstacles to giving forgiveness is that our flesh never wants to do it. I can't tell you how many people have said to me "I wish I could forgive, but I just don't feel like I can." Wishing isn't one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but self-control is! That's the reason that God told us in Deuteronomy 30:19 that even though He put the choice of life and death in front of us, we would have to choose life! It's not something we always feel like doing! James 4:7 says that if we will submit ourselves to God and resist the devil, he'll flee. Notice that Satan doesn't flee until after we choose to submit ourselves to God, and I can't find anywhere that it says I have to feel like it! Forgiveness is a choice we make in obedience to God's Word. It may take a while for our flesh to get over harboring unforgiveness, but our spirit man loves it when we choose to follow God!

It isn't easy making the choice to forgive. But living with unforgiveness can be downright deadly! I've heard it said that harboring unforgiveness is like drinking poison and hoping the other person dies! That's a good way to think about it because many, many illnesses, including depression and arthritis, can be linked to bitterness and unforgiveness!

That's why I'm giving you this gift idea to give to some undeserving soul this Christmas! Giving forgiveness will open a door for God to do great things in your life and in the lives of those you choose to forgive. So as you're making your Christmas list this year, try making a list of those you need to forgive. Maybe it's your spouse or your children. Maybe it's the store clerk who was rude to you. Maybe it's your pastor or your friend. Maybe it's yourself. Your gift of forgiveness will go a long way for God to work in their hearts, and in yours. Ask the Holy Spirit to stir up a heart of compassion in you and release LOVE, JOY, and PEACE in your heart. Be obedient to the still, small voice of God and forgive those who have hurt and disappointed you in the past. Your Christmas will be brighter and their life will be better for it too.

Blessings and MERRY Christmas!

by Cinde Lucas

Cinde Lucas is an ordinary person, who happens to LOVE to encourage and motivate people! She has a passion to share the love of God with people and to let them know that God is GOOD and He has an AWESOME plan for their lives! Cinde truly desires to lead people into a closer relationship with God through music; her prayer is that the ministry we share will uplift and encourage people to be all that God created them to be. Visit Overflow Ministries at www.CindeLucas.com.