

CHAPTER 14 GUILT AND FORGIVENESS

WE MUST DISCOVER WHAT WE ARE LOOKING FOR INSIDE NOT OUTSIDE OF OURSELVES

We all have an inner peace we can learn to consciously access.

External rational thought creates external feelings.

Internal conscious thought accesses internal feelings.

SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE INVENTORY

1. Most people find the hardest person to forgive is themselves. True or False?
2. Some people have done things that cause them to never feel forgiven. True or False?
3. Some children cannot forgive their parents because of what they did. True or False?
4. When you cannot forgive another, they control you. True or False?
5. To forgive means not to blame others for your hurt and anger. True or False?
6. Some people feel guilty because others get angry with them. True or False?
7. Some people will always feel guilty because of what they did. True or False?

WHO OWNS YOU?

Scripture says, "If you do not forgive others, neither will God forgive you." Matt 6;14

Guilt and unforgiveness go together because a person feeling unforgiven feels guilt.

When a person cannot forgive themselves they generally have someone else they cannot forgive. As long as their hand is in a fist holding onto the other person, they cannot receive what they most want.

It is only by opening their hand and to give real forgiveness that freedom from guilt can come. The best definition of forgiveness is "not blaming others for our pain." When we stop blaming others, we can begin to let it go.

The Oprah Winfrey show had three women who had been raped. They had become Christians and had forgiven their rapists. To Oprah's and all of our shock, none of them had taken the men to court. Forgiveness does not mean saying what these men did was right. They were wrong and should spend a good time in prison for their crime. Forgiveness is a matter of letting yourself go, not letting others go.

Another woman who was raped was asked by an interviewer whether she was still affected by the rape. She said, "Hell, no! I gave that man thirty minutes of my life and I am not going to give him any more."

After I finished talking about forgiveness at a conference, a woman came to me and said, "How can I forgive?" She related how her daughter was brutally raped and murdered by a man who was later convicted and now spending the rest of his life in prison. "Whenever I think of him, what he did to my daughter, and the terrible tragic loss of my only child, I feel bitterness, anger, deep sorrow, unforgiveness, and pain. I suffer every day of my life over what she must have gone through." I asked her, "Do you want this man to own you?" She jumped back as if hit by an electric shock and with an angry voice said "Certainly not!" I answered, "Well, he does own you, and until you can let it go and not blame him for your pain, anger, and suffering, he will continue to own you."

CONFESSION WITHOUT REPENTANCE: (THE SCAPE GOAT PROBLEM)

The problem with forgiveness is that people are looking for forgiveness without repentance. It's called "Scapegoating" and it won't work.

Scapegoating comes from the Old Testament times when during the Day of Atonement the high priest would confess the sins of Israel on the horns of a goat. The goat was then set free to escape into the wilderness with the sins of Israel on its head. This seemed to give a certain amount of relief to the people, but it didn't last very long. The pain of the sin came back. So they decided to tie a scarlet ribbon on the horns of the goat. When it was bleached out their sin would surely be forgiven. But this also took too long. They then decided to toss the goat off the cliff feeling that its death would bring a sense of total forgiveness. The problem was the goat didn't always die, and this wounded goat with a broken leg would be wandering around the wilderness with the sins of Israel attached to it. Finally they decided they would just kill the goat, but this didn't seem to work either. Today we consider ourselves more civilized than this primitive way of trying to get rid of our guilt, yet we are doing the same thing today with capital punishment.

A prison chaplain many years ago told of how when they would execute a person in Chicago, people would gather around the prison, which was on a hill with a road surrounding the walls. At midnight the lights dimmed and the people would go quietly away. (Actually, the lights never dimmed – the people only thought they did. The lights were on a separate power supply.) In effect the people were dumping their anger, guilt, and pain on a violent criminal and were finding a brief kind of respite. But, as with the ancient Jews, this respite just would not last very long.

Their problem was that there was no change on the inside. They would continue creating the same pain, guilt and anger. Soon they would have to find another person to dump on. Sometimes the "other" would be a spouse, child or innocent bystander. The problem was the sin continued because there was no repentance. Repentance, a Greek word "metanoia" meaning to change "meta" the nous" mind, way of thinking, or attitude. You cannot just confess sins and receive forgiveness, but not have a change of mind if you expect it to last.

As a matter of fact, you need to change your mind first, then comes the sense of forgiveness, and then the confession. Without a change of mind, it is still the same old Scapegoat problem.

If people think, "I won't be happy until they get rid of Saddam Hussein," Saddam then controls their lives.

The inverse of this is true. It would be possible to be happy even if they never get rid of Saddam. It is a sad thing when you hear the family of a brutally murdered child say they will not have closure until the murderer is executed. The problem here is that they are pinning their hopes on having closure and freedom from the pain on the execution. After the murderer is executed they will still have the same pain, but even greater because their hopes are dashed. They will perhaps say "I do not understand what closure is."

SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE TEST

The one thing that controls our spiritual intelligence is unforgiveness. There are three questions we can ask ourselves to test our spiritual intelligence.

First, "Do you think you can not forgive one person and not have it effect your entire life?" If you believe this, you have low spiritual intelligence. Unforgiveness is like breaking an arm. You do not want any one to hit you again nor do you want them getting too close to the injury. If they do get close you may try to warn them by exploding, telling them of your pain and anger. The problem is when you are controlled by your unforgiveness, no one can see it. They don't know what you are getting upset about, or why you are yelling, They get defensive, yell back and you have the start of a long-lasting argument.

In my counseling I have found an old wound, perhaps some abuse by a parent that is unforgiven, will impact marriage, family, personal, and business relationships. Sometimes the wound is so deep, it is buried. It may take years of counseling just to dig it up.

However, a person can save hours of counseling and thousands of dollars if they are willing to start consciously practicing one thing: forgiveness. Forgiveness is like a healing unction that permeates deep into the life of the soul.

The second question is, "Are you willing to forgive?" If the answer is "No", you have low spiritual intelligence.

The problem is most people do not know what forgiveness means, but they think they do. If they knew truly what it meant, they would want to do it.

It is important to have a working, personal definition of forgiveness, not one someone else told you. A biblical definition of forgiveness can be summarized by the phrase, "Whosoever sins you forgive they are forgiven. And whosoever sins you do not forgive, they are not forgiven."

First of all this does not mean if you don't forgive someone, they are not forgiven. Understanding the grammatical construction can help. The word "whosoever" modifies "sin". "They" therefore refers to the sin not to the person.

The actual Greek work for "forgive" should be translated "release". Then this passage

would read, "Whosoever sins you release, they are released and whosoever sins you retain, they are retained". If you refuse to let go of the pain, hurt and anger, you naturally will continue to have pain, hurt and anger.

The final question is, "Do you think the reason you feel hurt is because of what happened?" If so, you have a very low spiritual intelligence score.

The litmus test as to whether you have forgiven someone or not would be if you believe every time you think of what happened you feel hurt. If you do not have to feel hurt and angry -- you have forgiven.

Forgiveness is a choice, and we can choose which we want to believe.

The truth is, at times we feel more hurt than at other times. And the mood we are in does make a difference.

When we feel secure, loved and happy, we see events differently than when we feel insecure, unhappy and unloved. This being true, the event does not cause the pain or anger, but our perspective of the event.

Whenever we think of what happened, we do not have to feel angry – that it is possible to be at peace. Then we can become open to the presence of the peace that is within us. We find what is called "closure." This can enable us to be free and healed of our wounds both known and unknown

Guilt from past mistakes we have made can cause us to be powerless every time we think of what we did. No matter how much we try to make amends, we are still are powerless to be rid of the guilt. Somehow it never seems to balance out. We always wind up owing someone for something they caused. Guilt, however, is not caused by the event or by those who will not forgive you. It is caused by our perspective.

The final level is the most important one to understand. It would be possible, just possible, to think of what happened and still be at peace. Once we reach this level of understanding, we are on the road to closure.

Consider the fact that at times you have felt more guilty than other times. This is always true. Next, reflect on times when the mood you are in made a difference. Sometimes in a low mood you can chew on the guilt and the deed. In a high mood, it is easier to walk away from.

Now consider this truth: You do not always have to feel guilty every time you think about the event?

Once you realize this, it follows that it would be possible to be at peace whenever you think of what you did.

That is why understanding the five levels of truth is so important.

They can be helpful to leading a person to repentance, to change our way of thinking. They can enable us to understand forgiveness and find closure.

Now check your answers and see if you have any change of heart.

RESPONSES TO SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE INVENTORY

1. Most people find the hardest person to forgive is themselves.

False- Most people have a hard time forgiving themselves if they have someone else they cannot forgive.

2. Some people have done things that cause them to never feel forgiven.

False- They can't change what was done, but they can change how they think about what was done.

3. Some children cannot forgive their parents because of what they did.

False- Change the way they are thinking and they change their ability to forgive.

4. When you cannot forgive another, they control you.

True- Blaming others for your pain puts them in control of you.

5. To forgive means not to blame others for your hurt and anger

True- Letting go of the blame is what forgiveness is about.

6. Some people feel guilty because others get angry with them.

False- They think that is why they feel guilty.

7. Some people will always feel guilty because of what they did.

True- It's their choice, but why do it?