

Forgiveness

for-give-ness

A disposition or willingness to stop feeling resentful
towards an offense or offender

Sometimes, I lay in bed at night and seethe. Some injustice, some injury has been committed against me so I stare at the shadows on the ceiling and recall each infraction, catalogue each wrongdoing for later reference. Brick by brick, I construct a wall between me and my villain and stand firm, hardened for the fight.

But the fight never comes. I am alone, behind my wall, swirling in my fury.

The human heart is tender and we struggle to keep it safe. Sometimes that means shuttering ourselves away; other times we lash out. But when we choose to forgive, we take a different path. We don't retreat or attack. We stand still in the tornado and make a choice to open our hearts wider than we ever thought possible.

In 2006, a man walked into a one-room Amish schoolhouse in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania and shot ten girls before turning the gun on himself. He was, by most standards, the definition of evil. Unforgivable. But, before the sun had set the following day, the entire community had gathered to offer their forgiveness to the murderer and his family.

Forgiveness isn't easy. It's a process, a muscle that needs to be flexed, nourished, stretched. The deeper the wound, the longer it takes to heal. The pain becomes a faithful, familiar companion. I know this from experience.

For decades, I stirred a pot of resentment towards my mother. She was flawed and I wanted better. Through my twenties, thirties and forties, her shortcomings simmered on my back burner. But when she called one day and, through tears, told me she couldn't bring herself to eat, I walked into a therapist's office and handed myself over. "My mother's health is failing. Help me to not hate her when she dies." Two years later, after a long and ragged road, I sat at my Mom's hospice bedside, holding her hand, stroking her cooling forehead, loving her wholeheartedly.

Forgiveness is a gift we give ourselves. To forgive is not to forget but to look through the circumstances, to the soul beyond the story. Each of us are born with a clean slate and, through the years, each of us manage to stir up the mud. To forgive is to acknowledge our fallibility, our frailty, the ease with which we all veer off the path. To forgive is to unburden ourselves of the bitterness and reach, instead, for the sweet fruit of compassion.



*To forgive is to set a prisoner free and
discover the prisoner is you.*

—LEWIS B. SMEDES