

March 5, 2022 Elissa Cheri Noble  
A Story of Forgiveness

Thank you for allowing me to share my story today. I am very nervous to share and pray the spirit speaks through me to each of you. I am very passionate about the topic of forgiveness because this word has the power to heal and the power to destroy. I have left out a lot of my story, as sharing it impacts others and isn't necessarily my story to share.

In the last few years I have been doing a forgiveness meditation and reflection in my daily practice, because it is a process of letting more of the light into those dark places. The hurt that was done to me, the hurt that I have done to others, and just hurt that comes through living life.

I will continue to lay out my life in God's hands. Forgiveness is something I can choose to move towards, yet it is something done in the heart, that I continue to ask God to change. This is a very long process.

And here begins the forgiveness journey...

When I hear the word "forgiveness", I feel nauseated and extreme discomfort because of how this was misused by the church and my family when I was growing up. I grew up in an abusive family, where we went to church 2-3 times a week. Often the abuse would be after church, as we would get in trouble for not behaving properly in church. Sadly what was taught by the church leader's about forgiveness, seemed to skip the part about exploring truth, taking action and protecting people from harm. My mother was encouraged to stay in her marriage and seek God and she really believed that everything would be ok. She had a strong spiritual side, but wasn't able to see the truth of her situation in order to make healthy changes. When my parents were confronted, the solution was to try a new church. I later learned forgiveness doesn't mean you stay in unhealthy situations.

When I was in High School I remember making a commitment to forgive my father. There was a lot of fear attached to it - if I don't forgive others, God won't forgive me. At the same time, it was easy to see that I suffered when I was angry, and I was able to connect with him in a fun way for a few years. The process of changing my heart though is so much more complicated and requires a lot of action and discernment. For me this is a spiritual process that I committed myself to at 16, even though I didn't really understand all of what it meant, and probably had some codependency attached to it. God has a way of taking where we are, and guiding us through.

One thing that is very clear to me is I can be more loving and forgiving when I am safe and have appropriate boundaries. Often these are bridges to connecting, but at times a wall is necessary otherwise we both go into the water. When my kids were little I created a safe living space by having my kids in my sight at all times when I was around my parents. There were times when I chose not to have any contact to allow me space to process what was needed. Initially I was very clear about my boundaries with my parents, but over time I stopped repeating what they couldn't see and just implemented the boundaries that were needed. With my father, often I chose to see him away from my children as this fit our situation better. I don't believe people are toxic, and most of the time not mean spirited. Sometimes though; addictions, mental challenges, backgrounds and behaviors may affect my relationship with people and at times I don't have the capacity to handle what comes up. When I wasn't sure what to do, I sought out wise counsel to sort through the complexities.

I find it is easier to be forgiving when I see my own challenges and mistakes. I have made a lot of mistakes. I struggle with anger, depression and resentments. Sometimes it's all too much, so my body retreats into numbness at times. Sometimes I feel hard in my broken places. Fortunately, today I have tools to help me cope and see my God as

someone with grace and love, instead of seeing God as judging, uncaring and unfair.

In my daily practice, I take time to give forgiveness to myself and others. Often the prayer of forgiveness towards someone in my life, leads me to also pray for forgiveness again for those who hurt me as a child. Often these wounds linger into my current relationships and recognizing this helps me to heal. In my meditation I focus on my heart and God's mercy and light over us. When looking at my own stuff I pay attention to things that I say that reveal resentments and anger such as being annoyed or frustrated or repeating stories. I bring this continued grief to God, and allow his mercy to bring more healing in this long process.

I have been doing daily forgiveness meditations for years and I still feel a lot of anger. It is hard for me to understand why I still have anger after all the healing work I have done and the constant prayer about this area of my life. It can come up when the world feels unjust or I feel unheard. Yet, I can choose to continue to grieve and surrender whatever I feel to a God who is greater than my hurt, and I can bring truth to the wounded places, and take action when necessary.

One of my favorite prayers of surrender is:

God, give me grace to accept with serenity  
the things that cannot be changed,  
Courage to change the things  
which should be changed,  
and the Wisdom to distinguish  
the one from the other.

The church of Montavilla is part of my forgiveness story. It isn't always easy for me to be in a church setting, and somehow I am working at this church. I love people and ministry, and this passion stayed with me. I just

thought God would never lead me in this direction again. Being a reconciling congregation makes me feel more included, because I can bring any of my friends here, and know they would be welcome.

Over a year ago, my father passed away, and I was able to be with him when he died. 14 years ago, I was with my dad, when my mother passed away. These were powerful moments, loving someone exactly where they are in the final hour.

Today, I get to share my story with others when it is helpful and appropriate. God uses everything, and sharing our stories is where the healing is strongest. I have been able to connect with a lot of people through my challenges and I am so grateful for that.

I want to end my story, with something I read recently from a journal entry I wrote on 10/1/2016 written to my niece, Cheri, who died by suicide the previous year. I was feeling very depressed, I was in the process of a divorce, feeling shame from my mistakes, financially struggling and afraid of losing my home. I believe my prayer that day was answered, and most days I feel a degree of freedom. I might still struggle with depression, but the hopelessness is gone. I am not alone.

My prayer that day and today is:

“Show me the butterfly. Help me find my wings so I can fly, I can be free, I can bring beauty and hope to others”.

Amen