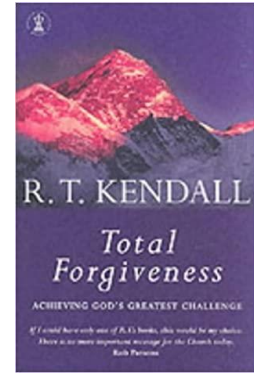


RT Kendall

Total Forgiveness: Achieving God's greatest challenge

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Notes by Alison Morgan October 2020



Introduction

Friend told him 'You must totally forgive them. Until you totally forgive them you will be in chains. Release them and you will be released.' He has vowed not to retell the story, but had never before been hurt so deeply. 'The wrong that I believe was done to me hit just about every area of my life: my family, my ministry, my very sense of self-worth. I felt at times like Job: 'I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil' (Job 3.26). I felt like David: 'Answer me quickly, O Lord; my spirit faints with longing. Do not hide your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit' (Ps 143.7). I doubt whether those who brought this upon me had any idea what I went through and I pray with all my heart they never will.' 2 It was the hardest thing he'd ever been asked to do.

'When we are bitter we delude ourselves into thinking that those who hurt us are more likely to be punished as long as we are set on revenge. We are afraid to let go of the feelings of revenge. After all, if we don't make plans to see that justice is done, how will justice be done? We make ourselves believe that it is up to us to step in.' 5 But vengeance is mine, says the Lord; I will repay (Rom 12.19 & Heb 10.30, from Deut 32.35).

1. What is total forgiveness?

The proof is when we sincerely petition the Father to let off the hook those who have hurt us. Not only forgive them, but ask the Lord to bless and prosper them. Because we too want to be forgiven, be blessed and to prosper. Mt 7.1, do not judge or you too will be judged. So it's in our own interests.

Ps 103.12, my sins have been removed from me; they will not be held against me, and no one will know what I have done. So I will not hold others responsible for what they have done to me; and I will tell nobody.

This book is about not harbouring a grudge because you want revenge.

Forgiveness is NOT:

- Approval of what they did
- Excusing what they did
- Justifying what they did
- Pardoning what they did (they may need to face secular justice)
- Reconciliation
- Denying what they did
- Blindness to what happened (pretending otherwise)
- Forgetting
- Refusing to take the wrong seriously
- Pretending we are not hurt

Forgiveness IS:

- Being aware of what someone has done and still forgiving them
- Choosing to keep no records of wrong
- Refusing to punish
- Not telling what they did - just one other person, for therapeutic reasons
- Being merciful - blessed are the merciful, Mt 5.7
- Graciousness - the opposite of being rigorous
- An inner condition - it takes place in the heart. Most people we must forgive do not believe they have done anything wrong, or if they did they believe it was justifiable.
- The absence of bitterness - you will know it's gone when you have no desire to get even/punish; when you do/say nothing to hurt their reputation or future; when you truly wish them well in all they seek to do
- Forgiving God

- Forgiving ourselves – no joy in it otherwise. God wants us to forgive ourselves as much as he wants us to forgive others.

2. How do we know that we have totally forgiven someone?

Story of Joseph and his brothers. He had been arrogant. They sold him. Potiphar's wife accused him of rape. All this served to prepare him. He was released and promoted. He forgave his brothers; and told them not to worry about telling their father the details. Our conclusions:

1. Do not let anybody know what someone said about you or did to you – Joseph wanted neither the Egyptians nor his father to know what his brothers had done
2. Do not allow anybody to be afraid of you or intimidated by you
3. We will want them to forgive themselves and not feel guilty
4. We will let them save face
5. We will protect them from their greatest fear (exposure)
6. It is a lifelong commitment - RT had to keep on forgiving; it goes on and on, and some days will be harder than others.
7. Praying for them to be blessed (not from story of Joseph)

3. The Lord's Prayer and Forgiveness

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. comes from a Greek word meaning 'to let be' or 'to send away'.

Purpose of the prayer is to keep us in fellowship with the Father; to keep us from feeling self-righteous (which God likes a lot less than he likes most things). In the LP Jesus assumes that others have hurt us; and that we too will need to be forgiven. We all have skeletons in the cupboard, things we don't want others to know about; do we not want God to let *us* off the hook? So...

Forgiveness is a lifelong commitment and a supernatural act, equal to any miracle. We can fake holiness, but if we have bitterness inside we are only claiming to be in relationship with God; we are really in darkness.

Sometimes people don't mean to hurt us – they know they have disappointed us, but feel they had no choice.

Sometimes they are just being insensitive. But sometimes they know what they are doing. If this is the case, you must recognise that there is being handed to you on a silver platter an opportunity to receive a measure of anointing that another person might never get because they have not had to forgive as deeply as you have. It's a challenge and an opportunity.

Forgiveness is something you grow into. It's not the way you are saved, but it is the way you experience the dove coming down and remaining on you. You forgive because you prize fellowship with God more than you want to see him throw the book at them.

Clarifications:

1. Salvation is unconditional; fellowship with the Father is conditional
2. Justification before God is unconditional; the anointing of the Spirit is conditional (Rom 4.4-5)
3. Our status in the family is unconditional; our intimacy with Christ is conditional (Eph 1.5 adopted)
4. Our eternal destiny is fixed, but receiving a reward is conditional (Col 3.5 reward; 1 Cor 3.14-15, escaping through flames)

God condemns an unforgiving spirit – it shows indifference to the death of Jesus, it interrupts his purpose of reconciliation, it demonstrates ingratitude.

Unforgiveness is manifested through resentment, hate, self-pity, going over and over it again, wanting revenge. But it's not our job, it's God's job to judge. See parable of servant released from debt who then held another liable for a much smaller debt, Mt 18.

The consequences of not forgiving:

- The HS is grieved – Eph 4.30
- You are left to yourself, and Satan will take advantage of that
- You force God to become your enemy – James 1.4, fights and quarrels. If you do not forgive, you are essentially shoving God aside and wanting to do his job.
- You lose your anointing; you may be able to keep going for a bit, but sooner or later it will wither
- You lose authentic fellowship with the Father

4. Playing God

Judging is the opposite of graciousness. A helpful acronym is NEED.

Necessary – do I need to say this?

Encourage – will this make them feel better?

Edify – will it build them up?

Dignify – will it give them a sense of dignity? That's what Jesus did.

Think how nice it is to live in an atmosphere devoid of criticism. Think about the pain that follows from being critical. If you don't like being criticised, don't criticise.

It's often jealousy which wants another person put in their place; we want them to have their come-uppance, we resent their success and their popularity. We don't want them to be liked.

Remember the story of Nathan and David in 2 Sam 12. In judging the man in the story, David had judged himself.

5. When we are right to judge

Matt 7, speck and plank.

Sometimes we have to protect others from harm – from a rapist, from a person who sows discord in the church. But we must face our own faults first, and when we have looked carefully at our own fallibilities and flaws then in a spirit of gentleness we can address those of others. Jesus wants us to see that when we are critical and point the finger, we have a worse problem than the other person.

How to behave if someone criticises us – we must not defend ourselves, or try to impress how good or right we are, and we must not punish them for doing it. We must not make them look bad. Agree that you need all the help you can get; ask them to pray for you!

The person who can correct another is the person who realises that they too would be capable of doing that very same thing – Gal 6.1, restore gently, watch lest you too should be tempted. Before we can help another we must be sure we are truly impartial, with no axe to grind, nothing to gain, no emotional involvement, no jealousy or desire to get even, and our own self-esteem is not connected to the matter in hand.

The person who can help another is the one who is meeting a need; when it would be irresponsible not to speak; when you have been asked to step in by someone who has no agenda; when you are truly impartial; when you care primarily about the honour of God.

6. The art of forgiving ourselves and forgetting

1 John 1.8-9.

We must keep no record of wrongs – this is preventative as well as curative. We keep records in order to use them. Don't. Let go. Don't point out their wrong either to them or to others.

We must not keep a record of our rights either...

Forgiving ourselves is also a lifelong commitment. Peter was so effective on the Day of Pentecost because he knew he had been forgiven for denying Jesus.

Signs that we have not forgiven ourselves include we feel guilty, blame ourselves, cannot function normally.

Maybe we are angry with ourselves; or afraid we have messed up our futures.

If we sin, we confess and are forgiven. Pseudo guilt comes when there was no sin in the first place (eg it was an accident), or where it has been forgiven. Let the past be the past.

7. How to forgive – totally

Forgiving those who are *not* enemies – people who no longer need us, or who decline a request.

Forgiving enemies (ie those who want to harm you, or who would say something about you which would call into question your integrity or credibility). Their main tactic will be to discredit you if you are likely to stay in the picture; they will put the record straight, say things to your boss, keep you from that promotion, tell your friends things they need to be told lest you get away with them; they will try to keep you from succeeding or being admired by others – and they may well claim they are doing it for God and his glory! John 16.2 they will put you out of the synagogue, and even think they are offering a service to God. People like this will kill you not with the sword but with the tongue or the pen.

BUT the greater the hurt, the greater the blessing that will come. Matt 5.11-12, blessed are you when people insult and persecute you. If you have a real, relentless enemy, you should see yourself as sitting on a mine of 24 carat gold; you are blessed, chosen. We need enemies; they keep us humble, keep us from taking ourselves too seriously, show us what we are like. Your enemy's objective is to punish in some way, put you in your place; rather than leave it to God, they feel they are his instrument in putting you in your place.

Loving our enemies is the biggest challenge. If you hate, you will give them your heart and mind – as Mandela explained. Don't.

Don't justify your own sin (I am bad, but they are much worse) – God knows not only your sins, but also those you are capable of. He knows our hearts.

So why forgive?

1. Consider the consequences if you do – you will be released
2. Consider the consequences if you don't – God won't forgive you

STEPS in FORGIVING

1. Make the choice not to tell anyone what they did
2. Be pleasant to them
3. If you talk to them, say that which will set them free from guilt
4. Let them feel good about themselves
5. Protect them from their greatest fear
6. Keep it up
7. Pray for them.

Conclusion

Helpful steps:

- Stop excusing, pardoning, rationalising
- Pinpoint the actions that have hurt you
- Think about how your life would be more satisfying if you could let go of your grievances
- Think how they too are a human being vulnerable to harm
- Understand their history and state of mind – without condoning their actions
- Develop greater compassion towards them
- Become more aware how you have needed the forgiveness of others in the past
- Resolve not to pass on your pain
- Spend time thinking about your new sense of purpose and direction
- Enjoy the relief which comes as the grudge melts away.

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