

Forgiveness? You Can't Be Serious!

by Norm LeClercq, Marriage & Family Therapist



Do we *always* have to forgive? Even when the offense feels like more than we can bear as in the case of an unfaithful partner or a sexually abusive parent? These are only two examples that result in significant and ongoing suffering. Is it really fair to expect these survivors to forgive the ones who did such intimate harm? As a therapist I say yes, **but only** if the process of forgiveness is explained to them as clearly as possible.

The first step of forgiveness is acknowledging the violation. Do not excuse or ignore it. Recognize that you have taken a genuinely damaging hit. Anything that violates our selfhood is traumatic and always results in an internal sense of shame. Though this sense of shame is imposed upon us from the outside and is not a function of an inner, healthy conscience, subjectively it cannot be distinguished in any way from a healthy sense of shame. Furthermore, although the damage may in no way be our fault or be deserved, once it exists it is our responsibility. Yet, be-

cause the emotional mind does not respond to logic or facts, when we are harmed *in relationship* we must receive care *in relationship*.

The second step continues this facing of the violation consequences. Violation of selfhood is traumatic and produces the emotional process identified with grief. Initially there is a sense of shock, disbelief. We might find ourselves attempting to explain the action in other ways, seeking to prove our experience is a total misunderstanding. This is a type of internal bargaining attempting to make it not so. Then the inevitable and undeniable reality, accompanied by a piercing pain and an often forceful anger occurs. The desire to hurt back arises; wanting the person to feel what their behavior has caused us to feel.

It is important that this anger be honored as a healthy internal response to a violation. As a dent in a tin can requires internal force from within to restore the original form, the impact of violation requires an internal force to address it. Unfortunately, the emotional force of anger is often misunderstood or even condemned. "I should not feel this way, what is wrong with me?" The initial internal response often involves more shame for having such forceful emotions. However, there is the opposite reaction of self-righteously indulging the

anger and lashing out at our violator. The temptation is to believe we are justified in harming the violator as if "two wrongs make a right."

The violated person needs a safe interpersonal relationship in which they can present the injury and what it means to them without fear of being further shamed. This is not to triangle another person into the conflict.

When the injury is this significant, we often need the help of a trusted friend, family member, or skilled professional to tend to our shamed selves. This trusted contact is not an ally in our conflict but rather in our struggle with our own internal state. Part of this process also involves facing the loss of trust in our violator we assumed was warranted. Such an effort requires a reordering of our view of the other which also challenges our underlying trust in all of our relationships. Often it is only after receiving care and making necessary internal readjustments that we have the strength to responsibly engage the one who has violated us.

Scripture refers to "speaking the truth in love." This takes great strength and a disciplined self-awareness. Only after respecting our internal anger and tending to what it insists must take place before we address our violator, are we ready to take

Steps to Forgiveness

- Acknowledge the violation; do not excuse it.
- Face the internal consequences of the violation: shock, disbelief, grief.
- Honor the anger as a healthy response to the violation.
- Share the violation with someone considered safe (friend, family member, skilled professional).
- Evaluate our part in violation.
- If possible, confront the violator by "speaking the truth in love."
- If the violator admits the harm, you can begin to re-establish trust, work on reconciliation and choose to forgive.
- If they reject our invitation to admit wrong doing, then the process ends with them, but not us.

another step. This step involves facing how we might have contributed to what took place. This effort is meant to be self-empowering. Having compassionately dealt with our injury we now can explore

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Blessings Celebrated at Annual Banquet

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Our Mission

New Leaf Resources promotes healthy relationships and personal growth through counseling, education, and consultation from a Christian perspective.



(From left) Board Members Jack Elzinga, with wife Carol, and Ken Van Dellen with wife, Elaine, attended the Banquet.

Close to 250 friends and supporters of New Leaf recently gathered at The Center for Performing Arts, in Munster, to celebrate God's blessings for the ministry and "sow the seeds" of hope, help and healing for the many hurting in our communities.

Guests also enjoyed a delicious meal prepared by Villa Catering, beautiful centerpieces donated by Vans Floral Products, and the comedic talents of Christian Comedian David Dean.

Executive Director Terry Top gave a favorable ministry update, reporting that with the generous support of individuals, businesses and churches, more than \$140,000 in assistance was provided last year.

"Twenty five years ago when I started at New Leaf there was a huge stigma attached to counseling," Top

said. "Thankfully that has changed significantly, but many people still think counseling is only for people with really serious problems," explained Top. "Actually there are very few people that I know who could not benefit from counseling at some point in their lives. While it is for serious emotional problems, counseling could also benefit someone going through a major life transition or loss."

Thank you to all that came and supported the annual fundraiser. We're excited to report that the event raised close to \$30,000 for the Marty Doot Client Assistance Fund! Donations are still being accepted. Contributions to the fund can be made on-line at newleafresources.org or by mailing your check to:

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Comedian David Dean performs for the audience.

Overcoming Despair Through the Grace of God

A client recently shared how her experience at New Leaf Resources has given her help, hope and healing.

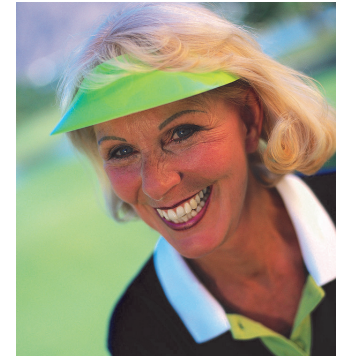
"There comes a time when we have to stop and reflect on our life. I knew I had some problems but I could handle them by myself. However time proved me wrong. I was unhappy, grew increasingly depressed, useless, hopeless and felt alcohol added more problems. Time and denial only deepened the problems. I reluctantly, with shame, sought help and felt a like a failure

in a life of overwhelming darkness.

After getting past the initial feeling of failure and fear, I started to share my problems and slowly developed a sense of trust with the counselor. I wasn't the easiest person to deal with, I was full of mistrust, I questioned, resisted and doubted. At one point, I didn't even care about life...total despair. But with the grace of God and a counselor, that understood and listened to me and that I could count on; things slowly started to change.

At New Leaf, I found a caring, non-judgmental person who gave gentle encouragement and support. I appreciated the insights I gained, the wisdom and concern of the counselor, and the respect with which I was treated. Thank you for all the help and care for us whose lives are in such turmoil. New Leaf Resources has truly given us HELP, HOPE AND HEALING. I was broken and now I'm whole. You have truly given us a New Leaf in life.

Sincerely,
A Saved Soul"



**"I was broken and now I'm whole. You have truly given us a New Leaf in life."
- a New Leaf Resources client**

Forgiveness? You Can't Be....

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what part (if any) we may have played. Sometimes this inventory will reveal we really *did not* have a role. "Taking the log out of our own eye before dealing with the speck in another's" reminds us of our common humanity. Furthermore, it allows us to honestly examine our motivation in this process. However it does not excuse the action of the other which violated us.

"Speaking the truth in love" requires several internal elements. First, it must not put us at further risk. Second, when we confront the other, we are doing so from a position of self-respect and personal strength, while respecting the other. The goal is to promote understanding not to harm or punish, to provide an opportunity for the violator to "see" the depth of harm caused. To do this requires genuine vulnerability and

faith in the spiritual reality of "in our weakness the Spirit is made strong." By coming from a position of vulnerability, we are appealing to the person's conscience and humanity.

By not attacking or seeking to require a particular moral response from the other we invite them to exercise their own vulnerability, hoping they will do the right thing. Now, the ball is in their court. If they reject our invitation and refuse to accept any responsibility for the harm caused, the process ends.

The goal of fostering understanding for the sake of restoring trust and promoting reconciliation has failed. We can in time forgive the other from the heart but this is an autonomous activity. Forgiveness of the heart frees us from the toxicity of resentments and bitterness

while keeping the violator at a safe distance. If the violator does accept our invitation and has the inner strength and courage to actively face the harm caused, then the process continues. If we see a true remorse, demonstrated by an open admission that their action was wrong, and witness a commitment to never allow such behavior again, then the ball is back in our court.

At this juncture we can exercise forgiveness leading to the re-establishment of interpersonal trust, restoration of the relationship, and genuine reconciliation. Though I don't believe forgiveness can be earned, I do believe trust and respect can. In my opinion forgiveness is a gift. It is voluntarily relinquishing the debt caused by the violation. By relinquishing the debt we are free to receive the connection offered by the other.

Barnabas on Savings Bonds

Looking for a new way to support your favorite charity? Have you thought about Savings Bonds that have stopped earning interest? Many families have stashed away Savings Bonds from years past. In fact, according to the U.S. Department of Treasury, over \$13 billion worth of Savings Bonds are no longer earning interest.

What a great gift idea! Redeem the Savings Bonds and pass the cash on to charity. Another way to use your Savings Bonds is to include them as a bequest in your Estate Plan. If you do so, income taxes may be avoided on the accumulated interest of the Savings Bonds in your estate. For more information call Barnabas at 888-448-3040.

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New Leaf Provides Pre-Marital Advice for Shore Bride Magazine

New Leaf Resources has partnered with *Shore Bride*, a website and magazine targeted to engaged couples in Northwest Indiana, by providing pre-marital advice columns.

Associate Marriage & Family Therapist Leah Travis writes monthly stories aimed at helping engaged couples work through pre-marital issues that they may encounter.

"I'm so blessed to have the opportunity to help couples lay a strong foundation for their marriages. Writing for *Shore Bride Magazine* gives me a place to present information in a fun way, that will hopefully sink in and still be useful once that 'honeymoon stage' is over."

Check out the website at nwi.com/app/shorebride.com. *Shore Bride* is a sister publication of *Shore* magazine and the *Times* newspaper.

SHORE MAGAZINE
bride

CARE 360° at Timothy Christian

March 10, was no ordinary day for the 7th graders at Timothy Christian School. There was no math, social studies or language arts. Instead they got to experience CARE 360°! Teachers and high school students partnered with New Leaf to present the day-long prevention program. The focus is on the word "care;" how we care for ourselves and others. See more about Timothy Christian on our website at newleafresources.org.

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New Leaf Resources is...

A **professional mental health agency** which provides counseling services to individuals, families, couples, children, churches, schools and businesses.

A **ministry** which brings the best possible care to those we serve, striving to reflect God's grace and love to all who seek help.

A **community resource** offering educational services, prevention programs, training, support and coaching.