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The Powers of Friendship, Part IV. Forgiveness

I have never had a close friend I didn't need to forgive sooner or later. Likewise, I am confident that the same could be said of me by anyone who has regarded me as a friend.

Forgiveness is necessary because we fail one another. Failure is often the result of our human limitations. Dr. Steve Roy expanded this point at our recent Pastor's Teaching Conference. *"Failures come because of our limitations. Human knowledge is limited. Unlike God, we don't know everything, and we don't know the future."*

God knows all, including the future, while we grope in search of the most reasonable educated guesses available. Our best intentions may disappoint our friends simply because we underestimate our personal human limitations. The failures of friends are worth forgiving because we all need friends and because life is lonely without them. While failures due to limitations may disappoint, they are comparatively easy to forgive.

As friendships grow, disclosure unfolds. Eventually, someone drops their guard, daring to trust a friend with the contents of a few or closet-full of personal secrets, otherwise known as skeletons. All is well as long as: (1) the other person does likewise, (2) neither person passes judgment on the other for past behavior, and (3) neither person violates the unwritten rules on confidentiality. It is a recipe ripe for resentment or forgiveness. Forgiving friends who fail to accept us as we were or are is the right choice. After all, it's a lonely world without friends; replacing them is hard work and time consuming.

The power of forgiveness flexes its muscles in the face of betrayals. King David experienced the painful blows of betrayal when Ahithophel, his counselor and confidante, turned against him in favor of following David's rebellious son, Absalom (II Samuel 16:15-17:23). When a friend uses confidential information to advance his or her selfish motives, there is no substitute for forgiveness. Without forgiveness, there is virtually no hope of restoring the relationship. Besides, forgiveness releases the forgiving person from the devastation of bitterness (Hebrews 12:15).

***"Bitterness is like an acid which destroys the vessel
in which it is stored more than the vessel on which it is poured."
Author Unknown***

King David had one friend who was worthy of full disclosure. Ironically, it was King Saul's son, Jonathan. As Saul sought to kill David, Jonathan set out to protect David because **"Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself"** (I Samuel 18:3). Jonathan lived up to the proverb, **"A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother"** (Proverbs 18:24). The biblical narratives provide no record of any event requiring David to forgive Jonathan.

Eventually, we may have a once-in-a-lifetime friend like Jonathan. What a treasure! Diligently seeking or developing a friendship like David and Jonathan's is worth all the heartbreak of trusting and forgiving. We cannot live without true friends.

Wait a minute! We don't have to look far to find a Friend like Jonathan. We don't have to forgive another person before finding a perfect Friend without flaw or limitation. I take back my opening statement: *"I have never had a close friend I didn't need to forgive sooner or later."*

There is a Friend we will never need to forgive. You know Who I'm talking about - Jesus Christ, the Righteous and Forgiving Friend. He took the initiative to forgive us even before we had sinned. Long ago He called all who would believe in Him His friends for whom He laid down His life in order to forgive us. That leads us to our next Power of Friendship. See you in December . . .

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.
^{NIV} John 15:13

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