

Voices: Reuniting with forgiveness

March 7, 2018

It all began with a poem.

Lynda Frederick, who lives in New York, wrote it and posted it on her old high school's Facebook page. The poem spoke of Lynda's sad and tormented experiences being bullied by her classmates.

She also wanted everyone to know that life had gotten a whole lot better for her over the intervening 25 years.

Lynda wasn't prepared for what happened next.

Her Facebook post was flooded with heartfelt apologies from her onetime bullies. They begged her for the chance to make the past right. And they did more than that. They raised \$800 in order to bring her to California for a class reunion.

Moved by the reach for reconciliation, Lynda was reflective. "We can't fix yesterday," she observed, "but we can try to fix today."

While the past cannot be undone, it can be redressed.

The power of forgiveness

Reconciliation begins with forgiveness — that sweetest and most profound of virtues.

In his model prayer, Jesus urges us to seek God's forgiveness for our offenses and, in the same manner, to extend forgiveness to those who have

offended us. Jesus goes so far as to assert that God will not forgive us if we refuse to forgive others (Matthew 6:15).

Neither Jacob nor his brother Esau could “fix” the many years of deceit, treachery and rivalry that had marred their relationship. What was done was done. But when they finally met again, “Esau ran to meet [Jacob], threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. And they both wept.” (Genesis 33:4).

The tears of forgiveness melted away the bitterness of wounded pride and lost opportunities.

His brothers feared his power to retaliate, but Joseph was overcome by a deep and compassionate forgiveness for them, by a love that never died despite the long separation caused by their betrayal. Nothing in his fascinating and eventful life tells us more about Joseph’s abiding character than his willingness to forgive his brothers for what they did to him.

Forgiveness is the sincerest form of love. It is also the costliest and often most difficult.

The cost of forgiveness

An unforgiving spirit has no place in the believer’s life. It is flagrantly unhealthy. Holding a grudge is not only a sub-Christian attitude; it’s also an emotional grind. Over time, such poison in your system will weaken your spiritual constitution and make you vulnerable to other diseases of the soul such as vengeance, gossip and envy.

An unforgiving spirit is a moral and spiritual cancer.

It may begin small and undetected, but it grows inexorably and spreads until it has consumed the heart with cynicism and bitterness. Only when unforgiveness is cut away by the scalpel of God’s grace and transplanted

with genuine, Christ-centered forgiveness can new life breathe into the soul.

Only then can love be rekindled, hope renewed and joy restored.

This is why Jesus ties forgiveness to the very heart of worship.

The command to forgive

“So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple,” Jesus says, “and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God” (Mathew 5: 23-24).

We must put first things first. Jesus tells us that the first order of spiritual business for each of us is forgiveness and reconciliation. Even if we are already sitting in the church pew and about to drop our offering in the plate, if we recall the slight that hurt, we must stop, go and seek forgiveness.

Reconciliation precedes worship and authentic worship is conditioned upon forgiveness — and virtually impossible without it.

Paul tells the Ephesians to flush the bad attitudes and rotten behavior out of their lives. “Instead, be kind to each other, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32).

For Lynda Frederick, it was a poem that led to forgiveness, reconciliation and a new lease on life she hadn't expected.

Perhaps the past was gone and forever shrouded in regrets. But Lynda's old classmates proved that seeking, offering and finding forgiveness can turn a class reunion into something far grander and more lasting than the petty cruelties of a high school hallway.

Forgiveness. What a beautiful thing.

Jack Wyman, a former preacher, pastor, community leader and politician, is the Director of Advancement & Donor Relations for [Haggai International](#).