

## WHY ME? HELP AND HOPE FOR THE HURTING: SECTION THREE

### Three Responses That Empower the Sufferer – Forgiveness/The Implication (continued)

In our last segment, we considered the parable on forgiveness taught to the disciples by our Savior. The all-important application is provided in Matthew 18:35, where Jesus says this –

**“My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.”**

What a powerful lesson on the awesome privilege of being forgiven by God, and the equally critical responsibility that goes with it: forgiving those who hurt you. This two-fold truth is confirmed by Paul in passages such as Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:12-13. The specific mechanics of how our forgiven status must be lived out is also two-fold. The New Testament speaks of a *covering* forgiveness as well as one that *confronts*. They are to be used when the need arises as an avenue for releasing anger, as well as a source of healing the hurt that has occurred. Jesus speaks of each one when He says the following –

**“Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.” (Mark 11:25)**

**“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.” (Matthew 18:15)**

When Jesus describes covering forgiveness in Mark 11:25, there is no mention of confronting the individual who needs to be forgiven; confirmed in 1 Peter 4:8 which tells us that “love covers a multitude of sins.” If the only method for expressing forgiveness involved confronting the individual who hurt us, no matter how large or small the hurt, we would spend our time doing little else. Therefore, this demonstration of forgiveness that covers sin without confronting the sinner, serves as an expedient first response to being sinned against. As a result, we receive all the benefits of practicing forgiveness, personally and relationally, with God and others.

However, there are times when covering forgiveness will not suffice. At which point, there is a need to confront the individual responsible for hurting us, so we can forgive them face to face. How can we know when to employ these two distinctly different methods? Very simply, covering forgiveness should always be viewed as the first option. If the “cover” doesn’t stay on, but keeps flying off, no matter how many times you may put it back on, then you must use option two – confronting forgiveness.

The need to move from one kind of forgiveness to another will vary from one Christian to another. The more spiritually mature we become, the heavier and larger our “cover” will be. As a result, the need for option two arises less often. Obviously, there will be times when the nature of the sin, and not the size of the cover, will be the determining factor in exercising option two. But for the most part, for many of the relational hurts that require forgiveness, we should seek to “cover” first and “confront” last. As we do, the many benefits that come from forgiving others will be part of our daily experience. In addition, the many pitfalls that occur when we refuse to forgive will be avoided, which will be our focus in the next segment.