

# #27 Northside Natter

23 September 2020

Today, I'm looking at **Forgiveness**.

I read something that I feel is worthy of repeating here and even contemplating for a bit. *The greater the offense, the harder it is to forgive – but we must because whatever we refuse to forgive and let go of, we carry with us.*

Sometimes, we find ourselves stewing on things over and over ad nauseum. These are the things in our past we can't let go of. We really need to uncouple that caboose and let it slip away while we continue our journey unimpeded. That has got to be the number one biggest-ticket item in the 'easy to say, hard to do' category. Yet, these niggly things from our past won't go away and I will tell you why. We haven't forgiven them.

We sit with a problem and try to work out how to solve it from every angle we can think of. We work on ways to get revenge, we come up with something we wish we'd had the brains to say at the time, or we try to rewrite the event to make it come out differently. None of that works because we're not forgiving, just plotting. We need to go before the Lord and ask him to help us to forgive that person, that situation, or even ourselves. His guidance will strengthen our resolve.

Imagine we have been employed as a train driver and we're given a schedule of the times we need to meet in order to provide a dependable service. Unfortunately, we don't have many days in a week where we're not getting attacked by marauders. Most of these attacks we can repel easily enough because the train we drive is hardened steel and the windows have bullet-proof glass. We keep going with hardly a hitch to our timetable.

The passengers on board will sometimes give us a hard time. They travel with us often and we see the same regular faces most days. We feel a little bit like a family and so we develop a fondness for them and want to do our best for them. Unfortunately, a passenger will take offense at something and lash out. This might be in the form of pushing the *emergency stop button* which causes us to stop our train to find out what's wrong. Nobody owns up to doing it and nobody dubs anybody else in. It's as if it never happened and we are looked upon as if we've lost the plot. It's only a small hitch in the day and can be forgiven so we move on.

One day a passenger comes up to the engine carriage, opens the door and abuses us loudly, telling anyone within earshot that we're a stupid driver and we should be pushed off the train to let someone else drive. The passenger cannot be appeased regardless of how many times we try to address his concerns and continues to abuse us every day for several weeks. In the end, we become so stressed that we cannot work. We request sick leave and think seriously about transferring to another route.

The passenger is no longer seen as someone we want to do our best for. When we see that particular person again, we feel no fondness towards him, but we do feel a rising resentment. We feel as if we've been disempowered by the abuse we received and not being able to do anything about it because we have a testimony to uphold for the company, irks us.

While we finally sit at home taking sick leave, the replays start and we fester a loathing for the man. We can't understand why he suddenly took a dislike to us and began abusing us, we thought he was a friend. It feels like betrayal.

Even when we go back to driving our train, we are mentally stuck on this one passenger, and in effect, we are not moving anywhere. We stay stuck in time and it feels like a continual *Ground Hog Day*.

Unfortunately, our loathing and festering affects other relationships. We don't smile as much, we don't seem to be as fond of regular faces anymore, we become ho-hum about the timetable and if something happens to disrupt it, we don't really care so much. When a passenger complains about something, we feel more offended than we should and the marauders are making dents in the hardened steel shell of the train and their bullets are cracking windows. Our joy slowly seeps out.

On top of this, we feel shame for not having the courage to stand up for ourselves. What a heavy burden we are now carrying around with us. Suddenly, the head of the company pops in for a chat. Our drop in performance and bad customer reviews have been noticed.

After a lengthy chat, it is suggested that we forgive the passenger. We agree, but all we can think of is the humiliation we received in front of the other passengers, the disempowerment we felt and our self-loathing at our inadequacies. How on earth are we going to do this?

We notice the man at the train station and remember what we must do. We nod and smile at him as he goes by. It didn't kill us to do it and it actually felt a little empowering. We feel good about ourselves for the rest of the day and this is reflected in the way we treat everyone else we meet. Things are looking up.

One day, we are walking to the engine carriage when the man makes his way to the platform. 'Good morning,' we say to him with a smile and are about to get on the train when he responds, 'good morning.' What a change that makes to our hearts. We start to feel our joy returning. Could it really be that simple? We decide to test our theory and the next day we say good morning again. We repeat this process over and over, until one day, we are being friendly to all and sundry including the abusive man. Our customer reviews and performance hit new highs. The company is very happy.

One weekend, we are lying on the beach with a cooling breeze blowing through our sunshade while the waves slap gently on the shore. It's a perfect day. Suddenly, the weeks of abuse run through our minds and we relive the whole nightmare yet again. What? Didn't we deal with this already?

When things replay it's because we have shoved them into a little box labelled, *things to forget about*. While that is part of the forgiving process, it's not really forgiving anything. Forgiveness needs to come from the heart. It's something that we must know and feel in our gut to be a truth just as we know and are convinced that Jesus is alive and real. We know it because we have experienced it. Have we experienced forgiving this man? No, we haven't, we've only made a decision to move forward from it and to be pleasant to him. *Anything that we continue to stew on is not forgiven.*

If we go to the passenger and shake his hand, telling him with utter conviction that we forgive him his folly and ask him to forgive us ours, our replays will end. The intensity of emotion inside us will be quickly relieved as if opening a floodgate. Our stuck-ness will disappear into the annals of history and our life-journey will continue. We will become empowered, grow in maturity and very possibly earn the respect of that man. If the man is responding to us it's very likely that he is feeling quite sorry for what he did. Why he did it doesn't really matter anymore and isn't even part of the equation.

### **Matthew 6:14-15**

*For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

Our motivation to forgive another person may not be to make the other person's life better and seem self-serving at first. However, in the end, we are making that other person's life better as well as our own. The more we practice forgiveness, our motivation to genuinely forgive others from the heart may change to a more compassionate approach. It costs nothing to apologise and forgive, other than some pride and self-righteousness; we can all afford to have less of that.

I encourage everyone to look into those old re-runs and genuinely forgive the people in them, including ourselves because: *there, but for the grace of God, go I (John Bradford)*.

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