

FORGIVENESS OF A DAD

One of the greatest issues today facing men of all countries and of all ethnic backgrounds is that of forgiving our dad for things that may have hurt us while growing up. This Fathering column specifically deals with one of the most sensitive areas for men (and women) of forgiving a dad for a past grievance. Read on...

Question:

Even though I'm an adult now, how do I forgive my father and bring healing to our relationship for his absence when I was growing up?

Note to the article:

The most obvious type of absence is simply a father abandoning his children (permanently or simply being absent from home due to work, divorce, separation or simply by choice. However, there are three other types of father absence: Emotionally, Spiritually and Psychological.

Let me speak briefly about the other types of absences: First, Emotional absence is the dad who is simply not connected with his children and most likely to his wife. There is a lack of affirming his kids. He comes home from work and goes about his life unaware of the activities of his children or if he does make a game or activity, the cell phone or the blackberry is consuming his time. He is a visitor in his own home. The same hold true for Psychological Absence. This is the absence of modeling skills and the importance of a father's role. And the last is Spiritual Absence. There is a lack of leading by fathers in the spiritual activities

Answer:

I believe that folks have a hole in their soul in the shape of their dad. When a dad is not there, and doesn't connect, it can leave a wound.

I think one of the biggest things you have to come to grips with is this notion that forgiveness and apology are not linked.

Maybe in your case your father did not apologize for the absence. That can be very difficult to do for a guy who has failed to be there for his children. But it's important to understand that you have the power here, because forgiveness and apology are not linked, if you will.

In other words, if someone comes to you and says that they'll forgive you when you apologize, the reality is that they'll probably never forgive you. Because if you had the spirit of forgiveness first, then no apology is needed.

Forgiveness: Steps & Benefits

What's standing between you and forgiveness? Recent scholarly research confirms what many already know—that forgiving others is a valuable gift for ourselves. Research shows that when we forgive, we have less stress, anger, and other psychosomatic symptoms like headaches, upset stomachs, and so on.

I know many of us carry very deep wounds from the past, and can barely imagine forgiving our dads. It may take time, but I challenge you—if you need to—to commit yourself to forgiving him.

Or maybe there's a strained relationship with a child. One father just asked me to pray for him and his teenage son. He said they are “always at each others' throats” and nothing he tries seems to work. He also admitted that he owns some of the blame for the way things are. Maybe it's time he asked for—and extended—some forgiveness. Imagine how powerful an exchange like that would be in that home!

Here are some steps to forgiveness from the researchers:

First, we need to change our expectations of others. Instead of having “rules” for how they behave, we should have “preferences.” After all, we can't control how others act. Maybe you'll never have a perfect relationship with your dad—or your teenager. But you can probably accept them a little more for who they are and—from there—build a good relationship.

Second, we need to try to see the other person's perspective. Maybe your dad never got what he needed from his father. His wound may have made him incapable of providing what you needed. Maybe your daughter is under a lot of stress with all she's dealing with at school. Considering the other person's perspective can make a big difference. The third step is to move from blaming to acceptance, and then move on. Moving on may mean building a new, better relationship. Often, that's what forgiveness brings. But also realize that your forgiveness doesn't depend on them. If they don't respond or even if they reject you, you have still forgiven, released the hurt feelings, and committed to go on with life in a positive way. What a burden that can lift! I think it's important to understand that you actually have the power and you have the control around this whole notion of forgiveness.

The reality is that the apology is actually not even for you. The apology is for the person who has done the wrong.

Forgiveness is something you can do yourself. You make that decision to forgive and move on to a new day.

Certainly in my case that was one of the things that actually released me from some of the pain, and even some of the anger that I had around this issue.

If your asking yourself this question or simply thinking about it without verbally acknowledging it then you're asking the right question. You're on the right path. You have the power within you, because you can decide to forgive. Once you make that decision to forgive, regardless of what he does or does not do, you're released from that. And that's what I encourage you to do.