

"Writing the truth
as I see it;
trying not to
offend
those who will
disagree."

The truth as I see it™

Idaho Common Sense™



Craig L. Bosley, MD

Sand and stone

December 29, 2008

There is a story about two merchants in ancient Persia, Mussah and Nagib. They were traveling together in a caravan and one evening set up camp near a river's edge. Nagib accidentally fell into the river and Mussah, without hesitation, jumped in and saved his friend. Nagib immediately had his servant carve on the face of a nearby stone, "Traveler, in this place did Mussah heroically save the life of his friend Nagib."

They continued their journey and on the return trip they happened to camp in the same spot. That evening sitting by the fire, Mussah and Nagib got in an argument and Mussah struck Nagib. What did Nagib do? Since he carved his friend's good deed in stone, shouldn't he carve the hateful deed in stone too? Is not the hateful as important as the caring? How should we respond to an insult, a hateful comment, an unbearable hurt? Should it be remembered just like the wonderful deed? Or should it be forgiven? Can it be forgiven?

Moreover, what if there is no apology, no remorse? Without those, can there be forgiveness? Author Sara Paddison answered this question saying, "Sincere forgiveness isn't colored with expectations that the other person apologize or change."

But what about murderers, whether repentant or not? Certainly, they do not deserve forgiveness. Or do they? But, aren't there acts that are too heinous to ever forgive?

Seven years ago, Ivan Simpson murdered Patricia Ann Nuckles. Her father, consumed with grief, could not recover from her death. His grief developed into an all-consuming hate, leaving him obsessed with learning

more about the evil human being who could so casually murder.

However, he did not find what he expected; instead, what he learned stunned him, leaving him so unsettled that he couldn't stop thinking about this man he thought he hated. He found out that Ivan the murderer was born in a mental institution and, as a boy, watched his mother drown his little sister because "God ordered her to."

The father could not stop thinking about this man and his horrific life. Finally, he met with the district attorney asking him to spare Ivan's life. That night he couldn't sleep. As he sat there alone in the middle of the night, he felt a weight lifting from his shoulders, an anchor leaving his soul. He had forgiven the man who killed his daughter. He was living the advice of theologian Lewis Smedes, who said, "To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you."

How can you forgive in these situations, even if you should? Recall the response of the Pennsylvania Amish when ten of their schoolgirls were shot by a deranged young man who then killed himself. Many Amish attended the young man's funeral, offering forgiveness and comfort to his wife. And on the day of the killings one of their leaders said, "We must not think evil of this man." The word "must" is interesting, suggesting that the ability to forgive is not automatic or easy; rather it requires intent and effort. In fact, it may be one of the most difficult things we do, most times not an emotional response at all; instead a conscious decision, a choice.

But what if we cannot follow the example of the Amish? What if we

cannot or will not forgive? Continuing to "hate is like drinking poison and then hoping your enemy dies." Don't we deserve better, even if our enemy does not?

So how do we describe the act of forgiveness? A former United States Congressional minister said, "Forgiveness ought to be like a cancelled note – torn in two, and burned up, so that it never can be shown against one. (Saying) I can forgive, but I cannot forget, is only another way of saying, I will not forgive."

Is forgiveness more like justice, mercy, or grace? Justice is getting what you deserve. Mercy is not getting what you deserve. But grace, even more wonderful than mercy, is getting what you don't deserve. Maybe forgiveness is most like grace because grace is a gift that demands nothing in return and needs nothing in return.

What happened to the merchants, Mussah and Nagib? After being struck, Nagib immediately picked up a stick and wrote in the sand, "Traveler, in this place did Mussah break the heart of his friend Nagib."

A servant said to Nagib, "Master, when Mussah saved your life, you had the words carved into stone, but now that he has struck you, you write it in the sand." Nagib responded, "It is my hope that I forgive my dear friend Mussah even before the words fade from the sand and the sand is washed away."

Do we know what to carve in stone and what to write in sand?

Happy New Year.