

Some Thoughts about Trust, Abuse, Disillusionment, Betrayal, Anger and Forgiveness

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Can we forgive Hitler? Or Saddam Hussein? What about mass murderers like John William Gacy of Chicago who killed over thirty young men and boys and buried them in his basement?

Why is it so hard to forgive?

My father was a very simple and a very good man. He cared a lot about people. He was honest, trustworthy, and naive. He trusted most people most of the time. He usually gave people the benefit of the doubt. He rarely said anything negative about anyone. As a result, he was hurt, betrayed, and mistreated some of the time. However, since he lived in a small community, and had reliable friends, the times that he was maltreated seemed to me to be few and far between. As a young boy growing up, I may have been unaware of some of his disappointments, betrayals, and mistreatments.

While my father was a good role model in many respects, his naiveté and belief in the good in everyone has caused me to overlook some obvious signs in people I have foolishly trusted. I have made choices to trust some people who turned out to be untrustworthy. I have ignored signs and symptoms of dishonesty, and have gone along, believing the best in people, and suffering numerous abuses and betrayals as a result.

While I seem to be able to forgive those who hurt me unintentionally, it is difficult for me to forgive some people who intentionally hurt me. Part of me seems to be like a three year old who desperately wants to believe that people are well intentioned and good. Maybe people are good on the inside, but some people do very bad things to others. I have experienced abuse, betrayal, neglect, and abandonment. I know many other people who have experienced the same. There seems to be some type of evil in the world that causes people to act out of selfishness, greed, and hostility.

Some people who believe in scarcity end up hoarding. Some people take things that don't belong to them. Some abuse through actions and words. Some people steal, murder, and destroy property. Where does this evil come from? Why have I been so naive all of my life? Have there been payoffs to being naive?

I carry around a lot of grievances. I am angry with many people. My elementary school teachers overlooked the intense amount of physical and verbal bullying I experienced as a child. They refused to take it seriously, or stop it. I have been treated with disrespect by those closest to me; family and supposed friends. I have been laughed at, taken for granted, lied to, shunned, yelled at and cursed by those whom I have trusted.

How can I forgive these people for what they have done?

First of all, I must accept the reality that there are “hurting people” who hurt other people. Some of these people are generally angry and hostile. These are the *HURTERS*. It is inevitable that some people in emotional pain will intentionally or unintentionally hurt others. **Second, some people do not want to work hard, so they take advantage of others.** They will take what you give them, want more, and not offer anything in return. They are the *USERS*. **Third, many people do not keep their word, or**
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their commitments. They lack honesty and integrity. These are the *BETRAYERS*. **And fourth, there are those who only accept you on their terms.** These people try to shame you and try to control your behavior. They are the *CONTROLLERS*. Some people are combinations of the above. Some are all four.

Many *HURTERS*, *USERS*, *BETRAYERS*, and *CONTROLLERS* maintain denial about their behavior. Some cover their pain with addictive substances.

What my father didn't teach me is how to spot one of these. Many people who are *HURTERS*, *USERS*, *BETRAYERS*, and *CONTROLLERS* pretend to be kind, innocent, and caring. They often initially offer support, listen, and show interest. Or they may appear delightful or charming. Eventually, they reveal their true selves through signs of selfishness and disrespect. It is important to be aware of the signs. What can you do if you see such signs?

You can confront the person about his or her behavior, and see if he or she is willing to own up to it, and then change it.

You can set clear boundaries, limit time with abusive people, or leave them altogether.

Some people who stay in long-term relationships with people who mistreat them are in denial. Those who live with hurters, users, betrayers, or controllers may be afraid to leave them. Some people are so dependent, and so fearful of being alone that they will put up with any mistreatment. Others are loyal to a system of mistreatment, and believe that is the way life is.

It is important to protect oneself from such people, and try to help them if possible. If they refuse to acknowledge their pain, or the effect they have on others, they will continue to be abusive. It is also possible to forgive people like these because they have probably suffered much pain their lives. However, by choosing to inflict this pain on others, they may be refusing to take responsibility for their behavior. **It is possible to forgive them for not growing up, taking responsibility, or being empathetic. However, this does not mean putting up with their abuse.**

We have all hurt others. Hopefully, these hurts were unintentional. We all wish forgiveness and, I guess, the way to receive it is to offer it first. **Forgiveness does not mean that the evil or abuse that was done was justified or all right.** It just means that all of us share in hurting others, and no one is righteous all the time. I'd like to believe that I am forgiven for the wrongs I have committed. I guess I should forgive others for what they have done. *This forgiveness process is done for me, not them.* It frees me from resenting or hating other people. It does not lessen my intention to discern whom I can and cannot trust, however.

So, it was good that my father was trustworthy and trusting. But, it was unfortunate that I did not learn how earlier to discern who is and is not trustworthy. Because I have trusted the wrong people and been hurt by them, I may have more people to forgive than others.

It is important for me to acknowledge my own suffering but not to wallow in it. I have been hurt by others, and that pain is real. I can grieve the losses I have experienced, and face the fact that my father was an imperfect role model. I wish people were more honest and kind, but some are not. As I become disillusioned with trustworthiness in general, I can still maintain trusting relationships with those I have learned to trust over the years.