

Forgiving is Freedom

LET THE PAST BE THE PAST AT LAST

By Stephanie Riggs

The movie *Invictus* portrays one of the most remarkable examples in the 20th century of a man showing us how to forgive. Nelson Mandela served 27 years of political imprisonment in South Africa, but when he was released in 1990 he told his people to forgive their oppressors and focus on the future. He championed the cause of forgiveness, leading a nation to rebuild despite the devastating trauma of apartheid. His attitude turned his country around.

Forsaking revenge, he voted for reconciliation and the world won. Instead of a bloodbath that could have buried South Africa, an extraordinarily peaceful transition took place, one that eclipsed a major ethnic and racial war. "I am grateful to God who enabled me to play a role in this reconciliation and forgiving process," Mandela said.

There is no future without forgiveness. If you need evidence, look no further than our troubled world or our neighborhoods and families. International best-selling author on forgiveness, RT Kendall says, "We will see God move in proportion to our total forgiveness of one another. The bigger the offense the bigger the blessing. Forgiveness is a matter of the heart, you can follow all kinds of steps, meditation and right choices, but you will be working your forgiveness out in your own ingenuity."

Speaking of forgiveness is one thing. Following through like Nelson Mandela did is another. But if there is no future without forgiveness, how can we afford not to talk about it? That's the genesis of *Divine Calling With Stephanie Riggs*, the first call-in radio show in Colorado that focuses on total forgiveness. Every day at 1 p.m. on KLTT, 670 AM, listeners call in from around the country and share their struggles, heartaches and victories, hoping to heal and become whole through forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not a feeling but a choice. Forgiveness is a daily commitment made over a lifetime that sets you free. You know you have truly forgiven when you no longer talk about the offense. You must let go in order to be released. When we point fingers, assign blame or hold on to a grudge with both fists, we relinquish control of our future. We give up new beginnings and all those possibilities for the pain of the past.

A man from Denver called in to the show and said, "Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and hoping someone else will die." The Dalai Lama said, "In the practice of tolerance, one's enemy is the best teacher." Gandhi believed, "The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong."

Social scientists are discovering that forgiveness may help lead to emotional and even physical healing and wholeness. Former President Jimmy Carter, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and former missionary Elisabeth Elliot have been promoting a \$10 million Campaign for Forgiveness

Research, established as a nonprofit corporation to attract donations that will support forgiveness research.

In 1998 the John Templeton Foundation awarded research grants for the study of forgiveness to 29 scholars. One significant finding of these studies is that the person who gains the most from forgiveness is the person who does the forgiving.

A news article in Britain's *Daily Express* described Professor Ken Hart, formerly of the University of Leeds and later of the University of Windsor in Canada, who offered the first course in the world on forgiveness. It was designed to help people forgive their enemies and let go of grudges. A grant from the Templeton Foundation paid for the seminar. The reason for the course: to demonstrate that forgiveness is good for your health. Holding a grudge can lead to illnesses ranging from heart disease to a cold because of stored-up anger, resentment and stress.

Here are the 10 steps to freedom in the book *Total Forgiveness*, by R.T. Kendall:

1. Stop excusing, pardoning or rationalizing.
2. Pinpoint the actions that hurt you.
3. Spend time thinking of ways in which your life would be more satisfying if you could let go of your grievances.
4. Try replacing angry thoughts about the "badness" of the perpetrator with thoughts about how the offender is also a human being who is vulnerable to harm.
5. Identify with the offender's probable state of mind. Understand the perpetrator's history while not condoning his or her actions.
6. Spend some time developing greater compassion toward the perpetrator.
7. Become more aware that you have needed other people's forgiveness in the past.
8. Make a heartfelt resolution not to pass on your own pain.
9. Spend time appreciating the sense of purpose and direction that comes after steps 1 through 8.
10. Enjoy the sense of emotional relief that comes when the burden of a grudge has melted away. Enjoy also the feeling of good will and mercy you have shown.

Nelson Mandela said, "Bitterness only hurts oneself." How did this shining example of forgiveness control his emotions instead of letting them control him? "If you hate, you give them your heart and mind," he said. "Don't give those two things away." ☺



Stephanie Riggs is an award-winning, veteran journalist, now hosting Denver's first ever call-in radio show about total forgiveness Call 303-455-0777 to share your story of forgiveness, Monday through Friday at 1 p.m. on KLTT, 670 AM, or go to <http://670kltt.com> and listen online anywhere in the world.