

## Could we start again, please? Betrayal and forgiveness in the 21st century

by Vickie Shurelds

**Matthew 6:14–15, For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Ephesians 4:32, And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.**  
(NRSV)

For a number of years, I believed I was one of the luckiest people on the face of the earth. I had two wonderful children, my mother, sisters and brothers were in good health, I felt a strong connection with God, and I had a job that made me smile. I loved going to work. I loved being at work. I loved all the work that I had to do, and even found joy in creating more work for myself.

Then, one day I was called into the boss's office and told I had a choice of resigning or being fired. I was devastated. All because of a misunderstanding, a situation easily fixed, I thought; but soon it became clear I was the only one who wanted to fix the "instance." My boss and his witness were satisfied with the dismissal. They wanted me gone! After all I had done! The special projects, the extra hours, the extra care, the obsession with accuracy, late nights, early mornings, weekends, holidays, staying overnight during blizzards to assist other departments...it all meant nothing. I had worked with these same people for nearly two decades and they turned their backs on me as they would a complete stranger. The pain was unbearable. Sure, it was embarrassing—humiliating really—to have to tell those I loved, who depended on me, supported me, and were proud of my accomplishments, that I had lost my job. But the deepest pain came from the feeling of betrayal from those I had considered my friends.

For months my brain recalled moments when just days before the firing my boss was standing in front of a crowd of people introducing me as one of his most treasured employees. With his arm around my shoulders, he had listed my qualifications and dedication as being unsurpassed by any other. My mind would then travel

back to the story of Jesus asking, “Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying [me]?” I felt my situation brought me close to understanding the slightest hint of the ache our Lord must have felt, even though he knew this was poor Judas’ destiny. Only those who know us best can inflict that type of heart-wrenching pain.

Even in the midst of disloyalty, although our human instinct may be to strike back, the bible teaches us that forgiveness should be our reaction to betrayal, not revenge.

“Father, forgive them.” Those words demonstrate the ultimate compassion for the imperfect beings that we are. Forgiveness is one of the greatest challenges people of God face. We hold on to the pain, let it fester, and bring it up time and again as justification for our actions, reactions, and inability to move forward.

If we let it go, then what do we have for protection? To forgive leaves us in the vulnerable position of having to trust again. We allow ourselves to be open to the possibility of enduring the gut-wrenching feeling again.

When we place our trust in humans, we must be prepared for human imperfection. A trusting relationship with God is the only shield that can withstand the impact of betrayal.

## PONDER

- 1. Spend some time thinking of your dearest friendships. Are they based on a reciprocal trust factor?*
- 2. Are you guarded in your relationships with the people in your life, keeping them at a safe distance to protect the most precious part of you?*
- 3. Have you given others the sense that they can be free to let you know their true selves without fear of betrayal?*

Prayer: Lord, give me the strength to endure the imperfections of the human condition. Create within me a reservoir of forgiveness. Guide me past the bitter pain of betrayal toward the peace that I may only find in you. 🙏