

283 03/28/05 Teach children to forgive those who don't ask

We have just celebrated Easter. How wonderful that a series about forgiveness coincides with the most glorious forgiveness of all. Christ died an agonizing death on the cross so that we could be forgiven. His was the ultimate act of forgiveness.

There is one last aspect of forgiveness that needs to be considered. It is very difficult for most people. Yet, if we are striving to be Christ-like, we will want to follow his example in this also.

Go with me to a hill outside Jerusalem two thousand years ago. "When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.'" Luke 23:33-34a.

Should we teach our children to forgive someone who has not asked for forgiveness? I think we must.

There are two categories of people who do not ask for forgiveness. One is the person who knows he has offended and refuses to apologize. The other is the person who is not even aware that she has offended.

If we choose to stay angry with either of these persons, we are being disobedient to Christ's example. We are also jeopardizing our own forgiveness from God and perhaps even making ourselves sick. The results of not forgiving someone are just the same whether or not there has been an apology. It is very important that we teach our children to forgive those who do not seek forgiveness.

Explain to your child that just like the people who crucified Jesus, sometimes the offending person did not know what he was doing. In some cases, he really did not know that he was hurting your child. In other situations, he was not thinking correctly—like the people at the cross.

Our children need to know that some people do not know Christ as well as they do. The unfortunate result of not knowing Christ is a tendency to lash out in hurtful ways to those nearby. Maybe those people need forgiveness more than anyone else. Help your children understand that we have the responsibility to "be merciful, just as [our] Father is merciful." Luke 6:36.