

Pasquaney *archives*



In fifth grade, one of my best friends in my neighborhood was a kid named Phillip. Looking back on it now, it is easy to say that he was not a good friend to have. But at the time I overlooked all the mean things he did because I didn't know any better and, being very shy, I only had a few friends. One day, after getting off the bus, he put me in a headlock and beat me up over something that was incredibly trivial. I was hurt physically and emotionally by someone I saw as one of my best friends. A week or two later, Phil forgave me for wronging him and said he would be my friend again. Even though I still felt like the victim and the one that deserved the apology, we continued with our friendship until I changed schools a year later. I have not seen him since.

For a relatively small event in my life, it is something that has had a surprisingly large influence on me over the years. The bitterness I hold to this day over this small event is a burden and a weight that is as unnecessary as it is unhealthy. It has been over ten years since Phil hurt me, but I still carry this anger and resentment towards him that I know is irrational. I have not forgiven him.

What is forgiveness? Why do we forgive? Is it something that is earned? Do we expect it when we have wronged someone else? What about self-forgiveness? Forgiveness, as I see it, is an abandonment of anger and resentment towards someone who is either flawed, made a mistake, or has offended. It is the release of the negative emotions that weigh us down and cloud our personal relationships, often making us bitter and cynical. We forgive to move on, to keep moving forwards rather than holding ourselves in the past. Forgiveness is a process; it starts with feelings of pain and anger and ends when the wronged reaches a point of understanding. By forgiving, we become less angry, are more optimistic, and become more compassionate. Forgiveness is to the aggrieved what the apology is to the offender: a conclusion to the process of antagonism. However, for such a simple and positive concept, the idea of letting go of our anger is not easy all the time. We often like holding onto that anger because it gives us an outlet for our frustration and it justifies being upset in the first place. We use that anger as a crutch for self-pity and as a way of avoiding examining what we did to contribute to the situation. No situation is ever one-sided, and by withholding forgiveness from others, we convince ourselves that they are to blame and that the fault lies entirely on their shoulders. Yet, by holding onto this indignation, we are risking hurting our own mental well-being and personal development.

Forgiving someone, especially when their offense was serious, can be difficult and take time. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is an attribute of the strong." I agree that it takes more effort in the short term to forgive than it does to hold onto that bitterness because a large part of forgiving is forgiving oneself. We get hung up on our mistakes, both small and large, and this destroys our confidence and makes us pessimistic. Self-forgiveness is the process of looking inward and recognizing these mistakes and coming to terms with them. It is no easy task really looking at ourselves and confronting what hurt us. However, in order to be able to function in the world we all have to be able to do this. When we make mistakes and get down on ourselves, our gut reaction is to wallow in self-pity and silently obsess over our faults. Yet, if we can forgive ourselves for our mistakes, we can move on and pardon others' offenses as well. When I was looking over some quotations to put in this tree talk, a recurring theme was self-release through forgiveness, and that we are prisoners of our own hatred without it. Self-forgiveness is the first step in the process of forgiveness and without it, nothing is learned and nothing changes.

I also think forgiveness cannot be an instantaneous thing. It requires us to really and truly think about the other person's actions and our actions. It also implies a deeper understanding of the offense and what caused it. If given too freely, forgiveness will not last. It has to be meant genuinely, otherwise, over time, the resentment and bitterness will resurface. However, if we hold onto our anger too long, more damage is caused since it takes more effort to keep being mad after we have moved past the situation. The farther removed we are from the problem, the more general the anger becomes and we lose sight of what caused it in the first place. While it is good to take time and think about forgiving others, we should not take too much time otherwise the anger will become part of us, making us bitter and pessimistic. In my grudge towards Phil, I definitely fall into the latter group, holding onto that anger too long so that it become more of an effort to maintain it. When I was a kid, I would have been happy to forgive him had he apologized right away, but since he did not, I carried that distrust and dislike for some years afterward, and it had a definite influence on my overall attitude.

Last summer, Nate Carmody gave a tree talk on apologies in which he talked about how to give an honest apology, and how it is beneficial for personal understanding and friendships. He said that forgiveness should not be expected after an apology. I believe that the same works in the other direction. You don't need an apology to forgive someone. Though an apology from the offender can speed up the process and make forgiveness easier, it should not be required. There is so much more to forgiveness than having the offender recognize their mistake. When I was a kid I expected an apology from Phil for beating me up. I realize now that the apology does not matter at all. Yes, it would have been nice, but it means more to me that he didn't. It's taken a while, but I have learned more from it. and because of it I can approach new situations with a clearer mindset.

Life is too short to hold grudges! Forgive others and forgive yourself. It may sound simple, but putting into practice is not easy. Forgiveness comes in many forms and it doesn't have to be a grand gesture; it can be as simple as ignoring others' insults, helping them when they are in need, being a friend, or openly saying, "I forgive you". Throughout all our lives we are guaranteed to have disagreements, fights, have our feelings hurt and be in situations where we feel wronged by someone else, but this does not mean we cannot make the best of these situations. Being able to forgive is essential to a happy life because without it we would all be bogged down in layers of built up resentment and anger. I realize now that by withholding my forgiveness from Phil, I was hurting myself and not accomplishing anything. I have to come to forgive him by trying to understand his position and looking at what I may have done to provoke him rather than having an easy way out with him admitting his wrong.

At camp, things are a very different. Pasquaney is place where forgiveness is freely given, building a closer community based off love and friendship. There is no other place that is so quick to look for the good in someone and forgive all the wrongs. This is what makes Pasquaney great! And we must strive to preserve this mentality both here at camp and back at home. I wanted to end with one quotation from David Ridge that I feel brings everything together, "True forgiveness is not an action after the fact, it is an attitude with which you enter each moment."