

To Err Is Human

The great English Poet, Alexander Pope (1688-1744) told us, "to err is human, to forgive divine." The art of forgiving is probably one of the most difficult principles for us to learn and put into a lifestyle. Yet, it is the one principle that will bring the most peace to one willing to do it. Forgiving others is an art. It's not something we do naturally. Like any other art it is something we can learn to do. Although some people do seem to be born a disposition that makes them more incline to forgive, nobody naturally forgives everyone in every circumstance. We are each born with our own unique temperament, which is the basic blueprint of much of our behavior and personality. Other factors, such as family, birth order, and environment blend with our temperament and help make us the people we are today. Inherent in our temperament is our propensity to forgive or hold a grudge. We can go into any hospital nursery or daycare facility, watch babies for a few moments, and quickly see these temperaments in action. A tiny little girl wrapped in a pink blanket in the corner will smile (yes babies smile) and coo at the nurses. She takes everything in stride. The little bundle of joy next to her will scream when she's touched, or not held, or not fed quickly enough. In the daycare, we can watch three-year-olds interact and see the strong willed Choleric line all the other children up to play the games her way. The Melancholy will tolerate this as long as she likes the Choleric, but she won't be told what to do for long. The Phlegmatic isn't impressed with her ideas or her game, but she will play to keep peace. The Supine will follow her anywhere and obey every command while the Sanguine is too busy laughing with her friends to concentrate on the game. These five basic temperaments are the building block of our personality. Our temperament strongly influences our ability to forgive. Ideally, we learn to forgive others in a family where parents wisely guide and teach us. Unfortunately, most parents are struggling with their own issues and grudges and they fail to teach this important principle to their children. The Bible has many things to say about forgiveness. One of my favorite Scriptures was written to the Hebrews, "Looking diligently lest any fail of the grace of God, or lest any root of bitterness springing up disturb you, and by it many are defiled" (Hebrews 12:15 MKJV). If we don't learn to forgive others, we can easily destroy our own lives and the lives of everyone we love or who love us. We all know people who were wounded early in life and never to let go of the pain. Bitterness seeps into everything they do. They can't trust and are always looking for the bad rather than the good in others. They offend easily and quickly get angry for the smallest slight, where real or perceived. Unforgiveness saps energy and destroys our creativity. It makes us horrible people to be around. We can all learn to forgive. When we do, our relationships are stronger and it is easier to accept God's forgiveness. Jesus suffered more pain and humiliation than any of us ever will, yet while He was hanging on the cross some of His last words were, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34 MKJV). Jesus wasn't looking at what they were doing to Him. He recognized that these mortals would stand before God one day and account for their actions. He knew that He was here for one purpose and the cross was part of that purpose. He learned to trust God with the plan for His life, including the cross. Years ago, we resigned a church that we had worked hard to build into a thriving, beautiful group of wonderful people. It was difficult for us because the congregation wasn't aware of the tension between some of the board members and us. This was one of the most painful experiences in my life. Before it was over, a couple of men got ugly and treated us badly. We loved those people and never spoke out against them, even taking undeserved abuse at times during the transition. One day when two men were being rather harsh in a church meeting God showed both my husband and son two angels sitting on the platform. They were weeping. Each of them had a pen and scroll in their hands. They were writing down everything that was taking place in that meeting. The angels were as grieved as we were. God used that experience to show me that He was aware of what we were going through and it was all being recorded. We understood that those men would stand before Him one day and account for the actions that day. That difficult period in my life was a turning point. From then on, I knew that He was in control even when I couldn't be. Every one of us experience bitterness and hurt. We grieve over the unfair things people do to us. We must work our way through it. We can't allow ourselves to hold onto the bitterness and let it destroy us. If we can take our eyes off the one who has hurt us and focus on the eternal consequences of their actions, we can even love them. God isn't as concerned with what we go through as much as He is with our response to it. Our response to injustice is the mortar that goes between the bricks of events building our lives. Forgiveness isn't an option. We can't choose whether we will forgive. It's necessary. Without it, there is nothing but pain and anger ahead. Alexander Pope was right when he said, to err is human, and to forgive is divine.

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About the Author

Dr. Sharon Schuetz is an ordained minister and holds a BA in Religious Education and a Phd in Clinical Counseling Psychology. She and her husband, Michael, have been married for 33 years. They have three children and seven grandchildren. Like most writers, she has loved writing since she was a child.