

Broken Trust

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by Tesh Njokanma



One of the most painful experiences in life is to be hurt or betrayed by someone you hold dearly; someone you love and trust. When faced with such a situation, it takes grace, real grace from above to let go of the hurt and forgive the person concerned. If you have ever been a victim of treachery; if you have been disappointed by someone you love, been betrayed by a close friend, or been stabbed in the back by the very person you used to pour out your heart to and confide in, then you will understand what I am talking about. Even after many years, some people like Katherine, are still hurting from wounds from the past.

Katherine's Story

Pastor Tim was Katherine's pastor. She had served under his ministry for many years. It was in fact in his church about 13 years ago that she made a personal commitment to receive Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior. Ever since, Pastor Tim had been her mentor, shepherd, counselor and confidant. But all that was about to change.

Nobody is perfect, at least on this side of the globe. This was something Katherine who held Pastor Tim in high regard soon got to discover.

Katherine never meant for it to happen, but it happened. She had an affair, an affair with Tony, a married man in her church. Not just any married man, but a leader in the church. What

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started out as a simple, casual friendship between two members of a House Fellowship Center, turned out to be something more as the days and weeks progressed and feelings or should I say lust and passion got stronger and Katherine found herself playing with fire.

Struggling with the shame and guilt of her wrongdoing, who else could Katherine turn to but to the person who had stood by her all these years encouraging her, praying for her and giving her sound and godly counsel whenever she was in a fix or needed to make an important decision? She told Pastor Tim everything. She opened up every minute detail to him thinking that if she could get it off her chest, the sleepless nights would come to an end and she would be free from the guilt that had been like a heavy man strangling and pressing her down.

In his typical way, Pastor Tim listened without showing any disgust or disappointment. He shared a few scriptures with Katherine and prayed with her. He also promised to handle the matter discreetly and maturely so that members of the congregation didn't get to hear about it and before you knew it, Stella, Tony's wife, would hear of what had happened and do something drastic.

But to Katherine's surprise, exactly a week after, as if they all planned it, three members of the church called her one after the other telling her of how ashamed they were of her, how she needed to repent and change her ways. One of them even went as far as calling her a prostitute. Well, maybe she didn't use that exact word but to Katherine, that was the summary of what Sister Gladys had to say to her. At this stage, the last thing that came to Katherine's mind was that Pastor Tim had discussed her with anyone. He couldn't. No, he wouldn't. He wasn't that kind of person. He was too compassionate, too mature and certainly too spiritual to do such a thing. She didn't put it past that good for nothing Tony who called himself a minister. Some minister indeed!

The shame of going twice to a hotel room with a married man and sleeping with him was one thing, getting to know that the Pastor you looked up to and had shared some deep and very personal details about your life with had told this to someone else was more than enough pain for Katherine to bear. She couldn't continue in such a place. Leaving the church wasn't a hard decision to make. How could she remain in an environment full of hypocrisy and distrust?

What was hard to understand was that eight years after this incident had happened, even though Pastor Tim had apologized to her and tried to make peace with her, Katherine still hadn't forgiven him. At that time, when she rudely confronted him, Pastor Tim explained that it was just one of the ministers in church who had a very good relationship with Tony and Stella that he told. His reason for this was that since Brother Matt was close to the couple, having been the best man at their wedding, he was in the best position to handle the situation. Again and again, Pastor Tim tried to explain to her that all he was trying to do was avoid a situation where the church would be dealing with a case of divorce. He didn't know that Brother Matt would discuss it with Sister Gladys and Sister Bridget. That was all balderdash, Katherine retorted. Pastor Tim's explanation wasn't good enough for Katherine. She told him to his face that if he was a man of God as he claimed to be, he would never have said anything to anyone least of all to Brother Matt whom everyone knew was a blabber mouth. He could eat his apology, she didn't need it and she certainly didn't need a church like his. That was how she

had left Redemption Tabernacle eight years ago. But it was obvious that she hadn't left that incident behind. Katherine still spoke so harshly and bitterly of Pastor Tim whenever she came across anyone who said they worshiped at Redemption Tabernacle.

Principles of Forgiveness

The people you least expect to can hurt and betray you. Imagine how Jesus felt when Judas betrayed him with a kiss. Yet, He forgave. We as Christ's disciples are expected to do no less. Painful as the hurt may be, we must forgive the faults and failures of others not so much for the person, but for our own good. Forgiveness is very essential to our relationship with God and our relationship with other people. When it comes to the issue of forgiveness, you must understand these truths:

1. Imperfect people do imperfect things

Life is full of disappointments because life is full of imperfect people. Imperfect people do imperfect things. They are not infallible. They are prone to gossip, backbiting, lies, envy, anger, sexual immorality and a host of transgressions. Even the most anointed and spiritual person can fall. If we understand that we are all imperfect beings in an imperfect world, we will be more accommodating of others, especially the faults of others. Now, this is not to excuse or justify wrong behavior, it is simply to make us understand that as long as we are in this world, we will meet with a lot of unpleasant situations. The only place where nothing goes wrong; where you never have any cause to weep, mourn or get angry with anyone is in heaven. So since we are still in this world and still striving for perfection, get ready to have some people even those you love and trust, step on your toes and occasionally misunderstand and disappoint you. And when this happens, just remember that you are equally imperfect and must have hurt and disappointed somebody somewhere at some time. Katherine felt her pastor had offended her and broken her trust and she made such a big case about it. But what about the pain and hurt she had inflicted on Stella, Tony's wife? What about the strain she had placed on their marriage? Did she ever think of the break in trust, fellowship and intimacy she had brought into their home? How easy it is to focus on the wrongs of others and ignore your own faults and imperfections.

2. Forgiving others assures you of God's forgiveness and blessings

We are all in desperate need of God's forgiveness. It's so easy for us to sin against God. Consciously and unconsciously we find ourselves falling into sin. Even Apostle Paul who more or less wrote the New Testament, found it a challenge to live without committing sin. This was why he said "For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do, this I keep doing" (Romans 7:18-19).

You and I need God's forgiveness on a constant basis. We need God's forgiveness to enter into His presence. We need His forgiveness to get answers to our prayers. We need His forgiveness to be blessed and to enjoy His blessings. But we can block God's forgiveness from getting to us without even realizing it. In Matthew 6:14-15 Jesus said, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your father will not forgive your sins". Holding a grudge against someone, harbouring bitter feelings about someone, not walking in forgiveness, can hinder your spiritual

growth and can keep you from receiving the very thing you need most God's mercy and forgiveness.

3. Unforgiveness can affect your physical health

You can't be at peace with yourself and with God when you are living in unforgiveness. Your mind like it happened to Katherine will be filled with such bitter thoughts that make you an angry, unpleasant, negative person to be around. Your words will be full of venom and you are likely to be a cynical, sad individual. Also, your physical health won't be in a very good condition. For one, you can't sleep well when you are so worked up and angry. You don't think straight when you are cross and bitter and are likely to make some unwise decisions. Stress, headaches, stomachache and muscle pains have been proven to be associated with bitterness and unforgiveness. The irony of it is that most times, the person you are angry and bitter with is out there having the time of his or her life, while you are giving yourself a throbbing headache over what the person has said or done. Is it really worth it?

4. Unforgiveness will be punished

No matter what anyone does to hurt and offend you, it can never compare to your sin for which Christ came to personally die for you. Imagine someone like Katherine who had rejected Christ, didn't live for Him, took decisions without giving Him a thought, yet on the day she called out to Jesus to forgive her and come into her life, Christ heard her, forgave and accepted her. He accepted her and made her a new creation completely forgiving and forgetting everything she had done in the past. Now, somebody out there has hurt her and she keeps telling everyone who cares to listen about how terrible the person is. Eight years have come and gone and she is still bent on revenge. How do you think Christ will feel watching all of this?

In the parable of the unmerciful servant Jesus out rightly referred to the unmerciful servant who refused to forgive and let go as a WICKED servant (Matthew 18:32). Now that's a very strong word but it is a word Jesus uses to describe an unforgiving person. When you refuse to forgive you are being wicked. God sees it as wickedness because you have freely received and been given the very thing you don't want to give another person. This was why He clearly stated that such a person would be punished (Matthew 18:33-35).

Colossians 3:13 tells us to "bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you". Think of all Christ has forgiven you of in the past, all He forgives you of today and all He will forgive you of in the future if you sincerely seek His forgiveness. Shouldn't a love so deep which has been graciously showered on you, be enough cause to forgive others when they hurt and offend you?

The main message of the cross is forgiveness. If we truly understand what Jesus did for us on the cross, we would tell others about the love and forgiveness Jesus offers and also demonstrate this same love to those that offend us.

Perhaps like Katherine you have been deeply hurt by someone and you are finding it hard to forgive. The incident may have happened recently or some time ago and you are still bitter about it. Why not surrender that incident to Jesus. He is the Master of forgiveness. He knows what it means to be betrayed and disappointed. He knows what it means to be ridiculed and

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insulted. He experienced the worst kind of humiliation from those He loved and came to help yet, He forgave all of that. Draw strength from Him today. Ask Him to heal the pain in your heart and help you forgive and let go so that starting from right now, you can be free, the person that hurt you can be free and you can begin to enjoy the fullness of God's love, peace and mercy.

Tesh Njokanma is a lawyer by training whose heart is in writing. She is a prolific writer with over 15 years experience as a magazine Editor. She is a pastor in the Redeemed Christian Church of God with a prayer and teaching ministry. Tesh is married with children. She is based in Lagos, Nigeria.

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