

Gripping and Complaining Living Well

In order to set the stage a bit, let's run through a few realities. It might start something like this . . . life's not fair. Circumstances are often unjust. Sooner or later people will betray us. Many will slander us with lies that have no shred of truth to them or are so twisted that whatever truth might be there is completely unintelligible. Financial situations will clobber us. Events will turn in ways that brutalize us. Physical issues will dog our steps and emotional pain will wrench our hearts. At some point we're all a victim of something, at other times we're the victimizer. We fall to the consequences of our own bad choices, and we feel the repercussions of the bad choices of others. It goes both ways. We will be loved and hated, admired and ridiculed, elevated and decimated. Such is the rhythm and reality of life.

Sometimes we can choose what happens to us. Sometimes we can't. However, our response to all of this stuff is the one thing that is our choice. The potential array of responses is vast. We can choose from a whole selection of responses that run the gamut from anger to hatred to bitterness to resentment to frustration to outright revenge. We can dissolve into a pooling mass of self-pity or we can rage with the flames of hatred. We can assemble some sort of overwhelming arsenal designed to flatten the aggressor that has hurt us, or we can withdraw by erecting defensive walls around our embattled lives so that we cower behind them. Then there's the primitive route where we simply do to them what was done to us, devolving into some sort of first grade playground mentality where "I'll hit you if you hit me." The possible responses are endless.

Our Response Dictates Our Healing

How we respond dictates how we will heal. Our response is not simply about countering a threat or providing a rebuff or defending our position. None of these are necessarily bad. But our response to any situation needs to take into account the fact that we have been wounded and that we need to heal. The way we respond will either help us heal, or it will add to the damage already done.

Sometimes, some of our responses actually create more pain and inflict more damage than what was originally done to us. We often kick this sick cycle into motion with the intent of returning the favor so that we keep things even. Often our desire to hurt others is intended to have them experience what we experienced so that they "get it." Or we just react out of a pure hatred and want to hurt them as bad as we can make 'em hurt. All of these have a sort of splash back effect to them, actually hurting us while we hurt them. Imagine something like dueling porcupines where the more they fight the more they get speared. Nobody's a winner. Everybody's a loser. That's not a good place for anybody to be.

What's My Main Goal?

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Really, our two main goals are to heal from the hurt inflicted, and to keep it from happening again. That's about as simple and as honest as it gets. We can come at these two goals a bunch of different ways, but many of those ways really have a whole bunch of other goals attached to them like revenge or retribution or retaliation or some such thing. It's kind of like pork barrel politics where a bill sent through the senate has a fistful of addendums shoved behind the larger bill. Sometimes our responses are like that.

Remember, our response can hinder or heal. We can actually do more damage to ourselves in the way we respond than was done to us originally. That being said, our response needs to be tight and clean; being nothing more than an attempt to heal and to make certain that the offense doesn't happen again. Keeping that focus allows us to stay clear headed and to move forward.

When We Heal, Others Can Heal

Did you ever think about the fact that the people who hurt us are hurting people themselves? Kind of odd maybe, but it's typically true. It doesn't excuse what they've done, but it can make better sense of it. If our posture is not to retaliate knowing that it will hurt us, in the same action we are not hurting them. In fact, we're presenting a posture of health, maturity and wholeness which is maybe something that they need to see. We insert a sort of pause into the situation, creating a place for contemplation and reflection.

We confront the situation, but only to bring whatever closure we can so that we can heal. Then we put some boundaries out there, some limits so it doesn't happen again. Then we move on whether they do or not. But we move on.

Forgiveness

Then there's that sticky topic of forgiveness. "Forgive and forget" they say. We can forgive, but we don't forget in the sense that what happened is now a part of our history. Forgiveness means that we just don't hold onto it anymore, we kind of pry our fingers off the offense and leave it there.

Forgiveness is a relinquishment of the offense. It doesn't mean that what happened is ok. Nor does it mean that you'll set yourself up to be hurt again. Neither does it mean that the offending party is free to hurt others or avoid a consequence for their actions. It simply means that I refuse to be a prisoner of a past that I can't change and shackled to decisions that I didn't make. I will not be bound by hatred and I will not be tied with the ropes of revenge. I bring closure, I set boundaries so it doesn't happen again, I forgive and I move on. It takes time to do all of that, it takes determination, but it's doable.

So how do you respond when life hits you? Better think about it. The decisions that you make will impact you today, tomorrow and forever.