

## Peace Talk Series by Mary Gloria C. Njoku

**In this edition of the programme, peace, I shall make a case for forgiveness and making progress towards a peaceful me.**

Do you remember the story of the unforgiving servant in the Bible. It is in Matthew 18:21- 35 and it reads thus: Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, if my brother keeps on sinning against me, how many times do I have to forgive him? Seven time?" "No, not seven times," answered Jesus, "but seventy times seven, because the kingdom of heaven is like this. Once there was a king who decided to check on his servants' accounts. He had just begun to do so when one of them was brought in who owed him millions of pounds. The servant did not have enough to pay his debt, so the king ordered him to be sold as a slave, with his wife and his children and all that he had, in order to pay the debt. The servant fell on his knees before the king. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay you everything!' The king felt sorry for him, so he forgave him the debt and let him go.

"Then the man went out and met one of his fellow-servants who owed him a few pounds. He grabbed him and started choking him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he said. His fellow servant fell down and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back!' But he refused; instead, he had him thrown into jail until he should pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were very upset and went to the king and told him everything. So he called the servant in. 'You worthless slave!' he said. 'I forgave you the whole amount you owed me, just because you asked me to. You should have had mercy on your fellow-servant, just as I had mercy on you.' The king was very angry and he sent the servant to jail to be punished until he should pay back the whole amount."

And Jesus concluded, "That is how my father in heaven will treat every one of you unless you forgive your brothers from your heart." My dear listener, every time I remember this statement, I remind myself that I must forgive anyone who wrongs me regardless of the pain associated with the hurt I may receive. I have spoken about the need to forgive in a previous edition of the programme, Peace. I expressed that forgiveness frees us and enables us to stay healthy. People who live in unforgiveness suffer from a myriad of diseases including spiritual atrophy,

physical health problems such as high blood pressure and mental health problems like paranoia and depression.

I have a feeling that people who are unable to forgive other people do not receive forgiveness from our heavenly father.

Recently, I experienced a dead end that led me to wonder whether forgiveness should be limited to only those who ask for forgiveness. I had an unusual encounter with a person I considered a best friend that I loved very much. In this particular encounter, we were talking nicely like people who care about the welfare of each other and 30 minutes later the story changed without warning. I felt humiliated and hurt. I immediately sensed danger and began to tender apology for a crime that I may have committed unknowingly. I asked for information on what I did to warrant the humiliation I received but no answer was given to me. For more than a week, I continued to seek for the story behind my humiliation but none came my way.

One day, I asked myself why my supposedly best friend did not blink an eye before choosing to humiliate me. Something in me told me that I may be the cause of my own problem given my tendency to apologize for things that I did not do and my tendency to grant forgiveness to people before they even ask for it. I wondered whether it is best to display a little bit of malice, anger and frustration towards my best friend. For a brief moment I said to myself, how I wish I am the Gloria that learned to play the malice game along with other children when I was young.

I pondered over my current challenge and concluded that I must not regret my intentional behaviour to learn and practice forgiveness in my life. But this story of my life reminded me of how challenging it can be to keep a relationship positive and alive. For a brief moment I wondered what life might be for people who are married to individuals who keep malice for minor infractions of personal life perspectives. I wondered how siblings continue to maintain good relationships with those who tend to keep malice and humiliate them at will. I wondered how individuals can maintain long-term relationships with those who sometimes disrespect and humiliate them and keep malice with them.

All these reflections led me to the conclusion that I must share my story with you so that you may know that you are not the only one who struggles with forgiving

certain types of people. I, the voice of peace on Radio Nigeria, Enugu, struggles too. I struggle with practicing and living peace but I have chosen not to give up on peace. I pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit each day. I pray for wisdom and I pray to be transformed into a perfect instrument of peace. I have not achieved my peace goals but I know that I have made a little progress in my quest for peace. I have chosen to find new ways to relate with my superiors, colleagues and younger ones in ways that promote peace. Sometimes I am successful with achieving my intended goal and sometimes I fail. But I will never give up on myself and my quest for a peaceful me. I will continue to make small steps towards peace. Hence I have learned that I must work for peace if I want peace. I am poised to continue to make my snail progress towards a peaceful me.

What is your own choice? Would you give up on forgiveness and peace because of the narcissism of your associates, friends and family? Would you give up on your sibling, mother and father? Or would you rather join the train of those who make snail progress towards achieving peaceful disposition in their lives. The choice is yours. But I urge you to take the path of forgiveness and peace. Allow yourself to feel empathy for those who appear narcissistic and powerful. Those who feel that they have everything going for them and must be recognized for their special attributes. Feel empathy for them because they don't know how to be consistently nice. No one will knowingly choose the part of narcissism or malice. I have a feeling inside me that those who engage in certain challenging behaviours do so because they have become prisoners of their own personality problems and they feel bad indeed within themselves. I feel that it is my job to empathize and show consistent love to my best friend, parents, siblings and colleagues who might accidentally bruise my ego and humiliate me. I must continue to love those who hurt me just as Jesus advocated. I acknowledge that it is not an easy task so I continue to subject myself to the school of the Holy Spirit for the strength to continue my snail journey to a peaceful me.

My dear best friend, if you are reading this story, I want you to know that I will always love you so long as the Holy Spirit puts this capacity in my heart. I long to see a change of attitude in you. I must confess that you have made some progress in this regard but it is difficult to be a consistent friend when you shut down and act with malice. I on my part will try to be conscious of your personality and

minimize actions that might trigger negative interpersonal relationship. Please join me in working for peace.

I am indeed set on achieving my target of peace by the special grace of God. Bankers have money targets to achieve, marketers have customer targets to achieve. My personal target is to become a peaceful me as advocated by Gandhi. I pray that you will set a similar target of peace. Let us join hands in institutionalizing peace and pray; let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.