

# Forgiveness is noble but offering it is a two-way street

**E**ven if they never liked his music, many people admired Shane

MacGowan's view — as revealed by his widow at his funeral — that it is always best to forgive. This included urging his friend Johnny Depp to forgive his ex-wife Amber Heard after their bitter divorce and their lawsuits against each other. It is a sentiment that sounds noble and is particularly appropriate in this season of goodwill. It attracted even more attention as it came from a rock star who was more associated in the popular press with a chaotic lifestyle and abrasive behaviour.

Yes, forgiving is noble, but is it always right? Surely forgiveness is a two-way street, in that it has to be deserved before forgiveness is granted. The person who has hurt you in some way must show a degree of remorse or, at the very least, awareness of the distress they have caused.

If they fail to do that, then forgiving them simply demeans that act and sells it too cheaply. It also lets them off taking any responsibility for what they have done. Most of all, it fails to educate them morally as to the consequences of their actions on others. They need to understand your experience and feel your pain. Forgiveness needs to be earned.

Turning the other cheek may seem pious but we do the perpetrators a greater religious service by making them examine what they have done and regret it. Of course, withholding forgiveness until that point is reached — which may come late or not at all — should not stop us from “letting go” of our own resentment of the

person. Otherwise it can build up poisonously within us and ultimately cause us more harm than the original offence. We can free ourselves without freeing them.

The converse of this is that maybe we have been the ones to offend someone else — by doing or not doing something, by saying or not saying something.

The command to “love your neighbour as yourself” is not selflessness, but the exact opposite: selfishness. We know what are our needs and feelings, and so should be aware of those of other people. It means we are not exempt from asking forgiveness when we know we have erred, however embarrassing that may be.

We may even feel we were justified or provoked but that does not mitigate the effect of what we did. We who can be wronged by others can also do wrong. Nor should we refuse forgiveness when asked by someone who shows regret. It may be tough to do, and may need some proof, but it allows both parties to start afresh. Shane would certainly approve of that.

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