

THE THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS SERIES

FORGIVENESS

Releasing You Is Freeing Me



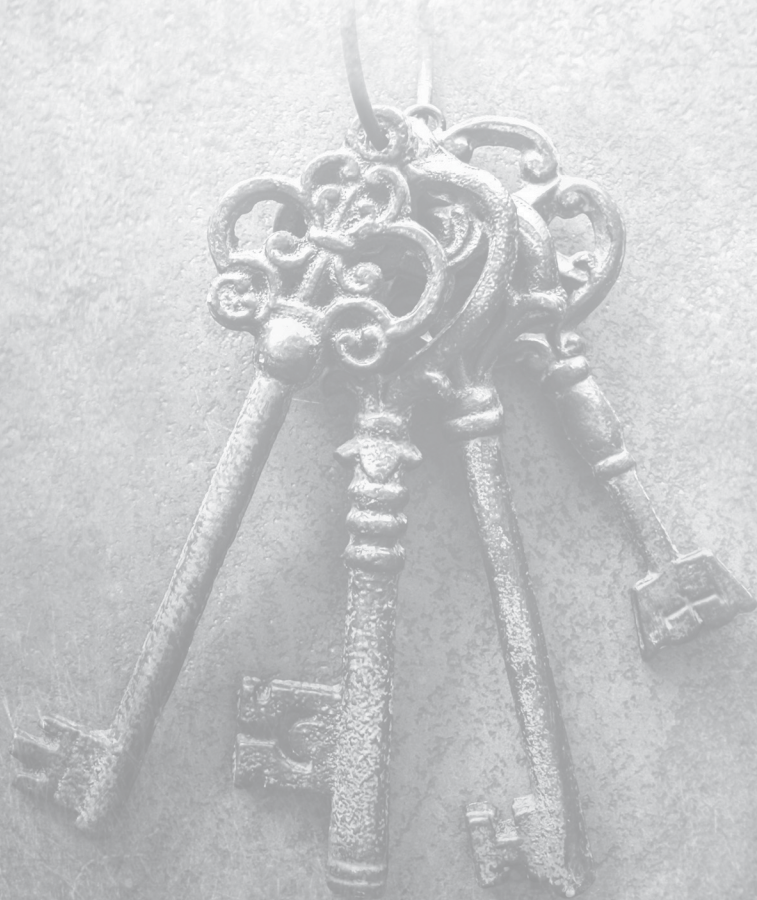
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

DEFINITIONS

What Is Forgiveness? 7

What Is Forgiveness *Not*? 9

What Does It Mean to Forgive Others? 12

Is Forgiveness the Same as Reconciliation? 15

What Is Divine Forgiveness? 16

What Is God’s Heart on Forgiveness? 20

CHARACTERISTICS

What Is the Price of Unforgiveness? 26

What Does the Forgiving Heart Look Like? 30

What Is the Cost of Unforgiveness vs.
the Reward of Forgiveness? 34

CAUSES

Why Is It So Difficult to Forgive? 45

Why Does the Need for Justice Contribute
to Unforgiveness? 47

Why Does Unforgiveness Spiral into
a Spiritual Stronghold? 48

What Is the Root Cause of Unforgiveness? 51

How Can You Be Totally Forgiven by God? 53

STEPS TO SOLUTION

Key Verse to Memorize67

Key Passage to Read..... 68

How to Have a Transformed Life..... 70

What Are the Four Stages of Forgiveness? 74

How to Truly Forgive..... 83

How Do You Sustain a Forgiving Spirit? 84

How to Protect Your Heart from Bitterness87

How to Lighten Your Scales of Blame..... 91

How the Story Ends..... 93

SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE 95

ENDNOTES & BIBLIOGRAPHY 101



INTRODUCTION

Have you ever had a serious struggle with forgiving someone? In the hidden recesses of your heart, have you wanted to see those who have wronged you receive severe judgment rather than forgiveness? If so, I understand.

I know all about harboring an unforgiving heart. For a number of years, I felt totally justified in harboring unforgiveness toward my father. He was an unbeliever who lived an immoral lifestyle.

At the same time, my mother was my “soft spot.” If you had known her, you would wonder, *Why would anyone want to hurt her?* She was compassionate, kind, and caring. Consequently, I would try to protect her from my father’s cruel treatment, but no matter how hard I tried, I failed. The truth is, whenever she hurt, I hurt.

I remember how easy it was for me to focus on my father’s faults. I would look for areas where he was wrong. Of course, since he never admitted to wrongdoing, I felt absolutely justified in my hatred, even though I would not have *called* it hatred at the time. I didn’t see myself in that light—as bitter. Why? Because the fact that I could still see his faults proved I was right.

I later became a Christian and learned about the forgiveness, mercy, and grace of God. Yet, I still felt justified in my hatred and unforgiveness. Why? Because my father had not changed. In order for me to forgive him, he had to change. That was my requirement.

I will never forget the day I came face-to-face with a passage that changed my perspective. It’s found in 1 John 2:9–11: *“Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.”*

I suddenly realized I had been blind to anything good my father had done. All I could see or wanted to see was the negative. I remember asking my mother, “How can you be so nice to him?” Her answer was

telling! “Oh, honey, if only he had the Lord, he wouldn’t be that way.” That was the key. She looked beyond his faults to see his need—He needed the Savior. She and her friends were praying for him to have a changed heart.

Six months before my father died, he was willing to pray a prayer of salvation. I am convinced this occurred because my mother had nurtured the soil of his heart with compassion and forgiveness—the hardened ground had become soft—so when the seed of truth was shared, it actually took root.

No matter what your circumstances, it’s never too late to choose the road of forgiveness. How I pray you will experience the freedom that comes from embracing a heart of forgiveness!

June Hunt
Founder, Hope for the Heart

FORGIVENESS

Releasing You Is Freeing Me

The year is 1944. Nazi Germany occupies Holland. An elderly watchmaker and his family are actively involved in the Dutch Underground. By hiding Jewish people in a secret room of their home, members of the Ten Boom family courageously help Jewish men, women, and children escape Hitler's roll call of death.¹

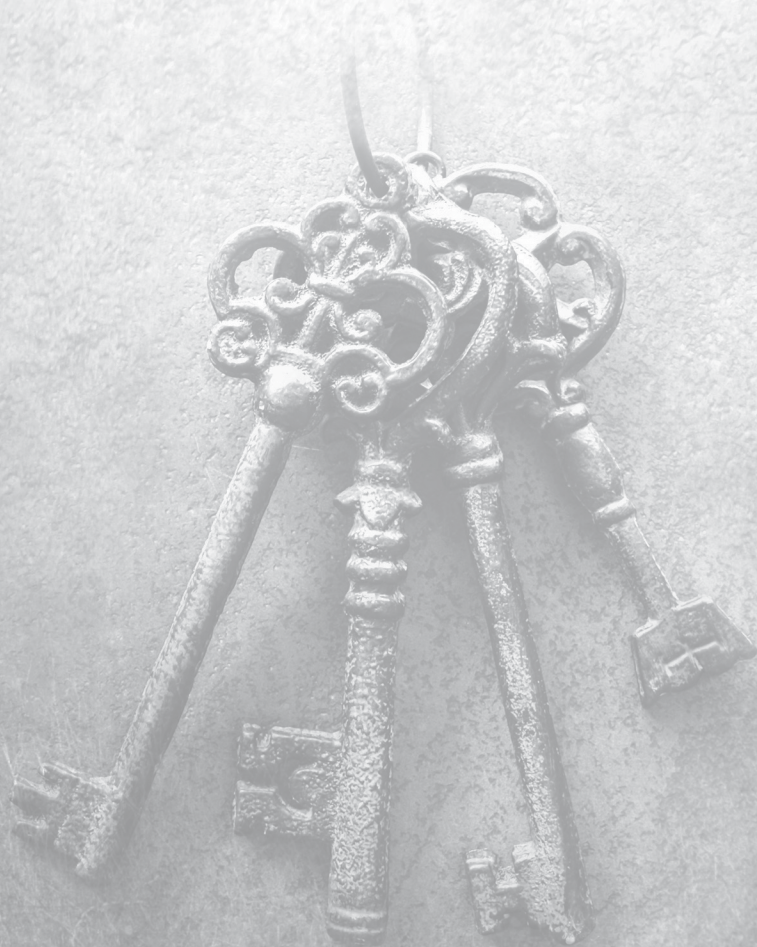
Yet one fateful day, their secret is discovered. The watchmaker is arrested, quickly imprisoned, and soon after, he dies. His tenderhearted daughter Betsie also cannot escape the clutch of death at the hands of her cruel captors. In a Nazi concentration camp, she perishes.

And what about Corrie, the watchmaker's youngest daughter? Will she live? And, if so, will she ever be able to forgive her captors, those who caused the deaths of her father and her sister? As she struggles to survive the ravages of Ravensbruck, one of Hitler's most horrific death camps, can anything sustain Corrie ten Boom? To what can she cling?

Indeed, Corrie does survive. Her God sustains her. She lives the truth of these verses:

*"False witnesses rise up against me,
spouting malicious accusations.
I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness
of the LORD in the land of the living.
Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart
and wait for the LORD."
(PSALM 27:12-14)*

DEFINITIONS



*“God wants us to
forgive each other
because He has
forgiven us.”*



Two years after the war, Corrie is speaking at a church in Munich. She has come from Holland to a defeated Germany, bringing with her the message that God does indeed forgive. There in the crowd, a solemn face stares back at her. As the people file out, a balding, heavysset man moves toward her—a man in a gray overcoat, a man clutching a brown felt hat. Suddenly a scene flashes back in her mind: *the blue uniform; the visored cap with its skull and crossbones; the huge room with its harsh, overhead lights; the humiliation of walking naked past this man*—this man who is now standing before her.

“You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk. I was a guard there,” he says. “But since that time I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well.” He extends his hand toward her and asks, “Will you forgive me?”² Corrie stares at the outstretched hand. The moment seems like hours as she wrestles with the most difficult decision she has ever had to make. Corrie knows scripture well, but applying this passage seems to be too much:

*“If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them;
and if they repent, forgive them.
Even if they sin against you seven times in a day
and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’
you must forgive them.”*

(LUKE 17:3–4)

What Is Forgiveness?

Assume you need to borrow one hundred dollars to pay a medical bill. You ask a friend for a loan and promise to pay it back at the end of the month. But when the time comes for repayment, you don’t have the money. In fact, for the next three months, you still don’t have the money. Then unexpectedly, out of the kindness of his heart, your friend chooses to forgive the debt! This is one facet of forgiveness.

The Bible says,

“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another.”

(ROMANS 13:8)

Forgiveness means dismissing a debt.³

In the New Testament, the Greek noun *aphesis* denotes a “dismissal” or “release.”⁴

- When you grant forgiveness, you dismiss the debt owed to you.
- When you grant forgiveness, you also dismiss the debt from your thoughts.
- When you receive forgiveness, your debt is dismissed. (You are released from any requirement for repayment.)

Jesus expressed the heart of forgiveness when He said, “*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you*” (Luke 6:27).

Forgiveness is dismissing your demand that others owe you something, especially when . . .

- They fail to meet your expectations.
- They fail to keep a promise.
- They fail to treat you justly.

Jesus said, “*If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also*” (Matthew 5:39).

Forgiveness is dismissing, canceling, or setting someone free from the consequence of falling short of God’s standard.

- The holy standard of God is perfection, yet we all have sinned.
- The penalty for our sins is spiritual death (separation from God).
- The penalty for our sins (our debt) was paid by Jesus through His sacrificial death on the cross. Therefore, instead of being separated from God, we can have our debt dismissed by God and experience eternal life in heaven.

“Everyone who believes in him [Jesus] receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”
(ACTS 10:43)

God’s Ability to Forgive

Question: “Is it possible to sin beyond God’s ability to forgive?”

Answer: No. God promises to purify us from *all* of our unrighteousness, not just specific sins, but we need to first confess our sins. (*Confess* means literally “to agree”—to agree with God.)⁵ And if we agree with God about our sin, we not only admit we have sinned, but we also turn from our sins and turn to Jesus, entrusting our lives to the one who died for our sins.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

(1 JOHN 1:9)

What Is Forgiveness Not?⁶

Misconceptions abound when the word *forgiveness* is mentioned. Some think forgiveness is the equivalent of *excusing* sin, saying that what was wrong is now right. Yet this is not the example of forgiveness Jesus displayed. When He encountered the mob of men eager to stone a woman caught in adultery, He chose not to stone her. However, neither did He *excuse* her sin. Instead, He said, “Go, and sin no more” (John 8:11 KJV). To help correct any confusion about what forgiveness *is*, you need to know what forgiveness is *not*!

*“Let the wise listen and add to their learning,
and let the discerning get guidance.”*

(PROVERBS 1:5)

Forgiveness is not circumventing God’s justice.

- It is allowing God to execute His justice in His time and in His way.

Forgiveness is not waiting for “time to heal all wounds.”

- It is clear that time doesn’t always heal wounds; some people will not allow healing.

Forgiveness is not letting the guilty “off the hook.”

- It is moving the guilty from your hook to God’s hook.

Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation.

- It takes two to reconcile, but it takes only one to forgive.

Forgiveness is not excusing wrong behavior.

- It is acknowledging that wrong behavior is without excuse, while still forgiving.

Forgiveness is not explaining away the hurt.

- It is working through the hurt.

Forgiveness is not based on what is fair.

- It was not “fair” for Jesus to hang on the cross—but He did so that we could be forgiven.

Forgiveness is not being weak.

- It is being strong enough to be Christlike.

Forgiveness is not stuffing your anger.

- It is resolving your anger by releasing the offense to God.

Forgiveness is not a natural response.

- It is a supernatural response, empowered by God.

Forgiveness is not denying the hurt.

- It is feeling the hurt and releasing it to God.

Forgiveness is not being a doormat.

- It is seeing that, if this were so, Jesus would have been the greatest “doormat” of all!

Forgiveness is not conditional.

- It is unconditional, a mandate from God to everyone.

Forgiveness is not forgetting.

- It is necessary to remember before you can forgive.

Forgiveness is not a feeling.

- It is a choice—an act of the will.

A promiscuous woman is caught “in the act,” and the stone throwers are ready. The penalty for adultery is clear—*stone the adulterers to death!* Jesus challenges the stone throwers to examine their own hearts before condemning the woman: “*Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.*” No one moves. Then, after all the stones drop—one by one—and the stone throwers leave—one by one—Jesus focuses His attention on the woman. He looks beyond her fault and sees her need. She needs to know the life-changing love of God. Unexpectedly, Jesus gives her a priceless gift—His merciful favor and forgiveness. (See John 8:3–11.)

*“Neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared.
‘Go now and leave your life of sin.’”*

(JOHN 8:11)

Fact Not Feeling

Question: “If I don’t feel like forgiving, how can I be asked to forgive? That doesn’t seem right.”

Answer: Forgiveness is not based on a *feeling*, but rather on the *fact* that we are called by God to forgive. Forgiveness is not an *emotion*, but is rather an act of the *will*, a *choice*. Therefore, what “seems right” based on feelings can easily be wrong. Remember . . .

*“There is a way that appears to be right, but
in the end it leads to death.”*

(PROVERBS 14:12)

What Does It Mean to Forgive Others?

Imagine you are a runner and the race is an event in the Olympics. You have the right shoes, right shorts, right shirt. Yet, something is desperately wrong. Locked on your ankle is a heavy ball and chain! This weight is too heavy; you can't run the distance; you can't even qualify. If only you could free yourself, but you don't have the key to unlock the chain.

Then, on the day of the qualifying run, you are told that you already possess the key to freedom. Quickly, you retrieve it from its hiding place and free yourself—oh, what freedom! It is as though that heavy ball miraculously becomes a big helium balloon. The load is lifted. The balloon is released. The weight is “sent away.” Previously, no one told you that your unforgiveness was the heavy ball weighing you down. Now that you know that forgiveness is one of the major keys to freedom, you can run the race and cross the finish line with freedom.

*“Let us throw off everything that hinders
and the sin that so easily entangles.
And let us run with perseverance
the race marked out for us.”*

(HEBREWS 12:1)

To forgive means to *release your resentment* toward your offender.

In the New Testament, the Greek verb *aphiemi* primarily means “to send forth”—in other words, to *forgive*, send away or release the penalty when someone wrongs you.⁷ This implies that you need to . . .

- **Release** your right to hear “I’m sorry.”
- **Release** your right to be bitter.
- **Release** your right to get even.

*“Do not repay anyone evil for evil.
Be careful to do what is right
in the eyes of everyone.”*
(ROMANS 12:17)

To forgive is to *release your rights* regarding the offense, to . . .

- **Release** your right to dwell on the offense.
- **Release** your right to hold on to the offense.
- **Release** your right to keep bringing up the offense.

*“Whoever would foster love
covers over an offense,
but whoever repeats the matter
separates close friends.”*
(PROVERBS 17:9)

To forgive is to *reflect the character of Christ*. Just as God is willing to forgive us, we are called to forgive others.

- **To forgive** is to extend mercy.
- **To forgive** is to give a gift of grace.
- **To forgive** is to set the offender free.

Jesus taught his disciples to pray,

*“Forgive us our debts, as we also
have forgiven our debtors.”*
(MATTHEW 6:12)

Examine Your Thoughts

Question: “What can I do when I don’t feel like forgiving?”

Answer: Whenever you don’t feel like doing something you should do, examine your thoughts.

You can’t control what your offenders do, but you can control what you think about your offenders. God gives us much counsel about what we should sift out from our thinking. Imagine that the Bible is a “thought-sifter”—a tool that helps us sift the thoughts that should not go into our minds.

Evaluate your thoughts about those who offend you.

Remember: Your thoughts influence your feelings. Do your thoughts naturally flow through the “thought-sifter” in the verse below? If not, catch them before they pass through, and immediately sift them out.

When you carefully choose what thoughts you will dwell on, your emotions will begin to line up and you will gradually feel like forgiving.

*“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right,
whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—
if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—
think about such things.”*

(PHILIPPIANS 4:8)

Is Forgiveness the Same as Reconciliation?⁸

No. Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. *Forgiveness* focuses on the *offense*; *reconciliation* focuses on the *relationship*. Forgiveness requires no relationship. However, reconciliation requires a relationship in which two people, in agreement, are walking together toward the same goal. The Bible says . . .

*“Do two walk together unless
they have agreed to do so?”*

(AMOS 3:3)

Forgiveness can take place with only one person.

- **Reconciliation** requires at least two people.

Forgiveness is directed one-way.

- **Reconciliation** is reciprocal, occurring two ways.

Forgiveness is a decision to release the offender.

- **Reconciliation** is the effort to rejoin the offender.

Forgiveness involves a change in thinking about the offender.

- **Reconciliation** involves a change in behavior by the offender.

Forgiveness is a free gift to the one who has broken trust.

- **Reconciliation** is a restored relationship based on restored trust.

Forgiveness is extended even if it is never, ever earned.

- **Reconciliation** is offered to the offender because it has been earned.

Forgiveness is unconditional, regardless of a lack of repentance.

- **Reconciliation** is conditional, based on repentance.

Mandatory Reconciliation?

Question: “After we forgive someone, must we also *try* to be reconciled?”

Answer: The answer to this question is sometimes *Yes* and sometimes *No*.

Most of the time, God’s desire for us is reconciliation. Second Corinthians 5:18 says, “*God . . . reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.*”

However, sometimes encouraging the restoration of a relationship is not wise, as with an unrepentant, recurrent abuser. First Corinthians 15:33 says, “*Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’*” For instance, if a husband’s anger is out of control and he refuses to get help for his violent temper, the wife needs to take this scripture to heart and move out of harm’s way until counseling and lasting changes are a part of his lifestyle. The Bible gives this instruction:

*“Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person,
do not associate with one easily angered.”*

(PROVERBS 22:24)

What Is Divine Forgiveness?

Do you sometimes struggle with forgiving others? Understand that your awareness of how much God loves you and forgives you can be the catalyst that compels you to forgive others. Then you can actually forgive others with the Lord’s “divine forgiveness.” The Bible says . . .

*“The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving,
even though we have rebelled against him.”*

(DANIEL 9:9)

Divine forgiveness is the fact that God, in His mercy, chose to release you from the penalty for your sins. (Unfortunately, some people refuse to receive this gift from God.)

“The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love . . . He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities . . . As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” (PSALM 103:8, 10, 12).

Divine forgiveness was extended by Jesus, who paid the penalty for our sins in full—He died on the cross as payment for the sins of all people. While we owed a debt we could not pay, He paid a debt He did not owe. One of the many Messianic prophecies states,

“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him [Christ, the Messiah] the iniquity of us all” (ISAIAH 53:6).

Divine forgiveness is an extension of grace as seen in the Greek word *charizomai*, which is translated “forgive” and means “to bestow a favor unconditionally.”⁹ The Greek word *charis* means “grace.”¹⁰ You are an expression of God’s grace when you forgive others with divine forgiveness.

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (EPHESIANS 4:32).

Forgiveness Is a Gift

Question: “When Jesus was on the cross, He prayed, ‘*Father, forgive them . . .*’ does that mean everyone received salvation?”

Answer: No. Realize that forgiveness is a gift, and the forgiver is blessed in giving it whether the person being forgiven benefits from it or not. Many refuse forgiveness because accepting it requires acknowledging the need for forgiveness. Being forgiven by having your sins paid for is one matter. Receiving and benefiting from being forgiven is entirely another. It is our part to give forgiveness, and it is the offender’s part to receive that forgiveness.

*“You, Lord, are forgiving and good,
abounding in love to all who call to you.”*

(PSALM 86:5)

Biblical Example

Joseph and His Brothers¹¹

What could erupt in more resentment than friction within the family?

Joseph is a prime example of someone who could have chosen to be vindictive, rather than forgiving. (See Genesis chapters 37–45.) He is the favorite son of his father, Jacob. Joseph’s ten older brothers are so bitter and jealous that they sell him into slavery. Later, he is falsely accused of attempted rape, unjustly imprisoned, and forgotten by a royal official who promised to help him. Joseph has every reason to sever ties with his family, vent hatred on humanity, and slam the door on God—but he doesn’t.¹²

Later when Joseph becomes the prime minister of Egypt, a severe famine plagues the land. But through God's involvement with Joseph, Egypt is well prepared. When Joseph's brothers hear of Egypt's abundance, they make a long journey from Canaan to obtain food. While in Egypt, they encounter their brother Joseph, who they had thought was dead, but who has now become the prime minister. What an opportunity for Joseph to take revenge! But instead of settling the score, Joseph speaks kindly to them and recounts the way God used their treatment of him for his good, for their good, and for the good of the Jewish people.

*“Do not be distressed and do not be angry
with yourselves for selling me here,
because it was to save lives that
God sent me ahead of you. . . .
to preserve for you a remnant on earth
and to save your lives by a great deliverance. . . .
He made me father to Pharaoh,
lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. . . .
You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good
to accomplish what is now being done,
the saving of many lives.”
(GENESIS 45:5, 7–8; 50:20)*

Even though Joseph had been tossed into the deepest of pits, he emerged with extraordinary forgiveness toward those who wronged him. What was his secret?

The Secret to Joseph's Success

“Do not be distressed and do not be angry.”

- When you realize that God, in His sovereignty, will bring good out of the *wrongs* done to you—you will have an attitude of forgiveness.

“God sent me.”

- When you realize that God, in His sovereignty, will use your location (wherever you are placed) for good—you will have an attitude of forgiveness.

“He made me.”

- When you realize that God, in His sovereignty, will make your every circumstance result in good—you will have an attitude of forgiveness.

Conclusion:

- When you are able to accept God’s sovereignty over your location, your circumstances, and even the wrongs done to you, and when you trust Him to use them one day for good, you will have both success and freedom through having an attitude of forgiveness.

*“We know that in all things God works
for the good of those who love him,
who have been called
according to his purpose.”*

(ROMANS 8:28)

What Is God’s Heart on Forgiveness?

The obvious answer to the question “Why forgive?” is this: “Because God says so!” But *why does God say so?* First, because *others* need it. And second, because *we* need it!

Forgiveness is at the heart of God’s character and the heart of why Jesus came. God’s Word reveals His forgiving heart and provides many reasons why you should always strive to be forgiving.

*“In him [Jesus] we have redemption
through his blood, the forgiveness of sins,
in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.”*

(EPHESIANS 1:7)

God’s Heart on Forgiveness

God wants us to forgive each other because He has forgiven us.

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (EPHESIANS 4:32).

God wants us to forgive others in the same way He forgives us.

“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (COLOSSIANS 3:13).

God wants us to see unforgiveness as sin.

“If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them” (JAMES 4:17).

God wants us to get rid of unforgiveness and have a heart of mercy.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (MATTHEW 5:7).

God wants us to do our part to live in peace with everyone.

“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (ROMANS 12:18).

God wants us to overcome evil with good.

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (ROMANS 12:21).

God wants us to be ministers of reconciliation.

“God . . . reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation” (2 CORINTHIANS 5:18–19).

God wants us to forgive others so we will not become bitter.

“See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many” (HEBREWS 12:15).

God wants us to forgive others so we will accurately reflect the character of Jesus.

“Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (EPHESIANS 5:1–2).

Enduring Unjust Treatment

Question: “How can I respond in a Christlike way when I’m being treated so unjustly?”¹³

Answer: Realize, Christ suffered unjustly to pay the penalty for your sins—to make possible the forgiveness of your sins. Therefore, after you become a Christian, you rely on Christ to enable you to not only endure unjust suffering but even more so to forgive those who mistreat you. Be clear about this point: every Christian is called to suffer, but with that suffering comes a blessing.

“It is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. . . .

²¹To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

²²He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’

²³When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats.

Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”

(1 PETER 2:19, 21–23)



CHARACTERISTICS



*“Forgiving someone
does not in any way mean
that you do not want justice.
It simply means that
you are leaving the offense
entirely in God’s hands.”*



Here stands the enemy, the former Nazi SS officer. His very presence evokes the cruelty and the stench of crematoriums at Ravensbruck. As Corrie ten Boom stares at the rough hand offered by her former captor, she knows in her head what she has to do—*forgive!* But her emotions scream silently in opposition. The very message she has been sharing with the victims of Nazi brutality emphasizes that she must forgive those who persecuted her. Forgiveness is a necessity. But Corrie stands paralyzed as the battle rages between her mind and her emotions:

And I stood there—I whose sins had again and again to be forgiven—and could not forgive. [My sister] Betsie had died in that place—could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?¹⁴

Imagine Corrie's dilemma. She knows that those who have forgiven their enemies have also been able to rebuild their lives regardless of the physical horrors they suffered. But those who continue to nurse their bitterness remain imprisoned, not in Hitler's horrid concentration camps, but within their own wounded souls. Corrie knows the cost of bitterness—the very bitterness she is battling—because the Bible says,

*“See to it that no one falls short
of the grace of God
and that no bitter root grows up
to cause trouble and defile many.”*
(HEBREWS 12:15)

What Is the Price of Unforgiveness?

When you refuse to forgive, your unforgiveness keeps you *emotionally bound* to both *the offense* and *the offender*. A continual refusal to forgive digs a deeper hole in which you can easily hide your hardened heart. Blaming others is a favorite tactic to justify unforgiveness. You can become too comfortable in the habitat of self-righteousness and self-pity. Your past hurts, though buried, are still very much alive. And because they are not released in God's way, oddly enough, you *become like your offender* by becoming offensive yourself. Not forgiving your offender is an offense to God, thereby making you an offender to God as well. The Bible says to confess and renounce this sin.

*"Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper,
but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy."*

(PROVERBS 28:13)

The unforgiving heart is judgmental—focusing on the past wrongs that the offender committed.

The unforgiving heart has condemnation—being intolerant of any present failures of the offender.

*"Do not judge . . . Do not condemn . . .
Forgive, and you will be forgiven."*

(LUKE 6:37)

The unforgiving heart is merciless—rehearsing the reasons why the offender does not deserve mercy.

The unforgiving heart has contempt—looking down without mercy on the offender.

*"Judgment without mercy will be shown
to anyone who has not been merciful.
Mercy triumphs over judgment."*

(JAMES 2:13)

The unforgiving heart is resentful—begrudging the successes of the offender.

The unforgiving heart has envy—coveting the accomplishments of the offender.

*“Resentment kills a fool,
and envy slays the simple.”*
(JOB 5:2)

The unforgiving heart is vengeful—rejoicing when the offender experiences failure, difficulty, or hurt.

The unforgiving heart has retaliation—desiring to get even with the offender.

*“Do not gloat when your enemy falls;
when they stumble, do not let your heart rejoice.”*
(PROVERBS 24:17)

The unforgiving heart is maligning—talking to others about the faults of the offender with the intent to hurt.

The unforgiving heart has slander—sharing unnecessary negatives about the offender.

*“Whoever conceals hatred with lying lips
and spreads slander is a fool.”*
(PROVERBS 10:18)

The unforgiving heart is prideful—elevating self above the offender, who is considered less deserving.

The unforgiving heart has haughtiness—acting with arrogance toward the offender.

*“Pride goes before destruction,
a haughty spirit before a fall.”*
(PROVERBS 16:18)

The unforgiving heart is profane—being verbally abusive toward the offender.

The unforgiving heart has bitterness—harboring hostility toward the offender.

“Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”

(ROMANS 3:14)

The unforgiving heart is complaining—being quick to quarrel over personal choices, words, and deeds.

The unforgiving heart has resistance—arguing about any advice or constructive criticism regarding the offender.

“Do everything without grumbling or arguing.”

(PHILIPPIANS 2:14)

The unforgiving heart is impatient—exhibiting little patience while being easily provoked.

The unforgiving heart has annoyance—feeling easily irritated by the offender.

*“A person’s wisdom yields patience;
it is to one’s glory to overlook an offense.”*

(PROVERBS 19:11)

The unforgiving heart is bitter—feeling weighed down with unresolved anger.

The unforgiving heart has negativity—feeling no joy and no approval concerning the offender.

*“Each heart knows its own bitterness,
and no one else can share its joy.”*

(PROVERBS 14:10)

Extending Forgiveness

Question: “How can I forgive someone who has not apologized or shown any kind of repentance?”

Answer: Forgiveness is not dependent on repentance. Forgiveness is not based on what the offender does or deserves, but rather on giving the gift of grace to your offender—a gift that is *not* deserved. The real question is: “Do you want to be Christlike?” When Jesus was being crucified on the cross, His enemies had neither apologized nor repented, yet He extended His heart of forgiveness by praying:

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

(LUKE 23:34)

Forgiving Is Not Enabling

Question: “If I forgive those who offend me, I’ll be an enabler. Why should offenders change if there is no consequence for their offensive behavior?”

Answer: To forgive is not to enable. If a man borrows money from you and later refuses to repay the debt, you should still forgive him. Release both him as well as the offense to God for your sake, if for no other, so that you do not become bitter. But you should not enter into another monetary relationship with him.

Do not give irresponsible people more opportunities to be irresponsible with you. Enabling others means that by not establishing a boundary or by not having a consequence when others violate a boundary, you enable them to continue in their bad behavior.

Enabling puts you in a position of being offended again and again.

Enabling never helps offenders change, but further ingrains their bad habits. However, establishing consequences communicates to offenders that they will not have other opportunities to offend again.

Enablers are classic people pleasers who do not say *No* when they should say *No*. If you say *Yes* to irresponsible people when you should say *No*, you are essentially saying *No* to Christ.

The apostle Paul said:

*“Am I now trying to win the approval
of human beings, or of God?
Or am I trying to please people?
If I were still trying to please people,
I would not be a servant of Christ.”*

(GALATIANS 1:10)

What Does the Forgiving Heart Look Like?

When the Spirit of Christ is rooted within you, He produces fruit consistent with the character of Christ. The moment you entrust your life to Jesus, you are “sealed” with the Holy Spirit, who dwells within you for the rest of your life. (See Ephesians 1:13–14.) Just as orange trees produce oranges and banana trees produce bananas, the Spirit of Christ produces the character of Christ in a Christian. Therefore, the next time you are wronged, allow the Holy Spirit the freedom to produce His fruit of forgiveness in you.

*“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,
goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”*

(GALATIANS 5:22–23 ESV)

The forgiving heart is loving—not keeping a record of the bad things the offender has done.

The forgiving heart has a loving spirit, allowing for the possibility that the offender can choose to change.

*“Above all, love each other deeply,
because love covers over a multitude of sins.”*

(1 PETER 4:8)

The forgiving heart is joyous—taking to heart the goodness of God and His sovereignty over all events in life, even the painful ones.

The forgiving heart has a joyful awareness that God will use trials to bring triumph.

*“I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and
God’s provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ
what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.”*

(PHILIPPIANS 1:18–19)

The forgiving heart is peaceful—seeking to resolve any difficulty, hurt, or division, and wanting the offender to be right with God and to be blessed by Him.

The forgiving heart has a peaceful demeanor that can pave the way for reconciliation, if appropriate.

*“Peacemakers who sow in peace reap
a harvest of righteousness.”*

(JAMES 3:18)

The forgiving heart is patient—giving God time to work in the heart of the offender to bring about possible change.

The forgiving heart has a patient commitment to wait for God’s perfect timing to deal with difficulties and the right time to resolve them.

“Love is patient.”

(1 CORINTHIANS 13:4)

The forgiving heart is kind—looking for and acting in practical ways to express kind deeds and to meet needs.

The forgiving heart has a kind deed on behalf of the offender that is unexpected, unforeseen, and unannounced.

*“Those who are kind benefit themselves,
but the cruel bring ruin on themselves.”*

(PROVERBS 11:17)

The forgiving heart is good—holding to moral principles and purity even in the midst of conflict.

The forgiving heart has a good heart, reflecting the highest moral character—the character of Christ.

*“. . . give an answer . . . Do this with gentleness and respect,
keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously
against your good behavior in Christ
may be ashamed of their slander.”*

(1 PETER 3:15–16)

The forgiving heart is faithful—praying that those who have caused such pain might have changed lives.

The forgiving heart has a faithful commitment to pray for those who have been hurtful.

*“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction,
faithful in prayer.”*

(ROMANS 12:12)

The forgiving heart is gentle—taking into account the woundedness of the offender and responding to harshness with gentleness.

The forgiving heart has a gentle response, which understands that often “hurt people hurt people.”

*“A gentle answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.”*

(PROVERBS 15:1)

The forgiving heart is self-controlled—deciding ahead of time how to respond when conflict arises.

The forgiving heart has a controlled response that is Christlike so that no matter what is said or done, there is a positive attitude toward the offender.

“Think clearly and exercise self-control.”

(1 PETER 1:13 NLT)

Forgiveness Test

Question: “How do I know whether I have genuinely forgiven someone?”

Answer: After someone has offended you, you can test the “quality” of your forgiveness by asking yourself the following questions:

- “Do I still expect my offender ‘to pay’ for the wrong done to me?”
- “Do I still have bitter feelings toward my offender?”
- “Do I still have vengeful thoughts toward my offender?”
- “Do I truly desire that my offender will one day have a changed life and then receive the peace of God?”
- “When is the last time I prayed for my enemy, for the one who wronged me?”

Forgiving someone does not in any way mean that you do not want justice. It simply means that you are leaving the offense entirely in God’s hands. You are refusing to harbor hateful feelings toward your offender.

Remember, forgiveness is an ongoing process which requires that you choose to forgive every time an offense comes to mind. Likewise, you choose to pray for the offender every time an offense crosses your mind.

*“Far be it from me that I should sin
against the LORD by failing to pray for you.
And I will teach you the way
that is good and right.”*
(1 SAMUEL 12:23)

What Is the Cost of Unforgiveness vs. the Reward of Forgiveness?¹⁵

Carrying around unforgiveness is like carrying a sack of cement all day long. If you hold unforgiveness in your heart, you are walking around with a weight God never intended for you to carry. Unforgiveness becomes a burden, but Jesus says, *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest”* (Matthew 11:28).

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”
(1 PETER 5:7)

Unforgiveness allows a root of bitterness to grow.

Forgiveness keeps a root of bitterness from growing.

*“See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God
and that no bitter root grows up
to cause trouble and defile many.”*
(HEBREWS 12:15)

Unforgiveness opens a door to Satan in your life.

Forgiveness closes the door to Satan in your life.

*“I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake,
in order that Satan might not outwit us.
For we are not unaware of his schemes.”
(2 CORINTHIANS 2:10–11)*

Unforgiveness causes you to walk in darkness.

Forgiveness brings you into the light.

*“Anyone who claims to be in the light
but hates a brother or sister
is still in the darkness . . .
Anyone who hates a brother
or sister is in the darkness
and walks around in the darkness.
They do not know where they are going,
because the darkness has blinded them.”
(1 JOHN 2:9, 11)*

Unforgiveness is of Satan.

Forgiveness is of God.

*“If you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts . . .
Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven
but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.”
(JAMES 3:14–15)*

Unforgiveness reflects a godless heart.

Forgiveness reflects a godly heart.

*“The godless in heart harbor resentment.”
(JOB 36:13)*

Unforgiveness makes you captive to sin.

Forgiveness frees you.

“I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.”
(ACTS 8:23)

Unforgiveness grieves the Spirit of God.

Forgiveness is empowered by the Spirit of God.

*“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,
with whom you were sealed
for the day of redemption.
Get rid of all bitterness, rage
and anger, brawling and slander,
along with every form of malice.”*
(EPHESIANS 4:30–31)

Welcome Home! The Prodigal Son Story¹⁶

Taken from: HOW TO DEAL WITH DIFFICULT RELATIONSHIPS
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He personifies the young and the restless . . .

Living at home with his dad and brother is simply too much of a bore—routine days with routine chores that have become more than mundane.

“It’s time to live it up,” he says to himself. “I want what I’m entitled to—*now!* I want to see the world—*now!* I will get the cash to do it—*now!*”

Filled with presumption, he insists on having his inheritance, insinuating to his father, “I can’t wait around for you to die so I can get what’s coming to me. Give it to me *now!*”

Incredibly, the father grants the son’s request, distributing his property between his two boys in accord with the law: two-thirds to the elder, one-third to the younger. The impetuous son eagerly packs his bags. So much to do . . . so much to experience . . . and now, with so much to do it with!

This self-centered son moves far away from home—far from the familiar, far from his father. Enchanted by his new environment and free from the confines of family, he quickly loses self-control and squanders all “his” money. All too soon, every last dollar disappears—spent on the lure of wild living. Destitute, the brazen boy begins a downward spiral toward total depravity, falling faster and further until he hits rock bottom.

Meanwhile, hard times have hit the whole land and a famine further compounds his plight. Not only is all his money gone, but so are all his “friends,” along with all his options.

He's hungry. He has to find a job. And, somehow, he has to find food. At last he locates a farmer looking for a hired hand to feed pigs—dirty, disgusting, smelly pigs! For a Jew even to touch a pig, much less feed them, is beyond disgrace. (He will be cursed, according to Old Testament law.) Yet with no other choice available, this broken, humiliated young man finds himself working in the fields, where “he longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.”¹⁷

The work is hard on both his body and his pride, yet it also leaves plenty of time for something vital: much thinking and rethinking. He thinks of all the money he's squandered, thinks of all the time he's wasted, thinks of all the blessings he's lost. And he wonders, *What was I thinking?*

Finally, when he comes to his senses, he remembers that even his father's lowest-ranking servants—the day laborers—always have food to spare. He realizes how foolish he'd be to remain in his current condition. So he decides to return home. His new plan comes with a complete change of heart and a humble, contrite confession.

Likewise, his father has a plan. Since his boy's painful departure, not a day has gone by that he hasn't yearned to see his son back home—to see that face he dearly loves, to welcome his son with open arms. Every day he aches with anticipation, and every day he watches with a hopeful heart.

Then one day, *that* day arrives. Jesus describes the scene. The father saw his son off in the distance, “and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”¹⁸

Dispensing with all dignity, the dad races to his boy. Immediately, with no sense of entitlement, the son humbles himself and admits, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”¹⁹

But the father, instead of treating his son as a servant, he treats him like a king! He calls out to the servants to hurry and bring new clothes and shoes, and to prepare a meal with the finest meat. He puts his ring of authority on his son and declares it's time to celebrate the son's return.

Meanwhile, through the entire time of estrangement, the older son has remained at home, fully supportive of his father. And now, as he returns from the field, he hears music and dancing and asks a servant, "What's the revelry all about?" Upon discovering his reckless brother not only has the audacity to return home but is also being honored, he fumes with resentment and refuses any part of the festivities.

"Unfair . . . unjust . . . it's just not right!" he protests to his father. "Look at *my loyalty!* Look—I've done *my duty!*" He demands an explanation from his dad for his undeserved display of affection, his irrational response, his unjustified joy. Although the father reasons as to why his older son should also rejoice, deep-rooted jealousy bars him from doing so. How ironic it is that he remains resentful, for he, too, had received a portion of the inheritance—a portion *twice* as large as his brother's!

"He doesn't deserve a party! He deserves *nothing!*" Self-righteous indignation blinds him from seeing his own hardened heart.

Yet his father, whose heart is always filled with kindness, responds, "I *will* give him what he doesn't deserve—a feast, festivities, and a renewed relationship." (That's grace.) And, with a caring spirit marked by determined strength, he added, "I absolutely *refuse* to give him what he does deserve—rejection, condemnation, and a renunciation of him as my son." (That's mercy.)

In truth, the father has extended the gifts of grace and mercy to both of his sons. Beyond the financial inheritance the father had already bestowed, he presents both sons with a coin of compassion. This precious coin cannot be purchased—it's priceless. This coin cannot be earned—it's unmerited. One side is engraved with grace; the other is minted with mercy.

How can such a wrongly treated father respond with such tender generosity? He himself gives the explanation: "Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."²⁰ The father reminds his eldest that it's precisely because the relationship is broken that reconciliation is needed; thus, by extending forgiveness, the relationship can be restored.

But from where did this father's forgiveness originate? The strong foundation of an unbreakable bond of grace and mercy resides in the deepest part of his heart. And forgiveness is the external expression, the outflowing of both mercy and grace.

Giving grace means his son is given a priceless gift he could never, ever deserve: full forgiveness and a reconciled relationship.

Granting mercy means his son is not given the repercussion he most definitely deserves: not being rejected, even though he callously rejected his father.

What the father bestows upon both of his unworthy sons is a poignant picture of what our heavenly Father bestows upon us—on all of us who are most unworthy. Like the younger son, we've all rebelled, we've all rejected His rightful rule, we've all strayed and gone our own way. And like the older son, we've all stayed physically close, yet maintained a cold, distant heart. Yet our Father yearns for us to turn to Him—and to yield our will to His.

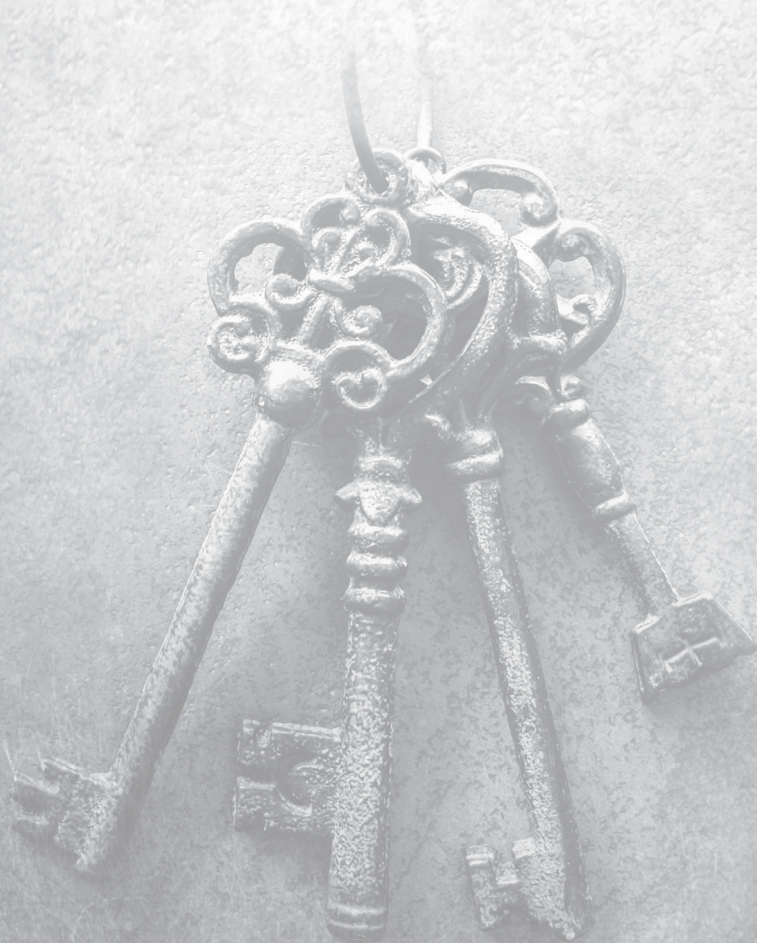
A humble, contrite heart always stirs the heart of God. Then from that strong foundation, that unbreakable bond of His grace and His mercy, He overflows forgiveness into our hearts. And finally, one day we realize we really are forgiven—fully, freely, forever.

*“Let us then approach God’s throne
of grace with confidence,
so that we may receive mercy and find
grace to help us in our time of need.”*

(HEBREWS 4:16)



CAUSES



*“Since no one likes
to feel powerless,
unforgiveness
provides an
illusion of power.”*



Amazingly, the Ten Boom's little home becomes the hub of the underground network. From their secret hiding place, the fingers of the underground reaches into the farthest corners of Holland. As those of the Ten Boom family live their double lives, they shuffle the hunted Jews into their one-room hiding place for sometimes up to two weeks, while members of the underground seek to slip the stowaways out of the country to safety.

Meanwhile, Corrie lives with the constant fear that they could be caught—and with good reason. The family is eventually betrayed by a man who poses as a friend in order to determine their involvement in the underground movement.²¹ As a result of this treachery, Corrie will never again embrace her father nor delight in the presence of her beloved sister Betsie. How can Corrie not be consumed with bitterness toward this “friend” whose betrayal cost her the lives of the two people she loves most in the world? She suffers the severity of these words:

*“Even my close friend, someone I trusted,
one who shared my bread, has turned against me.”*
(PSALM 41:9)

Why Is It So Difficult to Forgive?

People fail to forgive others for a variety of reasons. For example, when you have been deeply offended by a friend, forgiveness can make you feel emotionally deflated.

In contrast, withholding forgiveness can make you feel emotionally invigorated. Therefore, you might refuse to forgive the friend who offended you because of pride or the need to feel powerful.²²

The Bible states it this way:

“A brother wronged is more unyielding than a fortified city.”
(PROVERBS 18:19)

Barriers to Forgiveness²³

No modeling of forgiveness from parents

—“I don’t know how to forgive.”

Denying the offense ever occurred

—“I don’t want to think about it.”

Fearing to hold the guilty accountable

—“It’s really all my fault.” (This kind of thinking short-circuits the reality and the pain of being wronged.)

Not feeling that you can forgive yourself or anyone else

—“No mercy for me—no mercy for you.”

Not being forgiven for your past offenses

—“They didn’t forgive me—why should I forgive them?”

Not understanding God’s forgiveness

—“God will never forgive me. I will never forgive her.”

Believing bitterness is a required response to betrayal

—“God knows that my feelings are normal.”

Thinking forgiveness is excusing unjust behavior

—“I’m not about to say that what she did was okay!”

Requiring an apology or show of repentance

—“He shouldn’t be forgiven because he’s not really sorry.”

Feeling a sense of power by hanging on to unforgiveness

—“He needs to see how wrong he is!”

Refusing to let go of the desire for revenge

—“He should pay for what he’s done.”

Harboring a prideful, hardened heart that becomes a spiritual stronghold
– “I refuse to forgive.”

*“Blessed is the one who always trembles before God,
but whoever hardens their heart falls into trouble.”*

(PROVERBS 28:14)

Results of Unforgiveness

Question: “What should I do if I don’t want to reap the damaging results of unforgiveness?”

Answer: Choose to change your thinking and consciously ask God to soften your heart so that you will be willing to forgive. Unforgiveness can turn into an emotional stronghold that can damage many areas of your life. You *do* have control of what you dwell on. That is why the Bible says we are to . . .

“Take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

(2 CORINTHIANS 10:5)

Why Does the Need for Justice Contribute to Unforgiveness?

We feel outraged when justice is denied. Thus, the cry for justice is common to everyone—everyone except the guilty person waiting to *receive* justice! Then the cry is not for justice, but for *mercy*.

*“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.”*

(PSALM 51:1)

Why is the need for justice so strong and natural, and why is forgiveness so difficult and unnatural? There are three reasons:

- 1. God has instilled within every human heart a sense of right and wrong; therefore, we feel a need for justice when we are wronged.**

“The requirements of the law are written on their hearts” (ROMANS 2:15).

- 2. Based on the law, forgiveness seems inappropriate and unnatural.**

“Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” (DEUTERONOMY 19:21).

- 3. Because God is a God of justice, someone has to pay for sin—all the wrongs, all the offenses committed by people.**

That someone is Jesus. The death of Jesus on the cross fulfilled the justice of God. (See Romans 3:25–26.)

In the same way that God needed to have His justice satisfied by Jesus’ dying on the cross, shouldn’t we expect justice before we extend mercy and forgiveness?

The truth is, although everyone must face *God’s justice*, Jesus was the payment for *everyone’s* sin. While governments execute justice, *individually* we are to extend mercy. We are to leave *individual* justice to God. The Bible exhorts us to . . .

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (LUKE 6:36).

Why Does Unforgiveness Spiral into a Spiritual Stronghold?

In times of war, if your enemy gains a “foothold,” your enemy has gained ground. Your enemy has taken some of your territory. Now, with that foothold, your foe has a secure base from which to further advance.

If you have been hurt, and as a result harbor anger in your heart, realize that your *unresolved anger* can be a foothold for the enemy. The Bible says . . .

*“In your anger do not sin:
Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,
and do not give the devil a foothold.”
(EPHESIANS 4:26–27)*

The Development of a Spiritual Stronghold

When you refuse to forgive your offender, you develop *unresolved anger*.

Unresolved anger, in turn, allows Satan to set up a stronghold in your mind, giving him opportunity to tempt you into greater sin.

This stronghold gives Satan more room to operate in your life, which means you will face more *“flaming arrows of the evil one”* (Ephesians 6:16).

These flaming arrows of accusation and unforgiveness can continue to burn in your heart and keep you *captive* to do the enemy’s will.

At this point you are engaged in spiritual warfare. To win the spiritual war, recognize that the battle for freedom is fought in your mind. You need to take captive every thought of unforgiveness and release your unresolved anger to God. The Bible says . . .

*“You must rid yourselves
of all such things as these:
anger, rage, malice, slander,
and filthy language from your lips.”
(COLOSSIANS 3:8)*

The following spiritual warfare prayer will help you to honestly confront and release your anger to God:

Spiritual Warfare Prayer

“Dear Heavenly Father,

“I don’t want to be defeated in my life. Thank you that Jesus, who lives in me, is greater than Satan, who is in the world.

(Read 1 John 4:4.)

“I know I have been bought with the price of Christ’s blood, which was shed at Calvary. My body is not my own—it belongs to Christ.

(Read 1 Corinthians 6:19–20.)

“Right now, I refuse all thoughts that are not from you.

(Read 2 Corinthians 10:3–5.)

“I choose to forgive those who have hurt me, and I choose to release each of them and all of my pain and anger into your hands.

(Read Colossians 3:13.)

“I resist Satan and all of his power.

(Read James 4:7.)

“As I stand in the full armor of God, I ask you to bind Satan and his demonic forces from having any influence over me.

(Read Ephesians 6:11.)

“From now on, with the shield of faith, I will deflect and defeat every unforgiving thought that could defeat me.

(Read Ephesians 6:16.)

“And I yield my life to your plan and your purpose.

(Read Jeremiah 29:11.)

“In the holy name of Jesus I pray. Amen.”

What Is the Root Cause of Unforgiveness?

Many people who have been hurt feel insignificant and powerless; therefore, they try to get their need for significance met by withholding forgiveness. Unforgiveness gives them a sense of power and superiority.

If you have ever been betrayed by a friend, you may have felt powerless to stop the pain. Since no one likes to feel powerless, unforgiveness provides an illusion of power. By refusing to forgive, you feel a sense of control. By holding on to hatred, you feel infused with strength. By retaliating with revenge, you carry out a power play.

3 Inner Needs

We all have three inner needs: the needs for love, significance, and security.²⁴

Love—to know that someone is unconditionally committed to our best interest

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (JOHN 15:12).

Significance—to know that our lives have meaning and purpose

“I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me”
(PSALM 57:2 ESV).

Security—to feel accepted and a sense of belonging

“Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge” (PROVERBS 14:26).

The Ultimate Need-Meeter

What do our inner needs reveal about us and our relationship with God?

God did not create any person or position or any amount of power or possessions to meet our deepest needs. People fail us and self-effort also fails to meet our deepest needs. If a person or thing could meet all our needs, we wouldn't need God! Our inner needs draw us into a deeper dependence on Christ and remind us that only God can satisfy the longings of our hearts. The Lord brings people and circumstances into our lives as an extension of His care, but ultimately only He can satisfy all the needs of our hearts. The Bible says . . .

*“The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.”*
(ISAIAH 58:11)

All along, the Lord planned to meet our deepest needs for . . .

Love—*“I [the Lord] have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness”* (JEREMIAH 31:3).

Significance—*“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’”* (JEREMIAH 29:11).

Security—*“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged”* (DEUTERONOMY 31:8).

Our needs for love, significance, and security can be legitimately met in Christ Jesus! Philippians 4:19 makes it plain, *“My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”*

Wrong Belief: “It’s natural for me to resent those who have wronged me. If I forgive them, they will get away with it. My offenders need to pay for the wrongs committed against me.”

Result: This belief reflects an attitude of pride that sets you up as a judge higher than God, who is willing to forgive and chooses to forget.

“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more” (ISAIAH 43:25).

Right Belief: “Because God has totally forgiven me, I can release my resentment and choose to forgive others. I will rely on Christ, who lives in me, to enable me to forgive.”

Result: This belief reflects a heart of humility that results in a desire to forgive others in the same way God forgives you.

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” (EPHESIANS 4:32).

How Can You Be Totally Forgiven by God?

You can’t truly forgive others until you have God’s forgiveness in your own life. Of all the world’s religions, only Christianity teaches that God forgives sin completely.²⁵ God is ready to forgive each and every one of our offenses.

Yet, many refuse His forgiveness because they don’t understand mercy and grace. Grace is getting what you don’t deserve (forgiveness and heaven). Mercy is not getting what you do deserve (unforgiveness and hell). Right now, God wants to show you His mercy and grace. Through Jesus Christ, God wants to give you His forgiveness—forgiveness that is found only in a secure relationship with Him.

“It [salvation] does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy. . . .

Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

(ROMANS 9:16; HEBREWS 4:16)

You Can Receive God’s Forgiveness

4 Points of God’s Plan

Whether you’re trying to make sense of your past, trying to overcome something in the present, or trying to make changes for a better future, the Lord cares about you. He loves you. No matter what challenges you or your loved ones are facing, no matter the pain or difficult feelings you may be experiencing, no matter what you’ve done or what’s been done to you, there is hope. And that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for your life, and it begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The most important decision you can ever make is whether you will receive His invitation. If you have never made that decision, these four simple truths can help you start your journey together with Him.

“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”

(JEREMIAH 29:11)

1. God’s Purpose for You: *Salvation*

- What was God’s motivation in sending Jesus Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says, *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him”* (JOHN 3:16–17).

- What was Jesus’ purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said, *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”* (JOHN 10:10).

2. The Problem: *Sin*

- What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God’s standard—knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway—also knowing what is right and choosing not to do it. The apostle Paul said, *“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can’t. I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway”* (ROMANS 7:18–19 NLT).
- What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual death, eternal separation from God. The Bible says, *“Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God”* (ISAIAH 59:2). Scripture also says, *“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (ROMANS 6:23).

3. God’s Provision for You: *The Savior*

- Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins. The Bible says, *“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (ROMANS 5:8).
- What is the solution to being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (JOHN 14:6). The Bible says, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved . . .”* (ACTS 16:31).

4. Your Part: *Surrender*

- Give Christ control of your life, entrusting yourself to Him. Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”* (MATTHEW 16:24–26).

- Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your “good works” as a means of earning God’s approval. The Bible says, *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (EPHESIANS 2:8–9).

Has there been a time in your life when you know you’ve humbled your heart and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of your life? You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

“God, I want a real relationship with you.
I admit that many times I’ve chosen to go my own way
instead of your way.
Please forgive me for my sins.
Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross
to pay the penalty for my sins.
Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.
Change me from the inside out and make me the person
you created me to be.
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”

What Can You Now Expect?

When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who empowers you to live a life pleasing to God. The Bible says, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . .”* (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus assures those who believe with these words:

*“Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word
and believes him who sent me
has eternal life and will not be judged
but has crossed over from death to life.”*

(JOHN 5:24)

Forgiving Yourself

Question: “I know God has forgiven me of my sins, but how do I forgive myself?”

Answer: Have you ever considered that being unwilling to forgive what God has forgiven discredits God’s gift of mercy toward you? It is placing yourself as a higher judge than God Himself. It is saying:

- “God, you are wrong in forgiving me because I don’t deserve to be forgiven.”
- “Christ’s sacrifice on the cross must not be sufficient to cleanse me of my sins.”
- “Something else must be done to make up for what is lacking in Jesus’ sacrifice.”

While not forgiving yourself may make you *feel* like you are being *humble before God*, realize that in such a situation your focus is not on God but on yourself.

Humility is bowing your knee to God and submitting to His authority and His right to declare righteous whomever He chooses. After all, who are you to overrule God?

Since Satan is an “*accuser*” of Christians (Revelation 12:10), when you continue blaming yourself, you align yourself with Satan, whose goal is to keep you feeling defeated. Instead, humbly thank God for granting you His undeserved mercy.

Thank Him for giving you His undeserved grace and live in His undeserved forgiveness.

“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”

(TITUS 3:5)

A Prisoner Twice Set Free The Louie Zamperini Story²⁶

Taken from: HOW TO DEAL WITH DIFFICULT RELATIONSHIPS
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Prepare to crash . . .

The nose and left wing hit at high speed. The piercing impact with the cold ocean water thrusts his body forward, and the plane breaks apart. Debris from the decimated plane begins to float around him.

Darkness surrounds the submerged soldier and he is sure he is experiencing . . . death.

Miraculously, Louie Zamperini survives the plunge into the Pacific, but little does he know it will be the first of many horrors that will test and try him to his very core. This American Olympic runner found his life drastically altered by Adolf Hitler's deadly march across Europe. With draft papers delivered at Louie's door, dreams of competing in the 1940 Olympics immediately disappeared.

Trained as a World War II bombardier, Louie is on a rescue mission when his dilapidated plane dives into the ocean, leaving just three survivors.

Bloodied and dazed, the trio manages to climb aboard a pair of rafts, where thoughts of rescue keep their spirits afloat. Louie, Phil, and Mac expect to be discovered in a day or two, but the sky remains deafeningly silent. Days turn into weeks, and the once-beloved outdoors becomes their fierce enemy.

Not only does the sun burn and scald their skin; the salt water pours pain onto every inch of cracked flesh. Blinding sunlight sears their eyes.

And another deadly threat torments the men night and day. Sharks continually circle the rafts, some as long as 12 feet. At any given moment they can leap and land on the rafts, with gaping mouths hoping to devour their human prey. The men fight them off with their oars. Yet the sharks persistently wait for another opportune time to attack.

Rations on the rafts, so minimal, have now disappeared. The weakened men must rely on their survival instincts. While Louie lies still and lifeless, a huge albatross lands on his raft. Slowly moving his hands, Louie grabs its legs. The giant bird pecks at his knuckles, tearing away skin.

To finish the battle, Louie breaks the bird's neck, but the prospect of a meal soon turns repugnant. Upon slicing the bird open, a putrid odor fills the air and the men find themselves gagging on the raw meat. They simply cannot swallow it, but they do use the bird's bones to make small fishing poles and use the meat as bait to catch fish.

On the morning of the twenty-seventh day at sea, a roar fills the sky. It's a plane! Louie wastes no time sending up flares. The plane circles back and races low toward the men; then suddenly pock marks spray across the ocean's surface. Gunners are shooting at the three men, forcing them to jump into the ocean for refuge underneath the rafts. After the firing stops, the three weary men struggle back into their rafts, grateful to be alive.

But then the roar returns along with another barrage of bullets from the Japanese fighters. This time, only Louie jumps back into the water because Phil and Mac are too exhausted to fend for themselves.

Seven times the Japanese attack. Worse yet, Louie finds himself fighting battles both above and below the surface.

While underwater, a shark repeatedly lunges at him. A survival instructor's recommendation of showing teeth and the whites of his eyes didn't do the trick, but "a straight-arm to the snout did."²⁷

Incredibly, neither Louie nor his besieged buddies are harmed. Puncture wounds riddle the rafts, even in the tiny spaces between Phil and Mac, but not a single bullet has touched any of them.

Soon after, Mac begins slipping away, dehydration and starvation devouring his body. On day 33, Mac takes his last breath.

One week later, Louie experiences what seems to be a divine reprieve, a moment of hope from above. Suddenly, he hears singing—voices from a magnificent choir. Louie looks up to the sky and sees human silhouettes, floating in a cloud and singing a song so divine that it had to come from heaven above. Phil is oblivious; it's a moment meant solely for Louie.

Meanwhile, the two skeletal men continue their perilous journey across the water, eating fish when they can catch them and drinking rainwater when they can catch it. Finally, after 47 days, they spot land—a joyous sight after drifting across 2000 miles of ocean! A typhoon propels the pair even faster toward the shore, but they never make it out of the raft to climb onto the Marshall Islands.

Japanese military on a boat spot them, and before long the two are hauled off to an internment camp. The filthy conditions are repulsive, with wiggling maggots infesting the cells and flies and mosquitoes filling the air.

After being on the vast ocean for almost two months, Louie is totally disoriented in his cramped "new home." His new reality is life in a wooden cell about the length of an average

man and no wider than his shoulders. Adding to his emotional pain is separation from Phil. Louie wonders if he'll ever see his dear friend again.

The stench of human waste permeates the air. A window in the cell door proves frightening as Japanese guards use it to pummel him with rocks and poke him with sticks. Then one day, while laying in misery, he hears the magnificent voices again. He sees nothing, but relishes every word of the heavenly hymn. The divine encounter prompts Louie to pray for hours.

Louie eventually receives news that he is being transferred from Ofuna to a POW camp in Omori, where conditions are considered more favorable for prisoners. But for Louie, his nightmare grows even darker, for there he encounters . . . a monster.

Louie's Japanese military nemesis, Mutsuhiro Watanabe, is a finely crafted man, notably handsome with a perfectly proportioned physique. He exudes confidence and power. No one will tell him what to do, or not to do. An impressive sword dangles off his hip, and a belt with a huge metal buckle stretches across his waist. Louie meets a sadist who finds his greatest delight in breaking POWs.

Perhaps because Louie is a famous Olympian, Watanabe, otherwise known as The Bird, swoops upon him daily and beats him relentlessly. Fists, clubs, sticks and even the shiny belt buckle become weapons intended to demoralize Louie. The Bird disgraces Louie every chance he can get, including making him clean a pigsty with his hands.

For two-and-a-half more years Louie endures cruelty at the hands of Japanese military officers. But on August 6, 1945, an atomic bomb is dropped on the city of Hiroshima, and the

course of the war turns decisively for the Allies. Then the Japanese surrender and a formal ceremony marks the end of the war on September 2, 1945.

After the war's conclusion, Louie returns home to California to resume a "normal life," but it turns out he doesn't return alone. The Bird accompanies him in flashbacks, nightmares, and haunted memories. Louie obsesses about him—even to the point of planning a trip to Japan to murder his tormentor. One night Louie finds himself straddled over his victim, choking him with all of his might, but the victim isn't The Bird—*it's his wife*.

Shortly thereafter, Louie's wife, Cynthia, hears a neighbor talking about a famous man coming to town, a man by the name of Billy Graham. She attends the crusade and comes home a changed woman, a *born-again* woman, who had planned on divorcing Louie but now vows to stay married. On another evening, Louie reluctantly attends the crusade with his wife but storms out, enraged. Graham insists no one is inherently good, although deep down Louie recognizes that about himself.

Due to Cynthia's persistence, Louie again attends the crusade on yet another evening. His memory begins recounting all the miracles in his life, including surviving the plane crash and escaping harm's way from Japanese bullets. Suddenly he remembers a broken promise, one lifted up to heaven with sunburned, swollen lips—"If I get home through all this . . . I'll serve You the rest of my life."²⁸

Louie's spirit warms and he senses his heavy burden lifting. Hearing that he could receive a new life in Christ, he accepts the invitation and walks out a changed man. For five years after the war had ended, The Bird haunted Louie's dreams. After Louie's salvation experience, he never reappears.

The change in Louie's life is profound. He still plans to return to Japan—but now not to murder The Bird, but to make amends with him. With Christ as his example, Louie wants to extend forgiveness to The Bird along with the other brutal Japanese guards who so tormented his life. After traveling back to Sugamo Prison, he encounters some of the same guards, but The Bird is nowhere to be found. As it turns out, Louie was told his chief torturer took his own life by committing hari-kiri.²⁹

To his amazement, Louie finally realizes true freedom—the freedom of forgiveness . . . and real peace.

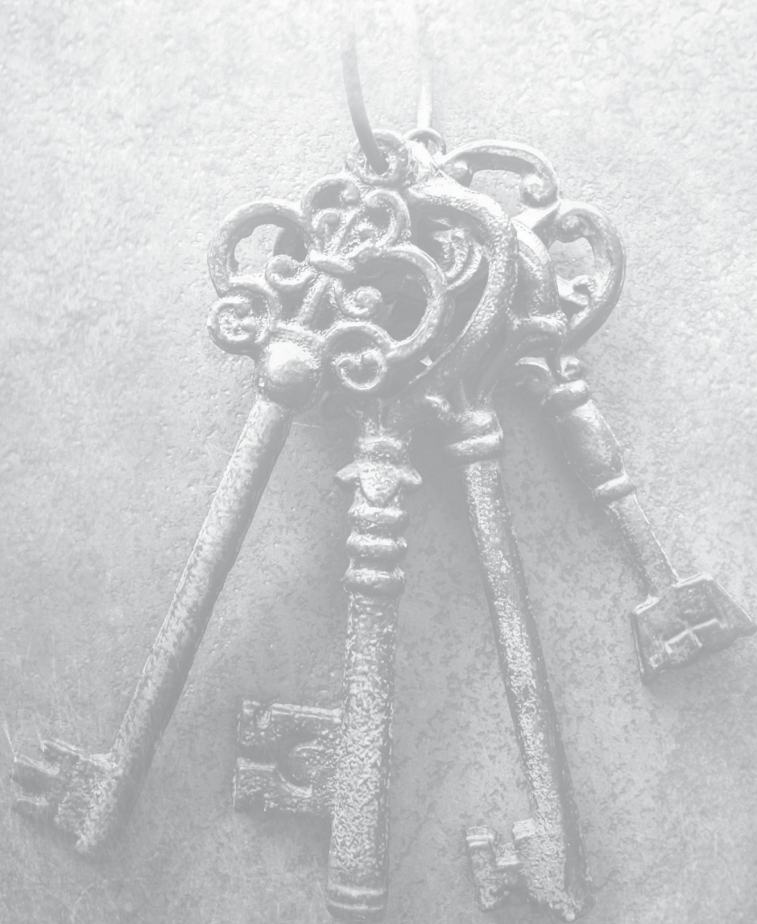
Ultimately, forgiveness has the power to end the war within everyone, lighting the darkness, liberating the mind, lifting the spirit. And for all who have received freedom through the forgiveness of Christ, this same forgiveness is meant to be shared with others who also need to be set free.

*“Be kind and compassionate to one another,
forgiving each other, just as
in Christ God forgave you.”*

(EPHESIANS 4:32)



STEPS TO SOLUTION



*“Relationships filled
with resentment
ultimately perish.
Relationships filled
with forgiveness
ultimately prevail.”*



After surviving the suffering of concentration camps (living in flea- and rat-infested barracks, losing her father and sister to inhumane treatment, facing death on a daily basis herself, and coping with what seemed to be the triumph of evil), wouldn't Corrie's present and future problems pale in comparison to the horrors of her past? But by her own admission, Corrie could not sleep at night—until she made the conscious decision to *choose* forgiveness on a daily basis and then to act on that decision each day. Corrie's admission is amazingly honest.

I wish I could say that after a long and fruitful life, traveling the world, I had learned to forgive all my enemies. I wish I could say that merciful and charitable thoughts just naturally flowed from me and on to others. But they don't. If there is one thing I have learned . . . it's that I can't store up good feelings and behavior—but only draw them fresh from God each day.³⁰

Corrie ten Boom learned that she not only needed to be forgiven by God, but that she also needed to forgive as God forgives. She needed to show mercy, for Jesus said:

*“Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’
For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”*
(MATTHEW 9:13)

Key Verse to Memorize

Have you ever prayed “the model prayer” or what is perhaps better known as “The Lord’s Prayer”? If so, did you mean it? Jesus said, “*Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors*” (Matthew 6:12). If you really meant these words, then you are asking God to forgive you in the exact same way you have forgiven those who have wronged you.

God wants us to forgive in just the way He has forgiven us.

*“Bear with each other
and forgive one another if any of you
has a grievance against someone.
Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”*
(COLOSSIANS 3:13)

Key Passage to Read

The standard is set. The command is clear. The mandate has been made. Forgiveness is not optional to God!

Not only did Jesus say it in His model prayer, He illustrated it by use of a parable. Jesus taught that if we want to be forgiven, we must forgive. It’s as simple—and as difficult—as that. But it’s only easy *if* we allow Christ to do it for us and through us.

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant **Matthew 18:23–35**

Jesus told a parable about a servant who owed the king ten thousand talents. (Estimates vary, but one talent would be worth about 6,000 denarii, or 6,000 days’ wages. To owe 10,000 talents, then, would be to owe 60,000,000 days’ wages—about 200,000 years of work!³¹ This figure represented an unreconcilable debt that a servant would have no ability and no hope of repaying). The king ordered the servant and his family to be sold—literally—along with all they had. The servant fell to his knees begging for mercy, “I will pay back everything.” The king extended mercy and forgave the entire enormous debt.

The king represents our heavenly Father, who *forgives all of our debt* when we humbly come to Him for forgiveness and mercy (vv. 23–27).

- Later, this same servant grabbed one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii (worth about 100 days’ or four months’ wages)³² and demanded repayment. His fellow servant fell to his knees begging for mercy, “I will pay it back.” Instead, the first servant had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

The servant who originally had his enormous debts dismissed was *not willing to forgive the relatively minuscule debt* of another servant who sought forgiveness (vv. 28–30).

- When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and told the king about it. Angered by his selfish servant, the king called him into account, demanding to know why he had not extended the same mercy he himself had received. The king then threw this servant into jail to be tortured until he could repay all he owed.
- Jesus concludes the story with a stern warning: *“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart”* (Matthew 18:35).

We are called to *extend mercy and forgiveness to others* just as God extended mercy and forgiveness to us (vv. 31–35).

- Jesus is not teaching here that we earn God’s forgiveness by forgiving others, or that we lose God’s forgiveness if we don’t forgive others. God’s forgiveness is a free gift of grace based on the shed blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7).
- The point of the parable is found in verse 33 where the king says to the servant, *“Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?”* (Matthew 18:33). The first servant was forgiven far more than his fellow servant, yet he refused to extend forgiveness. In fact, he took it a step further than refusal; he choked his fellow servant, threw him in jail, and demanded payment from him. It was not that the king’s servant struggled to forgive his fellow servant, but that he actively refused to forgive.

This parable teaches many lessons about God’s mercy, forgiveness, and grace. It’s a reminder that a proper understanding and practice of forgiveness begins with receiving God’s forgiveness. While forgiveness can be a struggle, God still desires that we forgive. Understanding our struggle, God left frequent reminders in His Word about His forgiveness toward His people. And there is certainly no greater reminder than the cross. As we pursue forgiveness in our lives, we must always remember the precious currency that purchased our own forgiveness—the blood of Christ.

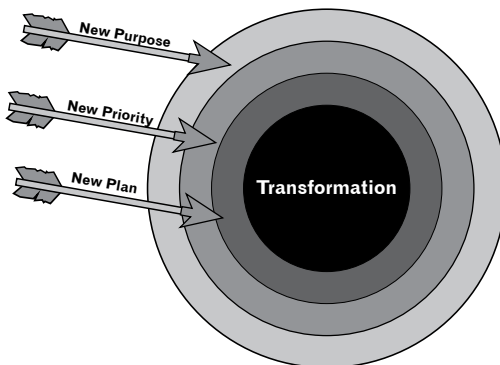
*“In him we have redemption through his blood,
the forgiveness of sins,
in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.”*

(EPHESIANS 1:7)

How to Have a Transformed Life

Have you ever said, “I have been severely wronged. People want me to forgive, but how can I simply forget what happened?” If these words have passed your lips or even crossed your mind, be assured you are not alone.

Reaching the Target: Transformation!



THE FREEDOM FORMULA

**A New Purpose
+ A New Priority
+ A New Plan

A Transformed Life**

Target #1—A New Purpose

God's purpose for me is to be conformed to the character of Christ.

"Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (ROMANS 8:29).

— "I'll do whatever it takes to be conformed to the character of Christ."

Target #2—A New Priority

God's priority for me is to change my thinking.

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (ROMANS 12:2).

— "I'll do whatever it takes to line up my thinking with God's thinking."

Target #3—A New Plan

God's plan for me is to rely on Christ's strength, not my strength, to be all He created me to be.

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (PHILIPPIANS 4:13 NKJV).

— "I'll do whatever it takes to fulfill His plan in His strength."

My Personalized Plan

Through Christ's strength, I will learn to walk in God's forgiveness, seek the forgiveness of others, and extend forgiveness to others. I will no longer carry the pain and guilt of my offenses. I will humble myself before those I've offended or wronged and ask their forgiveness so as I walk in the freedom of forgiveness, I am able to extend forgiveness to others.

"If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

(JOHN 8:36)

In choosing to seek forgiveness from God . . .

I will invite Jesus into my life as Lord and Savior.

I will make a list of my wrongdoings against God and individual people as He brings them to mind.

I will face the truth about the offenses I have committed.

I will confess my sins to God and take responsibility for each of my offenses.

I will ask God to forgive me for my sins against Him and against others.

I will allow Jesus to take control of my life and to live His life through me.

I will gratefully receive God's unmerited forgiveness.

I will cooperate with God as He begins His work of healing my damaged emotions, correcting my wrong thinking, directing my course, and transforming me into the person He created me to be.

*"The LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth
come knowledge and understanding,
7He holds success in store for the upright,
he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless,
8for he guards the course of the just
and protects the way of his faithful ones."
(PROVERBS 2:6-8)*

In choosing to seek forgiveness from others . . .

I will ask the Lord to go before me and soften the hearts of those I have offended.

I will humble myself before each person and acknowledge the offenses I have committed against them.

I will acknowledge the pain others have suffered as a result of my offenses.

I will own the hurt, anger, and damage my offenses have caused each person.

I will ask each person to forgive the wrongful acts I have committed against them.

- “I have asked God to help me see our relationship from your point of view.”
- “I realize that I’ve been (or was) wrong in _____.”
- “I would be grateful if you would let me know specific ways in which I have wronged you.”
- “I understand you to be saying that when I _____, you _____ . Is that correct?”
- “Would you be willing to forgive me for these offenses and any others you might recall later?”

I will demonstrate true repentance by proving myself to be consistently trustworthy—doing what is right on behalf of each person. (Extending respect and kindness indicates a willingness to move forward in the relationship.)

I will offer possible ways I can make restitution, if appropriate, several ways I will behave differently in the future, and a willingness to be held accountable for my future actions.

I will release each person and any future relationship to God while continuing to pray God’s best for each individual.

I will patiently rest in the truth that God will never forsake me as I continue to walk in forgiveness.

*“If you are offering your gift at the altar
and there remember that your brother or sister
has something against you,
leave your gift there in front of the altar.
First go and be reconciled to them;
then come and offer your gift.”*

(MATTHEW 5:23–24)

In choosing to forgive others . . .

I will make a list of wrongs done to me by each person I have not forgiven.

I will face the truth of each offense without minimizing or excusing any of them.

I will allow myself to feel the anger, shame, and pain each offense has caused me.

I will forgive each offense and each offender.

I will take each offense and each offender off my emotional hook and put them onto God's hook.

I will ask God to bring good from each offense I have suffered.

I will seek oneness and restoration with each offender, without resentment, if reconciliation is appropriate and possible.

I will walk in forgiveness on a daily basis as I pray for God's healing in the lives of my forgiven offenders.

*"We are taking pains to do what is right,
not only in the eyes of the Lord
but also in the eyes of man."
(2 CORINTHIANS 8:21)*

What Are the Four Stages of Forgiveness?

Have you ever noticed that the word *forgiveness* has the word *give* in it? When you choose to forgive, you give someone a gift—the gift of freedom from having to pay the penalty for offending you, the gift of dismissing the debt owed to you. Because this can be a difficult gift to give, you may need to travel through four stages of forgiveness. Realize that you are also giving yourself a gift—the gift of grudge-free living. That is true freedom. The Bible says . . .

*“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge
against anyone among your people,
but love your neighbor as yourself.”
(LEVITICUS 19:18)*

1. Face the Offense.

When you feel pain that is personal, unfair, and deep, you have a wound that can be healed only by forgiving the one who wounded you. First you must face the truth of what has actually been done and not hinder true healing by rationalizing or focusing on false thinking.

- **Don't minimize the offense** by thinking: “No matter how badly he treats me, it's okay.”

Truth: Bad treatment is not okay. There is no excuse for bad treatment of any kind—any time.

“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them” (EPHESIANS 5:11).

- **Don't excuse the offender's behavior** by thinking: “He doesn't mean to hurt me. I shouldn't feel upset with him—he's a member of my family!”

Truth: No matter the age of the offender or our relationship, we need to call sin “sin.” We need to face the truth instead of trying to change it. There must first be a *guilty* party in order to have someone to forgive.

“Whoever says to the guilty, ‘You are innocent,’ will be cursed by peoples” (PROVERBS 24:24).

- **Don't assume that quick forgiveness is full forgiveness** by thinking:³⁵ “As soon as that horrendous ordeal occurred, I quickly and fully forgave him. That's what I've been taught to do.”

Truth: Many well-intentioned people feel guilty if they don't extend immediate forgiveness so they “forgive” quickly. Yet they have neither faced the full impact of the offense nor grieved over what actually happened.

Rarely is the full impact of sin felt at the moment it occurs. Rather, its impact is felt at different levels over a period of time. Therefore, forgiveness needs to be extended at each of these levels.

“Quick forgiveness” over deep hurts may seem sufficient, but it may not be “full forgiveness”—not until it has been extended at each level of impact. Before complete forgiveness can be extended, you must face the truth about the gravity of the offense and its extended impact on you.

“You [God] desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place” (PSALM 51:6).

2. Feel the Offense.³⁴

We usually do not hate strangers or acquaintances; we just get angry with them when we think we’ve been wronged by them. But author and theologian Lewis Smedes writes, “When a person destroys what our commitment and our intimacy created, something precious is destroyed.”³⁵ Then anger or even hatred may be our true feeling in response to deep, unfair pain. Hatred toward an offender needs to be brought up out of the basement of our souls and dealt with. However, not all hatred is wrong. For example, God *hates* evil, and we should too.

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens . . . a time to love and a time to hate” (ECCLESIASTES 3:1, 8).

Failing to feel the offense results in . . .

- **Denying your pain:** “I don’t blame her for always criticizing me. She is under a lot of pressure. And besides, it doesn’t hurt me.”

Truth: Being mistreated by someone you love is painful. Feeling the pain must take place before healing can occur.

“The LORD is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (PSALM 34:18).

- **Carrying false guilt:** “I feel guilty if I hate what was done to me. I’m never supposed to have hatred.”

Truth: God hates sin. You, too, can hate sin. You are to hate the sin but not the sinner.

“To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech” (PROVERBS 8:13).

3. Forgive the Offender.³⁶

“To err is human, to forgive, divine.”³⁷ This famous quote by English poet Alexander Pope is a heavenly reminder to all of us. However, the earthly reality is more like this: “To err is human, to blame it on someone else is more human!”

Oh, how much easier it is to blame than to forgive. But we are called by God to forgive! When you do forgive, genuine forgiveness draws you into the heart of God, and your life takes on the divine character of Christ.

— **Argument:** “I don’t think it is right to forgive when I don’t feel like forgiving.”

Answer: Forgiveness is not a feeling, but is rather an act of the will—a choice. Jesus established what was right when He said . . .
“When you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins”
(MARK 11:25).

— **Argument:** “I can forgive everyone else, but I don’t have the power to forgive that person.”

Answer: The issue is not your lack of power to forgive, but rather how strong God’s power is within you to forgive any sin committed against you.

“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 PETER 1:3).

— **Argument:** “Forgiveness isn’t fair. She ought to pay for what she did!”

Answer: God knows how to deal with each person fairly—and He will, in His own time.

“Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord”
(ROMANS 12:19).

- **Argument:** “I have forgiven, but it doesn’t do any good. He keeps doing the same thing over and over.”

Answer: You cannot control what others do, but you can control *how you respond* to what others do. Jesus said you are to respond with forgiveness no matter the number of times wronged. The apostle Peter asked Jesus,

“Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times’” (MATTHEW 18:21–22).

- **Argument:** “I cannot forgive and forget. I keep thinking about being hurt.”³⁸

Answer: When you choose to forgive, you don’t get a case of “holy amnesia.” However, after facing the hurt and confronting the offender, close off your mind to rehearsing the pain of the past. Forget about your pain by refusing to focus on your hurt.

“I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (PHILIPPIANS 3:13–14).

4. Find Oneness—If Appropriate.

Relationships filled with resentment ultimately perish. Relationships filled with forgiveness ultimately prevail. However, reconciliation in a relationship—the restoration of oneness—is contingent on several vital factors. When these conditions are met, and when both parties are committed to *honesty* in the relationship, there is real hope that the two can be of one mind and one heart again.³⁹ The Bible says . . .

“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind” (PHILIPPIANS 2:1–2).

Note: Situations where reconciliation is *not* appropriate include: a physically abusive relationship, an adulterous affair, rape, murder, or even spiritual abuse. For *some* offenses, reconciliation may not be wise or safe. In these instances, seek God’s direction in the decisions you make beyond forgiveness by reading His Word, praying, and talking with a pastor, counselor, or trusted Christian friend about the situation and how best to proceed.

Honesty Is Required for Reconciliation

H—Honestly evaluate yourself and your relationship.

God intends to use your relationships to reveal your weaknesses and to strengthen your relationship with Him. The first step toward reconciliation is to honestly evaluate your own weaknesses and the weaknesses within your relationships so that you can know where change needs to take place.

“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (PSALM 139:23–24).

O—Open your heart and share your pain.

Have a candid conversation with your offender. Fully explain the pain you have suffered and the sorrow in your heart. Don’t attack your offender. Instead, address the offense and share how it made you feel.

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over” (MATTHEW 18:15).

N—Notice whether your offender takes responsibility.

Offenders need to know that what they did struck like an arrow into your heart. They need to feel your hurt. If offenders ignore your pain and respond with how much you have hurt them, they are not ready for reconciliation because they are not ready to take responsibility. They need to care about your pain as much as they care about their own pain. They need to experience godly sorrow.

“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death” (2 CORINTHIANS 7:10).

E—Expect your offender to be completely truthful.

Promises need to be made regarding honesty, support, and loyalty within the relationship. Although you cannot guarantee someone else’s dependability, you should be able to discern whether there is sincerity and truthfulness.

“Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment” (PROVERBS 12:19).

S—Set appropriate boundaries for the relationship.

You may have a heart for reconciliation; however, you need to evaluate and ask: Has my offender crossed the line beyond what is appropriate to what is inappropriate (excessively angry, possessive, demeaning, insensitive, irresponsible, prideful, abusive)?

If so, explain what the boundary line is, what the repercussion is for crossing the boundary (a limited relationship), and what the reward is for staying within the boundary (increased trust). You need to be disciplined enough to hold your offender accountable, and your offender needs to become disciplined enough to stop hurting the relationship.

“Whoever heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray” (PROVERBS 10:17).

T—Take time, cautiously think, and sincerely pray before you let your offender all the way back into your heart.

When trust has been trampled—time, integrity, and consistency are needed to prove that your offender is now trustworthy. Change takes time. Therefore, don’t rush the relationship. Confidence is not regained overnight. Trust is not given, but earned.

“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it” (PROVERBS 4:23).

Y—Yield your heart to starting over.

God wants you to have a heart that is yielded to His perfect will for your life. Serious offenses will reshape your future, and you will not be able to come back together with your offender as though nothing ever happened. You personally change through pain. You take on new roles, and you cannot simply abandon your new commitments and priorities the moment a friend is forgiven and is invited back into your heart and life. Leave negative patterns in the past and establish positive patterns of relating.

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland” (ISAIAH 43:18–19).

Forgiving a Monetary Debt

Question: “If I have forgiven a monetary debt, thus freeing a person from paying me back, does God still expect that person to repay the debt as a matter of integrity?”

Answer: You should not expect anything back if you have *truly forgiven* the debt. However, God expects us to be people of integrity—people who keep our word, honor our agreements, and fulfill our obligations. We should do everything within our power to avoid acquiring debts that we cannot pay and to repay all debts that we now owe. If you have forgiven a debt that a person is now able to repay, then that person should offer to repay the debt as a matter of integrity. But you are not to expect that. Consider two situations:

Debtor #1

A friend borrows \$100 from you and promises to pay you back in one month. But because of an accident, he becomes disabled and loses his job. He has no way of repaying the debt. If six weeks later you forgive your friend’s debt, does the person still owe the debt?

No, the issue of repayment is not a matter of integrity before God, but is simply a matter of inability—an inability to repay the debt. God knows that there are times when circumstances make the payment of a debt impossible. If later your friend has the ability to repay some amount, whether it is \$1.00 or \$10.00 a week, he could come to you and make the offer to repay as he can. If you state again that you want him not to feel compelled to repay you, then he can accept your generosity as a gift of grace.

Debtor #2

A friend borrows \$100 from you and promises to pay you back in one month, yet makes no effort to repay the money. After six months, you forgive the debt. Does he still owe the debt?

No, repayment of the debt is not owed to you because you have forgiven it. However, a person of integrity will want to repay the debt. Whether he begins paying back \$1.00 or \$10.00 a week, the repayment is owed as a matter of integrity before God.

Interestingly, according to the Law, the Israelites were required to cancel debts at the end of every seventh year. If we hold on to extended expectation of repayment and the debt is not repaid, we will likely become bitter; such bitterness is detrimental to all involved. (Read Hebrews 12:15.)

*“At the end of every seven years
you must cancel debts . . .
Every creditor shall cancel any loan
they have made to a fellow Israelite.
They shall not require payment from
anyone among their own people,
because the LORD’s time for canceling
debts has been proclaimed.”*

(DEUTERONOMY 15:1–2)

How to Truly Forgive

Have you ever said, “I was severely wronged by someone I once trusted. People tell me I should forgive, but how can I simply let my offender off the hook?” If these words have passed your lips or even crossed your mind, be assured that you are not alone. That is precisely why you need to know how to handle “the hook.”

How to Handle “The Hook”

Make a list of all the offenses caused by your offender.

Imagine a meat hook hanging around your neck and a burlap bag hanging from the hook, laying against your chest. Then imagine all the pain caused by the offenses represented as 100 pounds of rocks dropped into the burlap bag. Now you have 100 pounds of heavy rocks—rocks of resentment—hanging from the hook around your neck.

Ask yourself: “Do I really want to carry all this pain with me for the rest of my life?”

Are you willing to take the pain from the past and release it into the hands of the Lord? If so, lift up your pain and release it all to Jesus.

Visualize taking the one who hurt or offended you off of your “emotional hook” and placing that person onto God’s hook.

Remember, the Lord knows how to deal with your offender in His time and in His way. God says, “*It is mine to avenge; I will repay*” (Romans 12:19).

Finally, use the following model and pray to release your offender to God.

Prayer to Forgive Your Offender

“Lord Jesus, thank you for caring about how much my heart has been hurt. You know the pain I have felt because of (list every offense). Right now I release all that pain into your hands. Thank you, Lord, for dying on the cross for me and extending your forgiveness to me. As an act of my will, I choose to forgive (name). Right now, I move (name) off of my emotional hook to your hook. I refuse all thoughts of revenge. I trust that in your time and in your way you will deal with (name) as you see fit. And Lord, thank you for giving me your power to forgive so that I can be set free. In your precious name I pray. Amen.”

How Do You Sustain a Forgiving Spirit?

In the Olympics, a boxer doesn't usually step into the ring and register a knockout with the first punch. Generally, it takes several rounds of exchanging many blows before a winner is announced. Likewise, forgiveness is often not a onetime event.⁴⁰

You may need to go through many bouts of forgiving as a part of the *process* of forgiveness. But if you confront your hurts and face your wounds, it will be worth the emotional bruises you will likely encounter.

As you consistently release each recurring thought of an offense, eventually the thoughts will stay away. The process will be complete. The fight will be won.

Jesus emphasized the “again and again” nature of forgiveness when He said . . .

*“Even if they sin against you seven times
in a day and seven times
come back to you saying ‘I repent,’
you must forgive them.”*
(LUKE 17:4)

How to Forgive . . . Again **(an acrostic for the word FORGIVE)**

F—Forbid recurring thoughts of the wrongs done to enter your mind.

Stop them as soon as they occur. Say to yourself, “I refuse to keep a record of this. I refuse to keep a ledger of wrongs.”

“[Love] keeps no record of wrongs” (1 CORINTHIANS 13:5).

O—Overcome the temptation to bring up the matter again.

After an honest confrontation with the offender and both sides of the situation have been dealt with—or if the other person refuses to talk about the problem—let the Holy Spirit do His work of conviction. Ecclesiastes 3:7 say there is “*a time to be silent and a time to speak.*” Pray this passage:

“Set a guard over my mouth, LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips”
(PSALM 141:3).

R—Repeat scripture in your mind.

Allow God’s perspective to change your perspective. Allow God’s heart to permeate your heart. At times of testing, repeat over and over, “Love covers this wrong. Lord, may I be an expression of your love. May I reflect your love that covers over all wrongs.”

“Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs” (PROVERBS 10:12).

G—Give the situation to God.

Jesus understands how much you have been wronged. When He was being persecuted, Jesus knew that the heavenly Father would judge justly—in His way and in His time. And you can know the same. Your trial will make you either bitter or better. Say to the Lord, “I put my heart into your hands. I entrust myself to you. I know you will judge this situation justly.” These words were said about Jesus: *“When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly”* (1 PETER 2:23).

I—Intercede on behalf of your offender.

When you have been wronged, pray, “Lord, give me eyes to see this person through your eyes. May I care for my offender with your care.”

“Far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you” (1 SAMUEL 12:23).

V—Value what you can give rather than what you can receive.

Pray for God to help you understand the offender’s past and how his or her inner pain has contributed to the pain you are now experiencing. Focus on how you might care for and bless them, for it is more blessed to give than to receive.

“The Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (ACTS 20:35).

E—Extend God’s grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a direct expression of both God’s grace and God’s mercy. Grace is getting what you don’t deserve (pardon). Mercy is not getting what you do deserve (punishment). Pray often, “Lord, may my life be an expression of your grace and an extension of your mercy.”

“The Lord is full of compassion and mercy” (JAMES 5:11).

How to Protect Your Heart from Bitterness

Jesus said, “*Love your enemies.*” Impossible! No way! People *can’t* love their enemies! At least that’s the assumption. Yet the Greek word *agape*, translated “love” in this passage, by definition means “a commitment to seek the highest good of another person.”⁴¹ The “highest good” for those who are genuinely *wrong* is that their hearts become genuinely *right*. What can be one major catalyst for this change? Jesus provides the answer:

*“Love your enemies and pray
for those who persecute you.”*
(MATTHEW 5:44)

If you are saying, “But they really aren’t enemies,” realize that if someone evokes resentment, bitterness, or hatred, that person is an enemy to your spirit. Because praying for your enemy is commanded by Christ, believers should obey this directive and not regard this kind of prayer as optional.

Because praying for your enemy protects your heart from bitterness, you should *want* to obey this directive in heart and in deed. One approach is to pray “the fruit of the Spirit” for your offender. And because you are willing to “bless” your enemy, the Bible says that you will inherit a blessing.

*“Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult.
On the contrary, repay evil with blessing,
because to this you were called
so that you may inherit a blessing.”*
(1 PETER 3:9)

How to Pray for Those Who Hurt You

*“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, gentleness, self-control;
against such things there is no law.”*
(GALATIANS 5:22–23 ESV)

“Lord, I pray that (name) will be filled with *the fruit of love* by becoming fully aware of your unconditional *love*—and in turn will be able to *love* others.

“Lord, I pray that (name) will be filled with *the fruit of joy* because of experiencing your steady *joy*—and in turn will radiate that inner *joy* to others.

“Lord, I pray that (name) will be filled with *the fruit of peace*—your inner *peace*—and in turn will have a *peace* that passes all understanding toward others.

“Lord, I pray that (name) will be filled with *the fruit of patience* because of experiencing your *patience*—and in turn will extend that same extraordinary *patience* to others.

“Lord, I pray that (name) will be filled with *the fruit of kindness* because of experiencing your *kindness*—and in turn will extend that same undeserved *kindness* to others.

“Lord, I pray that (name) will be filled with *the fruit of goodness* because of experiencing the genuine *goodness* of Jesus—and in turn will reflect the moral *goodness* of Jesus before others.

“Lord, I pray that (name) will be filled with *the fruit of faithfulness* because of realizing your amazing *faithfulness*—and in turn will desire to be *faithful* to you, to your Word, and to others.

“Lord, I pray that (name) will be filled with *the fruit of gentleness* because of experiencing your *gentleness*—and in turn will be able to be *gentle* with others.

“Lord, I pray that (name) will be filled with *the fruit of self-control*—the *control of self* by Christ—and, in turn, will rely on *His control* to break out of bondage and to be an example before others.

In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.”

*“The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure;
then peace-loving, considerate, submissive,
full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.”*

(JAMES 3:17)

Releasing Bitterness

Question: “How can I release the bitterness toward my offender who is now dead?”

Answer: Although you cannot confront your offender in person, you can confront indirectly by saying what you would want to say or need to say as though your offender is in front of you.

Consider the often helpful and commonly used “chair technique.”

- *Imagine* your offender seated in a chair placed in front of you. Say the things you would say if the person were actually seated across a table from you.
- *Express* your feelings about what was done to you and the painful ramifications of those events on your life.
- *Forgive* the person and explain that you have taken the person off your emotional hook and placed them onto God’s hook.

Write a letter to your offender, stating every painful memory.

- *Describe* in a conversational way what you recall having happened and why it has caused you so much pain.
- *Read* it over the person’s grave or at a place where you can openly speak to the person as though you were in each other’s presence.
- *Choose*—at the close of your letter—to forgive by releasing your offender into God’s hands.

Make a list of all the painful, as well as the positive, memories.

- *Go back* to the beginning—after completing the list—and write the word “past” by each memory.
- *Acknowledge* and accept that the past is in the past.
- *Release* all the pain as well as the person into the hands of God.

The fact that your offender has died does not mean you cannot forgive. You can still prevent bitterness from establishing a foothold in your heart and mind.

The Bible says . . .

*“See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God
and that no bitter root grows up
to cause trouble and defile many.”*

(HEBREWS 12:15)

How to Lighten Your Scales of Blame⁴²

“To err is human . . . to blame someone else is more human.”

Scale of Justification



Playing the Blame Game

Often people justify acting badly toward others by focusing on the guilt of others. These offenders will blame you for *your guilt* in order to relieve *their own guilt*. Even if they are 98 percent wrong, they feel justified and their “scale of justification” is balanced by blaming you for your two percent. This means they will not feel the full weight (conviction) of their sin.

Your offenders may be able to balance their scale by focusing heavily on your guilt, but they still haven’t emptied the scale of their guilt. And every time they begin to feel guilty for whatever wrong *they have done*, they blame you for what *you have done*. Therefore, they stay in bondage to this unhealthy method of keeping their scales balanced. Realize, however, that even if you are not the major guilty party, you are still responsible before God for your percentage of wrong—even if it is only two percent!

*“If we claim to be without sin,
we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”*

(1 JOHN 1:8)



Ending the Blame Game

Regardless of how much someone else has been wrong, you are responsible to ask forgiveness for your own amount of wrong. Jesus said, “If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23–24).

When you humbly ask forgiveness for your sins and forgiveness is extended, your guilt is removed and the blame game is over.

When your blame is lifted off the other person’s justification scale, the weight of that person’s guilt comes crashing heavily down! This is why when one person asks “Will you forgive me?” often the other person responds with “Yes, but will you also forgive me?”

When you have a spirit of humility, the Spirit of God can use your humble heart to bring godly conviction to your offender’s heart.

True freedom can be found only by keeping the scale of justification empty by asking forgiveness from those you have wronged and extending forgiveness to those who have wronged you.

*“I strive always to keep my conscience
clear before God and man.”*

(ACTS 24:16)

How The Story Ends

The horrors of World War II are now far behind Corrie, but the intense battle between forgiveness and unforgiveness still rages within her heart. How can she find the strength to take the hand of someone who embodies the evil regime that destroyed the two people she held most dear? How can she forgive this man? To Corrie's dismay, she discovers she cannot!

His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often . . . the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side.

Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him.

I tried to smile. I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent . . . Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.

As I took his hand, the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.

And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself.⁴³

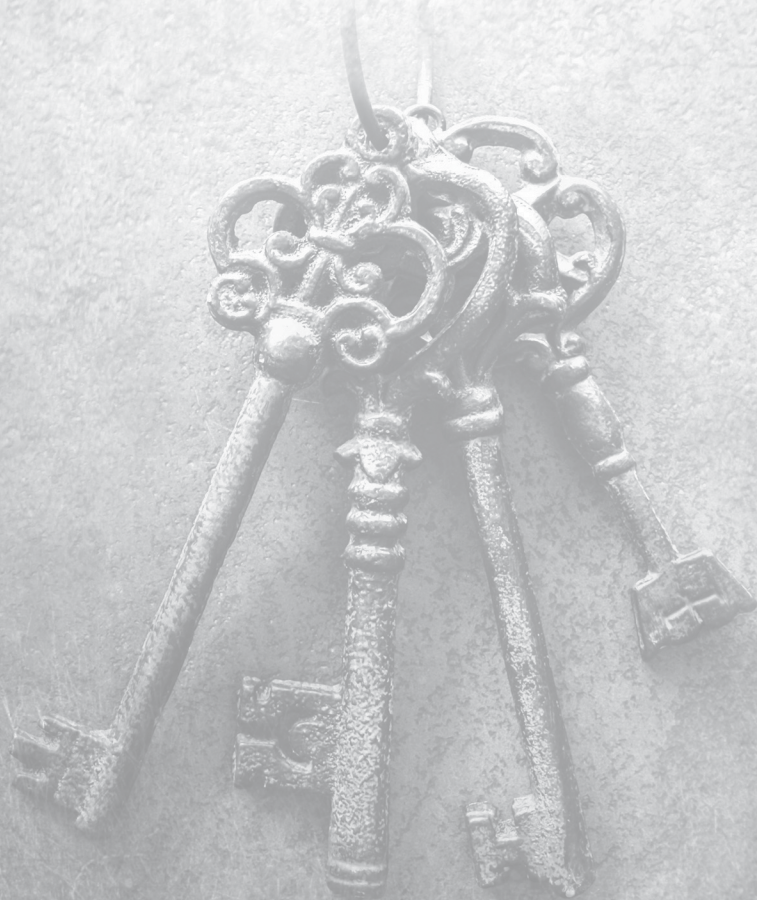
Jesus would never tell you to “*love your enemies, do good to those who hate you*” (Luke 6:27) without giving you the power to do it. And Corrie ten Boom was living proof of this love until her death in 1983. Perhaps no words reflect Corrie’s heart of forgiveness and life of love more than these, “*My friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you*” (Acts 13:38).

**By choosing to forgive . . .
by placing your burlap bag
of unforgiveness
at the foot of the cross . . .
you reflect God’s heart on forgiveness.
You demonstrate willing obedience
and a life of faith and trust in Him.**

—June Hunt



SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE



*“First seek the counsel
of the LORD.”*

(1 KINGS 22:5)



God's Word offers the hope and promise of a changed life. The Lord will renew your mind—transforming the way you think, act, and live—as you saturate yourself in His Word. In the following questions, the bold-faced words serve as prompts to help you more easily memorize the verses related to this topic. May God's truth come alive to you, flourish in you, and flow through you.

Does God expect me to continue to **forgive** those who repeatedly **sin against me**?

*“Peter came to Jesus and asked,
'Lord, how many times shall I **forgive**
my brother or sister who **sins against me**?
Up to seven times?' Jesus answered,
'I tell you, not seven times,
but seventy-seven times.'”*

(MATTHEW 18:21–22)

Is my **forgiving** those who **sin against me** and against those I love related to my **heavenly Father's forgiving** my sins?

*“If you **forgive** other people when they **sin against you**,
your **heavenly Father** will also **forgive** you.
But if you do not forgive others their sins,
your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

(MATTHEW 6:14–15)

To what degree or in what way am I to be **forgiving of others**?

*“Be kind and compassionate
to one another, **forgiving each other**,
just as in Christ God forgave you.”*

(EPHESIANS 4:32)

If I **forgive** others, is there any guarantee
that I **will be forgiven** as well?

*“Do not judge, and you will not be judged.
Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.
Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”*
(LUKE 6:37)

Is it possible to **foster love** by not only forgiving but
to “**cover over an offense**” by not repeating it?

*“Whoever would **foster love**
covers over an offense,
but whoever repeats the matter
separates close friends.”*
(PROVERBS 17:9)

Does God expect me to do more than forgive
my **enemies** and **those who persecute** me?

*“Love your **enemies** and pray
for **those who persecute** you.”*
(MATTHEW 5:44)

How can I **be reconciled** to someone
who has **something against** me
and **offer** my **gift** to God?

*“If you are offering your gift at the altar
and there remember that your brother
or sister has **something against** you,
leave your gift there in front of the altar.
First go and **be reconciled** to them;
then come and **offer your gift.**”*
(MATTHEW 5:23–24)

Does justice not require that
I **take revenge** and **repay evil for evil**?

*“Do not **repay** anyone **evil for evil**. . .
Do not **take revenge**, my dear friends,
but leave room for God’s wrath,
for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge;
I will repay,’ says the Lord.”*
(ROMANS 12:17–19)

If I refuse to forgive an offense, will that cause me to
fall short of the grace of God or **cause trouble**
for me and for others whom I love?

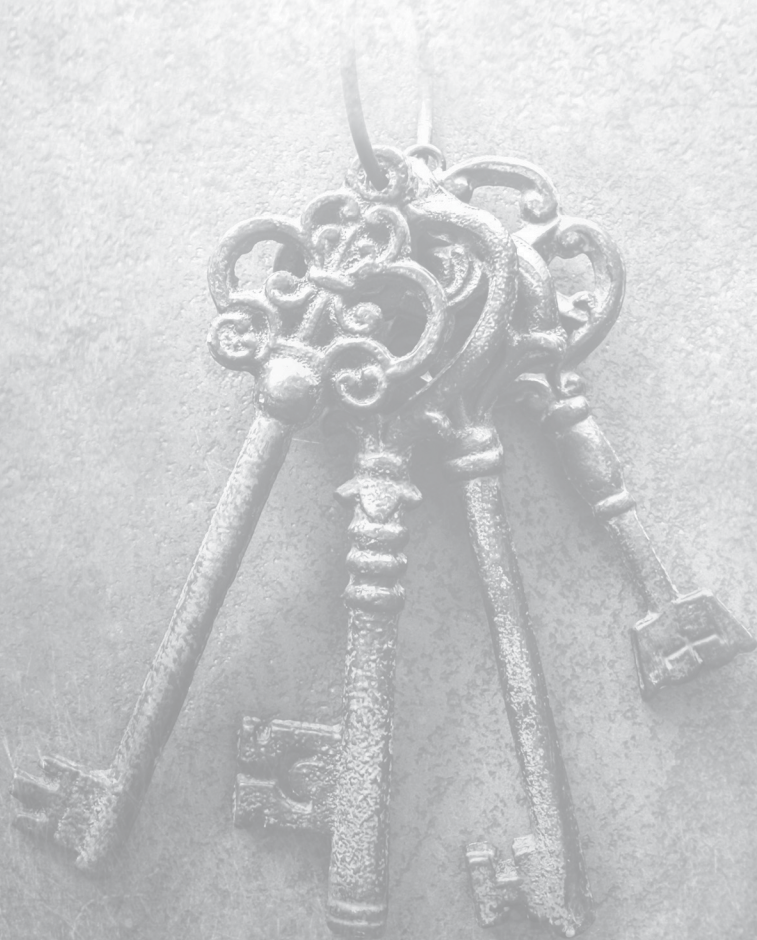
*“See to it that no one **falls short**
of the grace of God
and that no bitter root grows up
to **cause trouble** and defile many.”*
(HEBREWS 12:15)

Does God expect me to **bear with each** person
who sins against me and **forgive** whatever
grievance I have **against** them?

*“**Bear with each** other
and **forgive** one another if any of you
has a **grievance against** someone.
Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”*
(COLOSSIANS 3:13)



ENDNOTES & BIBLIOGRAPHY



ENDNOTES

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4. W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr., *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996), s.v. "forgive, forgave, forgiveness."
5. Vine, Unger, and White, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, s.v. "confess, confession."
6. For this section see Jeffress, *When Forgiveness Doesn't Make Sense*, 46-51.
7. Vine, Unger, and White, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, s.v. "forgive, forgave, forgiveness."
8. For this section see also John Nieder and Thomas M. Thompson, *Forgive & Love Again: Healing Wounded Relationships* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1991), 173-185; Jeffress, *When Forgiveness Doesn't Make Sense*, 107-123.
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10. Vine, Unger, and White, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, s.v. "grace."
11. Robert Jeffress, *Choose Your Attitudes, Change Your Life* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 102-7; see also Chuck Swindoll, "I Am Joseph!" *Insight*, Winter 1986, 3-9.
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15. Nieder and Thompson, *Forgive & Love Again*, 47-51.
16. June Hunt, *How to Deal with Difficult Relationships: Bridging the Gaps That Separate People* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2011), 382-385.
17. Luke 15:16
18. Luke 15:20
19. Luke 15:21
20. Luke 15:23-24

21. Ten Boom and Buckingham, *Tramp for the Lord*, 49.
22. See also Lewis B. Smedes, *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1984), 138.
23. David A. Stoop, *Real Solutions for Forgiving the Unforgivable*, Real Solutions Series (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine, 2001), 69–82.
24. For more on the three inner needs (or longings), see Lawrence J. Crabb, Jr., *Understanding People: Why We Long for Relationship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 17–18, 124–127; Robert S. McGee, *The Search for Significance: Seeing Your True Worth through God's Eyes*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 6–11, 21–24.
25. J.K. Grider, “Forgiveness,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 460.
26. Hunt, *How to Deal with Difficult Relationships*, 394–398.
27. Louis Zamperini and David Rensin, *Devil at My Heels: A Heroic Olympian's Astonishing Story of Survival as a Japanese POW in World War II* (New York, NY: William Morrow, 2011), 110. Excerpts from *Devil at My Heels* © 2003 by Louis Zamperini, by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.
28. Zamperini, *Devil at My Heels*, 99.
29. Zamperini, *Devil at My Heels*, 265.
30. Ten Boom and Buckingham, *Tramp for the Lord*, 181.
31. Calculation based on estimates in Craig L. Blomberg's commentary on Matthew. See note on Matthew 18:28–31 in Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture, The New American Commentary* (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 283–284.
32. *Ibid.*
33. See Augsburg, *The Freedom of Forgiveness*, 47–50.
34. See Smedes, *Forgive and Forget*, 21–26.
35. Smedes, *Forgive and Forget*, 23.
36. See Smedes, *Forgive and Forget*, 27–30.
37. Alexander Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, part 2, line 325.
38. For this section see Augsburg, *The Freedom of Forgiveness*, 44–46.
39. See Smedes, *Forgive and Forget*, 31–37.
40. Augsburg, *The Freedom of Forgiveness*, 42; Smedes, *Forgive and Forget*, 111–113.
41. Vine, Unger, and White, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, s.v. “love.”
42. For this section see Institute in Basic Life Principles, Inc., *Basic Seminar Textbook: Research in Principles of Life*, (Oak Brook, IL: Institute in Basic Life Principles, 1981), 74. Used by permission.
43. Ten Boom, Sherrill, and Sherrill, *The Hiding Place*, 238.

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June Hunt, M.A., is the Founder and Chief Servant Officer of Hope for the Heart, a worldwide counseling and caregiving ministry that offers biblical hope and practical help in more than 60 countries and 36 languages. The *Keys for Living Library* provides the foundation for the ministry's award-winning, live, call-in counseling radio program, *Hope in the Night*. Her passion to help others through biblical counsel is fueled by her joy in seeing a life changed through Christ. As an accomplished author, speaker, and musician, June provides God's truth for today's problems. See more at: www.junehunt.org

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