

JOHN LOREN & PAULA
SANDFORD
AND LEE BOWMAN



CHOOSING FORGIVENESS

TURNING FROM GUILT, BITTERNESS,
AND RESENTMENT TOWARD A LIFE
OF WHOLENESS AND PEACE

Choosing Forgiveness: Turning
from Guilt, Bitterness and
Resentment Towards a Life of
Wholeness and Peace
John Loren Sandford

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CHOOSING FORGIVENESS by John Loren and Paula Sandford and Lee Bowman

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

For many years now the focus of Elijah House has been on a ministry of restoration and reconciliation to born-again Christians who are in need of inner healing and transformation. Most of our writing and teachings have been directed toward training both professional and lay counselors to equip them to deal with the deep wounds and spiritual needs in the persons to whom they minister.

Our published works have often been used as textbooks by colleges and seminaries as they train men and women for ministry in the field of counseling and pastoral care. The

comprehensive nature of these books has served that purpose well.

However, in response to numerous requests by friends and coworkers, we have undertaken a project to adapt our writings and teachings to a broader and less academic audience-to deal in more depth with specific topics and to address directly the needs of the individual and small groups rather than the professional counselor.

Choosing Forgiveness is an important book because it addresses perhaps the most universal issue with which everyone must deal-learning to both give and receive forgiveness. Unforgiveness is the root cause of practically every interpersonal relationship problem.

This book is designed for study and practical application by those seeking spiritual growth and healing that will enrich their relationships with others and with God. A discussion section is included at the end of each chapter to encourage self-evaluation and small group interaction. We encourage you to use Choosing Forgiveness as a resource for personal study, fellowship groups, Sunday school classes, Bible studies, and discipleship training groups.

-JOHN LOREN & PAULA SANDFORD

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NAVIGATING THE STREAM OF LIFE

By LEE BOWMAN



S

o much to think about! So many to forgive! The morning air was crisp and clean as the blanket of mist began to lift ► slowly from the valley floor. Long shafts of sunlight broke through puffy white clouds floating along the horizon, sending sparkling rays of yellow light dancing across the green

Middle Tennessee meadows. The birds were singing. The gentle breeze rustled softly through the treetops. Everything seemed at peace except for the battle raging in my head.

I had come for a weekend retreat in the country, seeking counsel from Christian friends and to work through some of the anguish that had been burdening me for months. I felt nearly overcome with betrayal, anger, and bitterness. My marriage was on the rocks... my career was jeopardized... separation from my children was threatened... I was alienated from old friends, in financial crisis, and floating in moral ambiguity-I was in a state of extreme turmoil.

The group session the night before had been difficult but productive, with lots of "stuff" uncovered and true feelings exposed. I thought I was ripe for some resolution and was looking forward to more discussion with my group. But this morning our leader assigned us an exercise in silence. He said we were to spend the morning "alone and in personal reflection, experiencing nature and discovering what could be learned from a time of quiet contemplation."

My mind was neither quiet nor contemplative as I reluctantly headed down a path toward the open fields and the woods beyond. I had come for comfort and counsel and was being asked to experience more loneliness and silence. I was depressed, angry, and confused.

In frustration, I began to jog down the path in a blind attempt to flee my own tumultuous feelings. As I reached the edge of

the open field, I picked up the pace and broke into a full run. Running felt good-my legs stretching out over the rough ground, feet pounding into the moist soil, the cool morning air against my face. I ran freely across the softly rolling pastureland, becoming incredibly aware of the open expanse of sky above and the sweet smell of the earth beneath my feet.

I ran and I ran, my body sometimes straining to go faster than my weary legs would allow. Stumbling from time to time over the rough ground, I desperately struggled to retain my balance and push on. In near exhaustion, I finally reached the narrow strip of woods that ran like a ribbon along the creek below the rolling fields. Gasping for breath and with lungs burning, I stretched out, facedown, on the trunk of a large fallen tree that lay across the stream.

I lay there on the log for a long time with eyes closed and the morning sun warm against my back. Finally, when the sound of my pounding heart subsided enough to hear the soft gurgling of the stream below, I opened my eyes and gazed down into the water.

Immediately below me the stream ran deep and swift with a clear, sparkling current cutting a channel down the center of the creek bed. Large stones lined the bottom, worn smooth by the ever-rushing water. The stones were slick and shining in the reflected light of the morning sun.

On each side of the creek, closer to the bank, the water drifted by more slowly across a shallow bed of fine gravel. The

smooth surface of the stream was broken randomly by partially submerged branches, drifting leaves, and other floating debris.

Across the creek, in a low and muddy backwash area, the shallow water lay perfectly still, brown with algae and silt and topped with a layer of scum.

In quiet reverie I studied the stream and began to see a world completely within itself. A dozen minnows came swimming into view. Some launched out into the center of the stream where the water ran clear and swift. Playing in the current, they darted by like tiny silver flashes of light. Others, attempting to swim upstream, fought the current, barely able to make headway. They wriggled furiously to reach their goal.

Still other minnows seemed to prefer the shallows along the bank. They floated lazily in the quiet water as though happy to be in safe harbor, out of the turbulent current. A larger fish came swimming by, and the minnows reacted in fright, darting quickly for protection beneath a sunken log until the danger passed.

Fish would not swim in the shallow pools of brackish backwater. Muddy and stagnant, those pools lay quietly evaporating in the sun. One small fish lay dead, apparently trapped in the pool when the high water had receded. It floated on the surface, surrounded by algae and foam.

That quiet morning alone in nature proved to be a turning point in life for me. As I lay prone on a fallen log above an

everflowing stream, the world I observed crystallized a clear message presented by God for me to understand.

WHAT COURSE WOULD I FOLLOW?

1. Would I be caught in stagnant waters, feeling hopelessly trapped, while life-giving nourishment slowly evaporates around me?
2. Would I be content to wait in quiet shallowness, hoping to be left alone and unchallenged?
3. When threatened, would I flee in fear to the safety of a hiding place?
4. Would I exhaust myself, furiously swimming against the current, helplessly awash in the swift stream of life, and fighting against it all the way?
5. Or would I be one to choose where I will swim sometimes feeding in the quiet harbor of a peaceful pool, sometimes valiantly fighting the torrent to survive, sometimes choosing to let go with happy abandon as the clear current sweeps downstream to a new adventure and a new day?

The stream of life continues to flow today, and we are all inextricably a part of it. How will we respond, and where will we swim? Will we be helpless victims living in bitterness, or will we be proactive affirmers of life, willing to forgive and to bless those who would harm us?

CHAPTER-ONE

FORGIVENESS: OPTION OK.-NECESSITY?

CHOOSING TO JOURNEY TOWARD THE LIGHT



W

-hat significance is there to our living if we do not learn important lessons from our mistakes-and discover ways to keep from repeating errors that chain us to unhappy and unproductive ways? After all, life is a choosing!

Even in the heat of my (Lee's) anger, there was that split second to make a choice of whether to hit him. I was about twelve years old, and I had irritated my friend John Livengood enough to make him really angry. He called me a dirty name, which served to get me heated up, too. I stood there with clinched fists for that emotionally charged instant, and then I chose to add injury to insult by taking a hefty swing at his face.

My fist missed his chin and landed squarely on his Adam's apple! He went to his knees, writhing in pain and gasping for breath. The blow did no real damage, except to his feelings, because as soon as he was able to talk, he proceeded to curse me further and accuse me of fighting dirty. He was sure I meant to hit him in the throat-and would forever hold it against me.

As I recall, I wasn't sorry I hurt him, but I did regret missing my target. Yet I was not about to apologize as long as he had such a rotten attitude. He said I started the fight, but I knew that he had-and we never wanted to be close friends after that.

Years later, reflecting on my fight with John Livengood, I realized we were but a microcosm of the way most of the world behaves. We simply chose to sin against each other and then to live in unforgiveness.

THE LAW OF SOWING AND REAPING

Sin and unforgiveness are not happy issues to think about, and most of us characteristically avoid dealing with them if we

can get away with it. Ego and pride are involved when we have been hurt by someone-and in the eyes of the world it seems natural for someone who has been hurt to seek revenge. But our sin and unforgiveness have a way of rebounding and keeping us constantly in trouble. Sin is what isolates us from God, from one another, and from our own selves. Unforgiveness preserves and calcifies the isolation and prevents us from seeking reconciliation and wholeness.

Forgiveness is the antidote to sin. Forgiveness reunites us with God, brings us into unity with one another, and restores the integrity of our inner self. That is why forgiveness is central to all of life. If we are to be happy, healthy, and grow in relationships with others, forgiveness is not an option; it is a necessity.



Forgiveness is the most important and joyous message the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ brings to us.

God gives us ability to make choices, but we must live with the results of our choosing. We can be stuck with

unforgiveness forever and be miserable, or we can choose to forgive and enjoy the benefits of freedom that forgiveness brings. If you have always thought forgiving or not forgiving was just a matter of personal choice, depending on the intensity of your feelings, consider how the Scriptures command us to forgive:

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

-MATTHEW 6:14-15

Why does Jesus express this so strongly, so absolutely? God created an orderly universe based on impersonal laws or principles. Just as we know that certain laws of physics are unalterably true and predictable, so should we understand that God's spiritual laws are true and predictable. Wouldn't it be silly if our legislators got together and decided to repeal the law of gravity? They could unanimously vote gravity out of existence-but it would make absolutely no difference in the way planets revolve around the sun or the way we are held to the earth and kept from being flung out into space by the centrifugal force of the earth's rotation.

The reality of a parallel realm of immutable spiritual laws is rejected by many people today who would prefer to base ethical behavior on relative values left to each person's interpretation. History alone should demonstrate to us that

principles such as those spelled out in God's Ten Commandments given to Moses are essential foundation stones for human behavior. As famous movie director Cecil B. DeMille is reported to have said while making the movie The Ten Commandments, "It is impossible for us to break the law. We can only break ourselves against the law."

Stephen Covey, author of the immensely influential book The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, speaks directly to the issue of immutable principles that govern human growth and happiness. He says:

The reality of such principles or natural laws becomes obvious to anyone who thinks deeply and examines the cycles of social history. These principles surface time and time again, and the degree to which people in a society recognize and live in harmony with them moves them toward either survival and stability or disintegration and destruction.²



We need to recognize how the universe works. We will reap what we sow.

The principle of sowing and reaping is one of God's absolute laws. If we sow judgment, we will reap judgment. If we sow blessing, we will reap blessing. If we sow unforgiveness, we will reap the same. It is not God's intention to punish us by this standard. Rather, He loves us so much that He wants us to understand how the universe works so we don't have to reap unawares.

The consequences of breaking God's laws are fixed. The choice is ours to receive the blessing or reject it.

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.

-MARK 11:25

So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says "I repent," forgive him.

-LUKE 17:3-4

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

-EPHESIANS 4:32

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness,

humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

-COLOSSIANS 3:12-13

WHAT DOES LOVE HAVE TO DO WITH FORGIVENESS?

The process of forgiveness must begin with a simple act of choosing to begin the journey of forgiveness. Many people are reluctant to take that first step of choosing to forgive, believing that if they follow the path of forgiveness they will become weaklings who are consistently taken advantage of by others. This is not what forgiveness, triggered by love, is about. True love encourages a compassionate willingness to forgive, yet it retains the strength of conviction that all parties must be fully accountable for their own decisions and behavior.

Forgiveness grounded in true love is not a soft and naive yielding that excuses almost any kind of abuse people might direct at us. It is not a self-effacing meekness that lets people run all over us. True love releases a power within that enables us to make that risky decision to choose to forgive and to deal with the dynamics of working through what can be a painful give-and-take experience.

A teacher of the law once asked Jesus what the most important commandment is. Jesus replied:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all

your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: "Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these."

-MARK 12:30-31

If we love our neighbor rightly, the implication of Jesus's command is that we must also love ourselves. Loving ourselves doesn't mean selfishly looking out for our own interests at the expense of others. It means caring for and seeking the healthiest possible nurture for ourselves and being concerned for the wellbeing of others to the same degree. Healthy self-love hinges on self-respect, and we must guard against excusing any behavior or attitude in others that will undermine our personal integrity or jeopardize theirs. Respecting self requires that we discern appropriate boundaries and set limits on the amount of mistreatment we will accept from those who are thoughtless or who would be cruel.

Healthy expressions of love will not permit the shouldering of blame for the wrongs others commit or the stoic toleration of destructive behavior on the assumption that they can't help themselves. We must be willing to forgive, but we must also know where to draw lines of accountability. In the name of love, we do not have to passively accept disloyalty from trusted friends, betrayal from our spouse, abuse from our children, or the deceit of professional coworkers. That is not what forgiveness is. True love should empower us to say "No more" when someone's behavior pushes past our limits. We must expect each person to be accountable for his or her

actions.

This is a strong message for those caught in codependent relationships in which they tolerate or excuse dysfunctional lifestyles of loved ones and thereby enable them to continue to wound the lives of others. Love and forgiveness should not shield even those we love the most from the consequences of their decisions.

LOVE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Love is compassionate, but it is also strong. Love is strong because it is God's way. When we love in God's name, we act in the enabling power of His Holy Spirit. Such love is grounded in the authority of God and commands respect. It allows us to relate to others with integrity and enables us to take the risk of seeking committed relationships. Those who lack this power of love are more likely to fear commitment and less likely to risk forgiving others.

To show true love toward others is to respect them enough to allow them to be accountable, particularly for the wounds they inflict on other people. Letting persons be accountable is different from demanding they be accountable. We cannot demand another person's repentance, and we seldom can establish a level of consequence that represents justice for their infractions. Even if we could control others by our demands, we would be robbing them of their personhood by making their decisions for them.

Letting persons be accountable means respecting their personhood by allowing them to experience whatever the consequences are for their actions. Outside of the requirements of criminal law, we should neither protectively excuse nor vindictively punish other persons for the way they have hurt us. To do so is to usurp their own accountability and thus to show them disrespect.

Forgiveness is not the same as pardoning. To pardon is to end all judgment, to lift away all due reaping for sowing. God may pardon if He so chooses. We are called and given the authority only to forgive.

Expressing love inevitably pushes us to crises of decision:

-I Do we forever hold on to the hurt, nurturing our pain and feeling it again and again with each remembrance? Or will the power of our selfrespecting love reverse the tide of our feelings?

-I Is our willingness to be forgiving contingent on the offender's repentant attitude? Or can we choose to forgive regardless of how the offender may respond?

Simply speaking, can we choose to love our enemies and be kind to those who hatefully use us? Real love respects people even in the midst of their human frailties. When love restores one's selfrespect by drawing clear lines of tolerance and honestly placing accountability where it belongs, forgiveness

becomes more of a possibility. We can shift the focus of our attention from ourselves and begin to point our love toward those who have hurt us. Our willingness to respect others allows us to take that first step of choosing to forgive and enables us to move on to the healing of hurts, which can be accomplished through the power of God's Holy Spirit.

THE ENABLING POWER OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

We know the Son of God by many titles: Jesus, Lord, Redeemer, Light, Messiah, Truth, Christ, the Word. For the purpose of gaining insight into the absolute necessity of forgiveness, we need to understand the meaning of the title most often used in the New Testament. That title is Lord Jesus Christ.

It is interesting to note how many times in the New Testament the disciples called Jesus by this full title. For example, Paul began his letter to the church at Thessalonica in this way:

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

-1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-3, EMPHASIS ADDED

Use of this title is not just a verbal issue. His title represents three basic aspects of the authority Jesus has in establishing the kingdom of God:

-M Because Jesus is Lord, He can accomplish forgiveness. The Pharisees, who doubted Him, asked: "What manner of man is this that He even forgives sins?" He can forgive sins because He is the Lord of the universe. He has authority over all things and through His power accomplishes forgiveness where man cannot.

-I Because Christ the Lord is Jesus, the Son of man, He became the sacrifice necessary to accomplish forgiveness. Although He is the Son of God, He was also fully man, who suffered, died on the cross, and was buried, taking the full weight of mankind's sin upon Himself. Yet He conquered death by rising from the grave, providing salvation and eternal life for those who believe in Him as their Savior.

-M Because Jesus is Christ, the anointed one of God, He became the perfect sacrifice to provide salvation from sin and to make a way of forgiveness. As Christ the Savior, Jesus brings reconciliation between man and God, between man and man, between man and his own inner being, and even between man and nature.

Many people believe that Jesus was simply a wise and godly teacher who lived and died two thousand years ago. They

don't understand or believe that Jesus is the Son of God-that He rose from the dead, conquering sin and death on behalf of all men and women, and that through faith in Him we share that victory. They don't understand that to receive Christ as Savior means that the living Christ comes to live in us, and we are to live in Him. Consequently, they think salvation is up to them.

Those who struggle with forgiveness may say, "I have tried and tried to forgive, but I just can't seem to get it done." If we think it is up to us to accomplish forgiveness through our striving, we will never "get it done." We must understand that forgiveness comes through what the Lord Jesus Christ has already accomplished. He has taken that burden from us, and through His grace we can forgive, even when by the standards of our human emotion it seems virtually impossible.

Lord of the universe, maker of heaven and earth,
author of all life, righteous loving Father:

Thank You for Your wisdom in giving us the
unchangeable laws of nature and the immutable
spiritual principles that govern human behavior.
Help me to realize that I will reap what I sow and
that the path of unforgiveness in my life will lead
to destruction and isolation from You. Forgive me
when I rebel against Your shepherding and seek
my self will over Your loving provision.

I ask for the courage to repentantly confess my
own sins, the strength to bear up under my

woundings, the grace to choose to forgive, and the wisdom to allow others to be accountable for their actions. Help me to see that I do not have to accomplish forgiveness on my own-that You are my loving Father who is there to bring me into refreshing new relationships through the power of what the Lord Jesus Christ did for me on the cross. Amen.

Chapter One Discussion Forgiveness: Option or Necessity?

The chart on page 13 provides an opportunity for you to map out where you are with personal unforgiveness in your life. Read the instructions and complete each column as honestly as you can.

In column A, make a list of people toward whom you feel some degree of unforgiveness in each category.

Consider how well equipped you are to deal with each of these unforgivenesses listed above. Have you identified the person causing the wounding? Have you clearly defined the boundaries of what you are willing to tolerate from the situation? For each issue above, place a yes or no in the box in column B. If you answered yes, write out below a clear statement of your position, considering what you must do to protect yourself against further abuse without being vindictive toward the other person.

To avoid my continuing to be hurt, I must...

All of us must bear responsibility for ways in which we contribute to broken relationships or hurtful situations. However, one can't assume responsibility for another person's attitude or behavior. Do you clearly understand how this person who hurt you must personally be accountable for his or her actions? For each issue above, place ayes or no in the box in column C. If you have been unwisely assuming responsibility for other people, how can you withdraw from assuming that burden?

Are you willing to begin the process of forgiving the people who hurt you, no matter what their response might be? For each issue above, place a yes or no in the box in column D.

Share your responses above with a friend or with your group members. Choose one of the situations you face, and define the positive and negative aspects of being forgiving in that particular situation. Consider the law of sowing and reaping, and then write your thoughts below.

What will I reap if I choose to forgive?

What will I reap if I choose not to forgive?

Discuss with a friend or with your group the concept of how the Lord Jesus Christ can achieve forgiveness in you even when you don't seem to be able to accomplish it on your own.

Offenses for which we judge others in unforgiveness	A. Person toward whom you feel unforgiving	B. Have you clearly defined your boundaries?	C. Has accountability been established?	D. Are you willing to choose to forgive?
Disloyalty from a friend				
Betrayal from a spouse/relative				
Abuse from a family member				
Deceit from a co-worker				
Hurt from a stranger or group				

CHAPTER-TWO

THE PIGPEN DILEMMA

LESSONS IN AccOUNTABILITY



E

verybody makes mistakes. We sometimes make wrong choices for the right reasons and get ourselves in trouble. We may also make what appear to be right choices for the wrong

reasons, and those don't turn out so well, either. And then there are those times when out of immaturity, selfishness, stubbornness, or just plain vindictiveness, we make life-altering decisions that put us in a kind of pigpen dilemma of relationships. We wake up to life in an unpleasant place. Moral indiscretions, marital discord, sibling rivalry, family estrangement, dishonesty, untruthfulness, and prejudice-it is difficult not to slip unthinkingly into these common pitfalls of daily living.

We don't want to wallow in the messes we are in, but sometimes it seems we are stuck and don't know how to get out. After we are there for a while, we might even get used to the unpleasantness and settle into our dilemma with callousness toward others or a general bitterness toward life.

It's so tempting to blame others for the frustrations we feel. We then start criticizing targeted people for their all-too-evident faults and find reason to believe that the grief we bear has been put upon us by their shortcomings. Focusing on someone else's sins blinds us to our own failings, or at least helps us seem less culpable for the hurtful place we're in. It may be that we have been treated unfairly or even cruelly by others, but accountability for broken relationships is seldom a one-sided affair.



Focusing on someone else's sins blinds us to our own failings and helps us seem less responsible for the hurtful place we're in.

Let's take a new look at an old parable Jesus told that will show us what it is like to be accountable for how our choices affect us:

Eager to be free from his family and out on his own, a young man took his inheritance and traveled to a distant land where he soon squandered with foolish living all that he had.

Falling into severe need, he hired himself out for what he could get—feeding pigs in the fields and eating that which was intended only for the animals. Coming to his senses, he longingly wished for his home. He determined to return to his father, make amends for his sinful behavior, and seek forgiveness from his family.

-LUKE 15:11-19, AUTHORS' PARAPHRASE

When that young man took his inheritance and left home, he must surely have had a reason to leave. Maybe his father was expecting too much of him and it just wasn't fun working on the family farm. Maybe his brother was one of those negative, no-nonsense people who constantly criticize anyone with a free spirit. It may be that career opportunities in town promised to be a better match for the young man's talents and abilities than the dead end he saw in rural life.

For whatever reason, the young man's choices took him to a distant land-and soon those choices weren't living up to his expectations. The good life turned sour when his money was gone. Friends disappeared when the party was over. Tough times turned a life of pleasure into a place of unpleasantness and even desperation. He was in a pigpen of need and discomfort and was miserable living there.

COMING TO ONE'S SENSES

In this timeless parable, Jesus tells us that the young man eventually "came to his senses" (Luke 15:17). He reasoned that his former home, even with its perceived faults, was a far better place than where he found himself. He could have continued to blame his father and his brother for making life so unpleasant that he felt compelled to leave home. That would make them responsible for his grief and pain. He could have blamed his new friends for encouraging him to squander all his money. That would have lessened the guilt for his own indiscretions. Or he could have chosen just to wallow in bitterness toward

the world. The world is a cruel and heartless place.

But to his credit, the young man eventually recognized his own accountability in creating the mess he was in. His own choices had led him to that place of grief. Humble acceptance of those poor choices helped him to put in new perspective whatever grievances he had against father and brother and to seek their forgiveness for the immaturity of his own actions.

The main point of Jesus's story is to illustrate the marvelous love of God, who agonizes over His rebellious children. God will welcome home the repentant sinner just as this father rejoiced in the return of his prodigal son. If God is willing to forgive us in such a generous manner, should we not also be willing to forgive the sins others have committed against us?

But the richness of this story can teach us so much more. It speaks to us of the humility and courage required to admit our own mistakes when relationships are broken. Self-righteousness and pride can be enormous obstacles when it comes to seeing our true selves and the ways in which we are not always peacemakers. This story encourages us to push past our own hurts, to admit our own participation in broken relationships, and to meet others more than halfway to seek forgiveness.

In the case of the older brother who stayed at home, we are warned of how easy it is to be caught up in jealous anger and judgment toward those we believe to be less deserving of mercy and restoration. The father joyously celebrated the

return of the wayward child. The older son developed a hardened heart and chose to brood in bitterness over the perceived injustice of his brother's celebrated homecoming. The tragedy of this otherwise uplifting story is that the older brother is surely subject to spiritual defilement by the bitter judgment he makes of his brother, and in his judgment he also defiles others:

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

-ROMANS 2:1

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.

-HEBREWS 12:15, NAS

Our most common response to emotional pain is to lash out in anger, fix blame, and seek to punish the ones we hold responsible for our hurt. We see this in the vitriolic wrangling in divorce courts when two people choose to wound each other emotionally, bankrupt each other financially, and sabotage future relationships with children, all to prove the other person wrong and punish them for perceived transgressions. We see it in family squabbles over inheritance when one sibling gets an unequal share or another lays claim

to items in the estate without the knowledge or blessing of the rest. We see it when a misunderstanding between friends spirals down into resentment, anger, and even revenge. When other people's problems are seen from the outside looking in, the way they act often seems so senseless and destructive to us. But when the pain is happening to us, we see and feel the hurt differently.

Why can't we understand how irrational, impractical, and unproductive unforgiveness is? Why do we choose money and possessions over relationships? Why do we value ego and pride more than tolerance, mercy, and forgiveness? Why do we allow ourselves to be held captive to anger, resentment, and bitterness, when letting go of the hurt would bring such freedom and relief? What do we really gain by punishing others for causing us pain? Is the achievement of revenge worth the collateral damage it causes in the lives of others?



We can't control the attitudes and behaviors of other people,
but we can make right choices for ourselves.

These are all good and sensible questions that can be

answered purely from the standpoint of secular rationality that says forgiveness is proactive and productive, and that it makes good sense. But a Christian should live his or her life based on a deeper standard than secular rationality. When we live in Christ and He lives in us, we are new creatures, grounded in love and committed to a spiritual character that is a reflection of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

We can't control the attitudes and behaviors of other people, but we can make right choices for ourselves. Christian character demands honesty, transparency, humility, and love. We must see ourselves as the sinners we are, and in repentance be accountable for every attitude, judgment, and action that has contributed to the broken relationships with which we struggle. Only then can the Holy Spirit transform our minds, heal our hearts, and lift us out of the pignpens of our frustration into the fulfillment of restored relationships.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself in Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

-2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-20

Merciful Father God,

I cry out to You from my weakness and sin, recognizing that without the awful sacrifice made for us by the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, I could never hope to come before Your throne of mercy and grace. Like the prodigal son, I have squandered so much of Your treasure. I have rebelliously followed so many paths that have led only to darkness and destruction. Forgive me for those foolish ways.

My eyes now seek a continuing vision of Your warm light penetrating those places where a cold fog of confusion may obscure the proper pathway on my journey home. If I should falter and become distracted by the pain of hurtful relationships, please grant me strength and courage through Your Holy Spirit to endure along the way-always to choose the higher ground of forgiveness and reconciliation. Loving Father, be my comforter, guardian, guide, and stay. I ask in Jesus's name, amen.

Chapter Two Discussion The Pigpen Dilemma

Everyone experiences strained relationships at some time in life. Sometimes problems erupt over minor misunderstandings. Other issues may be more deeply hurtful or sustained over a

longer period of time. But in Christian honesty, transparency, and humility, we must come to acknowledge what part we have played in contributing to these fragmented relationships. We cannot expect to heal what we do not acknowledge.

Identify a specific issue in your life in which a fragmented relationship has caused you pain and in which you have not forgiven the offending party.

Be brutally honest with yourself, and identify ways in which your attitudes and actions have contributed to the fragmentation of this relationship rather than healing it. Be specific and make a list of these ways.

Write out a specific prayer of confession and repentance to God for the attitudes and actions you are willing to be accountable for in this fragmented relationship.

Make a commitment to pray blessing into the life of the person who has caused you offense. Explore the possibility of restoring the broken relationship that has troubled you. If the person is mutually repentant and desires healing of the relationship, share openly with him or her your accountability and your willingness to heal the breach. Ask forgiveness for

the part you have played in the broken relationship.

If reconciliation is not possible and you would be exposing yourself to more woundings, establish boundaries that will protect you from further hurt and that will keep you from becoming bitter. Continue to pray blessings into that person's life. Pray that God's Holy Spirit will equip you to turn loose of the resentment and to fully forgive the one who has offended you.

CHAFTEI_THf-EE

FACING TKUTH AND REALITY

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esus told a story about a wealthy man who forgave his servant a debt of ten thousand talents. Soon after being forgiven his debt, the servant came across a man who owed him just one talent. He confronted the man and said, "Pay me!" When the man said he could not pay, the servant took him by the throat and threatened him. The master heard of the incident and called his servant, saying, "I forgave you ten thousand talents, and you would not forgive this man even one?" The master then ordered the servant to be severely punished and all his debts to be placed back on him (Matt. 18:23-35).

Of course, the moral of Jesus's story is that we must respond to the wonderful grace of God's forgiveness by extending that same grace of forgiveness to others. If we do not, our sins will

surely rebound on us in crushing ways.

FORGIVENESS NOT REALLY GIVEN

The difficult thing about forgiveness is that we often think we have forgiven when in reality we have not. Most people are not aware, nor will they readily admit if they are aware, that they haven't forgiven others. We give lip service to having forgiven, but then we harbor grudges in our hearts. Most of us labor under the difficulty of really letting go of our hurts. In fact, we sometimes seem quite proud of our grudges.

People often say something like this: "I'm willing to be Christian about it and turn my cheek once, or maybe even twice, but after that, they had better watch out!"

Or, perhaps to justify anger and unforgiveness, they might say: "I'd be willing to forgive him for an honest mistake, but he meant to hurt me."

THE CENTRAL DAILY WORK OF A CHRISTIAN

Anger and unforgiveness destroy life. As Christians, forgiveness must be our central daily work if we are to guard our hearts against hate and bitterness and walk in love with Jesus.



Every speck of dust we see in the eye of a brother or sister must be measured against the great splatters of mud that cloud our own vision.

Most of the time we take forgiveness for granted. We make an effort to forgive and think we are free of the hurt, but then a situation comes up that triggers old emotions, and we are back into the hurt and bitterness again. We fool ourselves when we think enlightened willpower is enough to overcome dark resentment, jealousy, bitterness, and fear we have held inside for so long. As Christians, we should recognize that unforgiveness is a sin issue that cannot be remedied through our striving. We can spend all of our emotional energy trying to cope with our hurts and wind up frustrated over how little headway we have made in changing those deep feelings. Without the power of Jesus, we can expect little relief.



Forgiveness only gets done when it is taken to the cross.

We naturally expect anger and unforgiveness to be directed toward strangers who may have hurt us or toward those with whom we have not developed close relationships. The truth is that we are more likely to retain hurts from those who are close to us, such as a spouse, a parent, a child, or some other family member. Whenever we experience hurt at the hands of those we care about the most, it is more difficult to be forgiving.

Marriage is the most vulnerable relationship in which hurt and unforgiveness can happen. Happiness and success in marriage require exercise in the art of forgiveness twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, three hundred sixty-five days a year.

Let us (John and Paula) share with you some of the things we have learned about forgiveness-both through our own marriage and through many years of prayer ministry.

FOUR LEVELS OF WOUNDING THAT REQUIRE FORGIVENESS

1. Bruise

A bruise is a surface-level wounding that can be healed easily if treated promptly and properly. Bruises or abrasions require forgiveness moment by moment.

It is relatively easy to forgive people when we understand that the hurts were not malicious acts. We realize they were just insensitive, they made errors in judgment, or they unthinkingly had a slip of the tongue. Even though the events caused some pain, we know they weren't something done with premeditation or out of spite. Feelings can be caught before they get out of hand, and an irritable response in retaliation can be avoided. It's like saying, "This act wasn't intentional. Taking an angry and unforgiving stance is unjustified. I will clearly make my feelings known and choose to be forgiving."

If we don't take ourselves too seriously, many of those unintentional hurts can be dealt with by applying humor. We need to sort through our feelings and learn the difference between situations that require a real miracle of forgiveness and those that can be caught on the fly and dispatched with a sprinkling of lighthearted grace. By catching feelings as we experience them, we can keep problems in perspective and avoid hooking into whatever feelings are left in our heart that haven't yet been dealt with by the Lord.

Unthinking acts

An illustration of this is the irritation we (John and Paula) used to have in our family over letting pets in the house. John used to feel sorry for our dog Holly, who would beg at the door. He would let Holly in and then forget she was inside. Later, when we had gone to bed and were all snuggled down for the night, we would begin hearing weird sounds-of a dog eating houseplants and chewing on furniture! Holly was teething. Left alone in the house, she chewed on whatever was available.

This was very irritating to me (Paula). Each time it happened, I had to exercise a choice whether or not to forgive John's lack of awareness and his lack of responsibility. I would tell myself that John let the dog in, but he did not intend for the dog to do all those destructive things.

Since this happened again and again, forgiveness became a struggle, but it got easier as I reminded myself that the issue of John letting the dog stay in the house at night was not all there was to our marriage. The destructive thing that often happens in marriages is that each partner allows the irritation of the moment to become so intense that they respond in ever-increasing levels of anger and resentment until they become tyrannized by the feelings of the moment.

John: Catching irritants in life and dispatching them moment by moment does not mean that we just dismiss irritants as unimportant. They may not be worth elevating to a major issue, but they must be dealt with on some level rather than just

stuffing them down inside. This usually means simply making the other persons aware of issues, hurts, or disappointments and telling them that we are willing to forgive if they are willing to ask forgiveness-and then learning to forgive instantly anyway, even if they are unwilling to ask for forgiveness or even admit they were at fault.

When someone asks to be forgiven, don't say, "It's OK." It's not OK. The offender needs to hear the words, "I forgive you." If we excuse the hurt by saying it's OK, we may be indicating that what the person did had no power to affect us-that the person is not important to us.

Forgiveness is a necessary, moment-by-moment, day-by-day exercise, because letting little things mount up creates the proverbial mountain out of a molehill. Paula had to learn not to say, "It's OK" but instead say, "It's not OK what you did, John, but I forgive you. And honey, would you please pay better attention next time."

Insensitivity

We put in a vegetable garden almost every year, which has consistently been the talk of the neighborhood because God has blessed it so beautifully. John has always been proud of our garden. In the early years of our marriage he was so anxious and excited to share that he would gather all the produce and bring it into the kitchen. Piling it all over the table and cabinets, he would say with great enthusiasm, "Look, honey, aren't we blessed!"

Surveying that mountain covering every available space in the kitchen, I would feel anything but blessed-and my response reflected it. When the corners of my mouth went down and the pitch of my voice went up, John felt as if I was raining on his parade. He felt I didn't appreciate his gifts-or him.

I had to forgive him for not realizing how overwhelming it was to me. Subsequently, John learned not to bring all the produce into the kitchen, but instead to put it on a table on the back porch where I could take a little at a time and process what I could handle without feeling burdened. Then we could both share the joy of the bounty.

Error in judgment

John has always had a propensity to lose track of time. When he was in the pastorate, he would be out calling on parishioners, and his stomach really had to rumble loudly before he remembered it was mealtime. He wore a wristwatch, but he continually forgot to look at it. I would be at home, warming and rewarming the meal, steaming within myself.

Then he would crash through the door saying, "I'm starved to death!" as though I had not already prepared the meal. Again and again, I had to choose to forgive so that this pattern didn't get blown out of proportion. Surprisingly, when I learned to forgive and not make such a big issue out of his tardiness, he was more able to remember mealtimes. Then when he did become tardy, he would pop in the door and say something

like, "Oh, honey, I'm sorry. I lost track of time. Will you forgive me?"

When we forgive people, we expect it to have the desired effect. They should learn the lesson. The next time it happens, it's harder to forgive because apparently they didn't learn the lesson. What we need to understand about forgiveness is that it seldom results in the offending party doing an about-face by learning a lesson. For many years, I served overcooked, scorched meals and had to keep on forgiving. If forgiveness isn't at the center of a marriage, you just can't make it.

Unintentional hurt

John loves to bring people home for dinner-unannounced! Usually that's OK, because with so many kids around we almost always have plenty of food prepared. On one particular occasion John brought a friend, Mike. For Mike, coming to dinner at our house was a special treat. He came all dressed up, bearing a gift. John had forgotten to tell me Mike was coming! On that particular day all we had was leftover hamburger casserole! I was embarrassed and had to try really hard to be forgiving. Though John neglected to tell me, it was not intentional.

John is still too quick to invite someone to dinner or to spend the weekend. Sometimes he doesn't stop to count the empty beds or to check our schedule. For a long time, when John would do this, I would laugh a "gallows laugh;" suppressing

my anger, and make do. Then I began to forgive and actually chuckle when it would happen.

Forgiveness for life's constant unintentional hurts is not only a necessary discipline, but it is also what keeps the joy of love in relationships.

2. Cut

A cut is a more serious wound that perhaps was inflicted intentionally. The hurt produces immediate, personal pain and will require special treatment to achieve forgiveness and healing.

Think about it. What situation is most likely to cause your emotional temperature to rise-your threeyear-old accidentally bumping over a glass of milk at the dinner table, or your threeyear-old looking you straight in the eye and deliberately pushing over a glass of milk? Normally we're able to deal calmly with a child's "devilish" behavior, but when an adult peer does something we interpret as deliberately hurtful, we really have to work at being willing to forgive. Hurts that cause crises of forgiving usually have three characteristics:

1. The hurt is personal.
2. The wounding act seems very unfair.
3. The pain is felt deeply.

Each of the three tends to complicate our ability to move toward forgiveness. When someone else is hurt, we can be more understanding or objective toward the dynamics of the situation because we don't feel the pain personally. But when we're the object of the wounding, there is no emotional buffer. The affront is firsthand, the injustice is ours to bear, and subsequent feelings penetrate deeply. The more personal the hurt and the more unjust the act, the more difficult is the task of calling forth the will to forgive.

This kind of wounding often occurs when we have been passed over for a job promotion we feel we deserved, when we are slighted by a friend and not included in a group or activity, when a parent or other family member shows favoritism, or when we generally feel discounted or undervalued by someone we care about. We feel the "cut" when we suffer the consequences of someone else's selfishness, when they deliberately do something to "get even" with us, or when we feel they have deliberately tried to embarrass us by making us look bad.

3. Open wound

An open wound is a major hurt lodged in the heart that cannot be treated just by our own understanding or desire to change our feelings. The pain continues despite our consciously wanting to forgive.

When we have been intentionally hurt by a person unrepentant of the injury, we are less motivated to forgive at

the time of the wounding. The hurt becomes a constant affront to us. The wound festers, we become resentful, and deep resentment or bitterness sets in. When feelings overcome reason and resentments penetrate so deeply that choosing to forgive seems impossible, then our unforgiveness has become "lodged in the heart."

A story is told of a person who experienced the intensity of this kind of personal pain when, during an argument precipitated by divorce proceedings, the spouse pulled a favorite family photo from the refrigerator door and ripped it to pieces in the partner's presence. That callous act penetrated deeply into the heart, not because of the value of the photo, but because of who did it and the way the act was maliciously intended to cause pain by showing disdain for the family.

Similar scenarios are acted out in the lives of thousands of people daily:

- H A cutting remark designed to humiliate one's spouse in front of friends
- M A jilted lover telling lies to soil the reputation of a former sweetheart
- I A fellow employee sabotaging the work of a friend in order to make himself look good and get the friend's job
- I A trusted employee embezzling money

-I A sibling purposely not invited to family gatherings

These are the kinds of personal affronts that can hurt deeply. Unless they are dealt with quickly and thoughtfully, the wounded feelings can fester into bitterness.

Forgiveness must always begin with a choice-a willingness to release bitterness about the one who wronged us so that we ourselves might be healed of the hurts. Once we understand the destructive nature of unforgiveness and the lingering poison it infuses into our spirits, we should desire to choose forgiveness out of the pure logic of its benefits.



We may want to forgive because we recognize the benefits of forgiveness, but our wanting is not enough.

Overcoming unforgiveness at such a deep level is extremely difficult. A desire to be forgiving is still essential to begin the process, but the actual achievement of forgiveness is something we must learn to turn over to the Lord to accomplish for us. We are, in a sense, driven to the cross.

Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard

his spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.

-JEREMIAH 13:23

We cannot dislodge growing roots of bitterness (our spots) by ourselves. We must learn how to let the Lord Jesus Christ rid us of hurts that have taken root at such a deep level.

We may not always be aware of how negative our feelings are because what the mind does to handle hurtful situations is often a puzzle, even to ourselves. When we are wronged by another person, we may not respond in anger immediately. We might say, "Oh, that's all right" Or, "It doesn't really matter." With good intentions, we suppress our anger and then later spend time rehearsing, "Now I know what I should have said!"- not as though we really should have spoken. By that time, bitter feelings have sent down deep roots.

Christians are taught to be loving, thoughtful, and forbearing, so we often try to handle hurtful situations through rationality alone. We think forgiveness can be accomplished simply by choice, or that time and distance will heal all things. We sublimate feelings and rationalize the hurtful situation by saying something like, "He's always so busy he just forgets:"

Or we try to understand why someone might choose to hurt us, and we decide to be compassionate: "He's really meanspirited, but I guess that's just the way he was raised." We think our choosing to act compassionately accomplishes

forgiveness. But in fact, forgiveness is not done until we take our hurts to the cross, giving our deep feelings to the Lord for Him to put them to death and to restore a right spirit in us.

At the heart of the model prayer of Matthew 6:9-13 is the request for God to forgive us as we forgive our debtors (or our abusers). It takes a lot of humility to pray that part: "Forgive me as much as I forgive my abusers."

Are you kidding, Lord?

No, He's not kidding. But He will help us forgive, because forgiving abusers requires supernatural help.

When God asks us to forgive abusers, some misunderstand Him to mean that the abuser will get off without a penalty. This is not true, because God provides judgment and renders justice far better than we can do. God loves us and does not want us to suffer. He wants us to be free from the pain of abuse and free of the pain we bring upon ourselves through our own vengeful judgment.

The Lord Jesus Christ took the vengeance of all mankind to the cross, but only those will be forgiven who submit their lives to Him who died for their sins. All others will have to reap the full measure of penalty for the grief they sow. We should leave vengeance to be handled by the Lord. (See Romans 12:19.)

When hurts have lodged deeply in the heart, the process of

giving our unforgiveness to the Lord has no simple formula from which we can always expect immediate and surprising results. Giving our unforgiveness to the Lord requires that we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. We must accept Him as the Son of God who has authority and power to forgive sins, to overcome death, and to make us into new beings. We must come to Him repentantly so that we become malleable spirits in whom Jesus can work His transforming miracles.

At such times, coming into the reality of forgiveness may require returning in prayer to the Lord again and again each time old feelings emerge. We can fool ourselves into believing forgiveness is accomplished and rationalize away our feelings. One of the best tests of whether or not forgiveness is accomplished occurs when someone starts criticizing the person who caused the hurt and we have no desire to add to it.

4. Crippling injury

A crippling injury is a deep wound of the spirit resulting in pervasive attitudes of unforgiveness toward life. The actual wound or its ramifications may not be consciously remembered.

Traumatic experiences of early childhood can be imprinted in the mind and cause difficulty in adolescent, teen, and adult years, even though there may be no conscious remembrances of the traumas. For example, when a child is given up for adoption, the child's personal spirit knows it, and the spirit grieves for the natural parents. This grieving must be dealt with

as a process of forgiveness, but it is difficult to accomplish in a young child who does not yet know how to distinguish feelings and give them over to Jesus.

A child born into a family under financial stress or emotional turmoil among family members may be deprived of the love, attention, and positive nurture required to build basic trust. This can result in a deep-seated response of feeling abandoned or of anger toward parents. That unforgiveness lodged deep in the heart is often expressed in destructive behaviors that do not seem to be immediately connected to the early childhood trauma. The root causes of those woundings need to be uncovered and forgiveness accomplished in order to produce healing. This search from "fruits to roots" will often require help from an experienced prayer minister to reveal the sources of hidden woundings and to initiate the healing process through forgiveness.

When emotional, physical, or sexual abuse has been experienced as a young child, and the child has suppressed such extremely hurtful feelings as a means of survival, the hurts remain deeply lodged in the heart and spirit. If we were abused growing up (and we all were to some extent), then we have shame. As children, we thought we must really be bad kids to deserve this kind of treatment. This shame is false guilt.

As adults, we continue to carry that shame and continue to suppress our feelings to avoid bringing the memories to consciousness. We may also develop addictive behaviors to

distract our minds and feelings from the pain of the false guilt. We carry that pain until we see the truth and begin the process to forgive the abuser and ourselves.

Such emotional scars can cause continuing problems throughout life unless they are dealt with in a decisive way through the intercession of Jesus to accomplish forgiveness.

Not all childhood traumas are a result of intentional abuse. Oftentimes simple, unthinking acts can be very devastating to a child. For example, a seven-year-old has been working all morning on a drawing, and she comes running to show it to her daddy. She jumps into his lap and wants him to share in her pride and joy. But Daddy is in the middle of an exciting football game on TV. He pushes her aside angrily and scolds her for being in the way, making him miss an important play. His little girl's enthusiasm bursts like a balloon. She feels wronged and rejected.

How can a seven-year-old girl tell her daddy how that makes her feel? She probably doesn't try. But that hurtful experience, as well as many more similar experiences, weighs heavily on her fragile spirit. She may eventually lose memories of individual events, but the cumulative effect becomes lodged in her heart. When hurts are so ingrained in the heart that they express themselves in bitter attitudes toward life, forgiveness is the toughest to accomplish, and release can seldom be achieved in one session of prayer. Forgiveness has to be worked at for a long time, with many prayers, in order to dislodge ingrained

feelings and wash them away.

If your father ignored you when you were a young child, you probably developed a father vacuum. If your mother ignored you, you would tend to have a mother vacuum. These are like holes in our souls that cause us to crave love and attention. If parents don't fill the vacuum, other people can, and we must seek out the healthy, nurturing people who can love us back to life.

We cannot depend on parents to nurture self-worth into us, and we should not cling to the fantasy that they will change someday and finally come through with the quality of love we need. Through Jesus, we can cut the umbilical cord of dependence on unhealthy or incomplete nurture. We can submit to His love and be free because He connects us to God, our heavenly Father, who alone is completely faithful and completely trustworthy to provide for our deepest needs.



The chart below gives an overview of four levels of wounds that result in unforgiveness, along with a description of the character of the pain commonly experienced and the response needed to work through the process of forgiveness.

Woundings and the Forgiveness Process

Wounds and Wounding Events	Characteristics of the Pain	Response Needed to Achieve Forgiveness
"Bruise" • Unintentional hurt • Insensitive act • Error in judgment • Slip of the tongue • Irritability, quarrelsomeness • Gossip <i>Offender is immediately repentant when confronted.</i>	Surface irritant • Causes inconvenience • Creates distraction • Produces disappointment • Temporarily affects openness • Short-term discomfort	Forgive on the fly • Consider the logical benefits of forgiveness. • Catch issues and deal with them in the moment. • Relate to the offender with lighthearted grace and sense of humor.

Woundings and the Forgiveness Process

Wounds and Wounding Events	Characteristics of the Pain	Response Needed to Achieve Forgiveness
"Cut" • Intentional wounding • Disloyalty • Unfairness • Dishonesty • Embarrassment • Getting even <i>Offender becomes repentant when confronted.</i>	Hurt penetrates • Feels like a personal affront • Violates sense of justice • Creates feelings of being discounted, disrespected, unprotected, and uncared for	Proactively choose to forgive • Define boundaries and mutual accountabilities. • Choose forgiveness in the moment for repentant offenders. • Release hurts before they fester to bitterness. • Seek reconciliation.
"Open wound" • Premeditated wounding • Malicious offense • Constant criticism • Selective withdrawal of affection • Bitter betrayal • Planned revenge • Public humiliation <i>Offender is unrepentant and may continue behavior.</i>	Pain becomes lodged in the heart • Hurt felt as deeply personal • Pain is repeatedly rehearsed. • Anger causes wound to fester. • Blame often verbalized • Resentment becomes lodged in the heart.	Repent of judgments; take unforgiveness to the Lord as sin issue • Pray repeatedly for forgiveness to be achieved. • Depend on God. • Establish clarity about future relationships with abuser. • Bless those who hurt you. • Patiently endure the long process of forgiveness.
"Crippling injury" • Deep traumatic experiences in early childhood • Repeated long-term hurts • Unresolved grief • Deprivation of love, nurture • Emotional, physical, sexual abuse • Traumatic loss • Terror of being out of control <i>Offender is unrepentant and often not specifically identifiable.</i>	Deep wounds of the spirit • Loss of basic trust • Feeling of abandonment • Deep-seated anger • Feelings of rejection • Mistrust and hostility • Powerlessness • Lingering anxiety • Pervasive fear • Feelings of victimization • Bitter attitude toward life • Isolation, withdrawal	Seek help in tracing fruit to root • Acknowledge unforgiveness. • Pray for inner healing, death to old self, and restoration. • Replace old patterns with resurrected life. • Bless those who hurt you. • Continue a commitment to choose forgiveness. • Patiently endure the long process of healing.

IS UNFORGIVENESS LODGED IN YOUR HEART?

Test yourself with these six questions to discover if there is any unforgiveness lodged in your heart.

1. Does remembering a particular hurtful event trigger an emotional reaction or even revulsion?

If thinking about a hurtful situation causes strong negative emotions or even physical shuddering, that suggests forgiveness is not complete. The hurt is still alive.

Many people fear reliving their hurts, so they do their best to suppress all painful memories. They fool themselves into believing negative feelings will somehow go away: "Maybe those old hurts will quit causing me pain if I just don't think about them."

This often happens in cases of divorce and in fragmenting quarrels between siblings or between parents and children. Rather than deal openly with conflict issues and work through forgiveness, people choose to cut themselves off from the conflict completely, as though the event never happened and as though the other person never existed.

We know of one Christian mother who was so upset her daughter had chosen to marry a man of another race that she declared her daughter dead, insisted on holding a funeral, and forbade anyone in the family ever to speak of her again. Her prejudice and deep-seated unforgiveness continued for nearly

twenty years, even after the death of her daughter's husband.

That kind of attitude is certainly no solution-especially in the case of broken marriages where children are involved or in families in which relationships cannot be separated without further hurting other family members who stand in the breach and love both alienated parties.

Time can be therapeutic, but it is not true that time heals all things. Painful experiences lodged in the heart have a way of springing to life again, triggering long suppressed feelings:

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God;
that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble,
and by it many be defiled.

-HEBREWS 12:15, NAS

You may think you have forgiven and forgotten. But if memories stir up another round of pain, it may be that you have merely worked hard at forgetting, and forgiveness has not become complete. It is always better to accept the pain of remembering and endure the discipline of repeatedly choosing to forgive so that the Lord can fully accomplish forgiveness in you. When forgiveness is complete, remembering the event will no longer cause pain. Events can then be seen as valuable lessons learned and illustrations of the triumph of God's grace in producing healing and renewal.

2. Does the stress of remembering hurtful events cause physical reactions or discomfort?

Memories of unforgiven events can often produce as much pain as the original event itself. Body language can be very telling. We should pay attention to how our body reacts physically when we think about a situation that caused pain in the past. Do shoulders tighten? Do teeth grind or fists clench? Does remembering bring on indigestion or stomach cramps? Does the memory trigger depressive feelings or a desire to retreat into sleep? Is sleep disturbed? Or does the remembrance send us to the refrigerator for food to comfort our emptiness?

If remembering hurtful situations causes such physical symptoms, then unforgiven issues most likely remain lodged in the heart.

3. Does the painful experience bring to mind anything for which God can be praised?

Many of us have difficulty admitting we sometimes have anger toward God. We make mistakes or suffer because of the sins others inflict upon us, and then we hold God responsible:

A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the LORD.

-PROVERBS 19:3

We often deliver misdirected blame when we think what happened to us was unfair. We ask, "Where was God if He's good and loving? Why did He let this awful thing happen? Why didn't He rescue me?"

This is often the case when a child is stricken with a terminal illness, a family member is killed in a senseless automobile accident or one's home burns to the ground. The unavoidable question is, "Why did God let this happen?"

We need to be honest by confessing to God our anger against Him. Of course God is not guilty of anything, and He is not in need of our forgiveness. Our anger and unforgiveness are our own. They grow out of the frustration we feel at being out of control. When unforgiveness is lodged in the heart, it is difficult to see any way God may be using the situation to bring blessing or to write wisdom into us. Afterwards, when we have achieved forgiveness, we can verbalize lessons learned and thank God for bringing us through painful experiences with positive outcomes.

For example, our aunt who lived in Coffeyville, Kansas, tragically lost a young son when he went into shock during a routine tonsillectomy. At the time of her child's death, it was a grief almost too much to bear. But what grew out of that tragedy was her development of wonderful empathy for those suffering the loss of a loved one and an ability to compassionately minister to them in their time of deepest need. For more than fifty years she became a veritable angel of mercy, ministering to those in her community who suffered tragic loss.

When forgiveness is complete, we direct no blame toward God for what has happened to us. Our ability to enter into worship will again be free and fulfilling. This can be a clue for

us. Whenever we praise God and anticipate a blessing from Him, but nothing comes, one of the reasons may be that we are holding on to hidden anger toward Him. That blocks blessings He has for us. When forgiveness is complete, our hearts will be open toward God and toward others.

When forgiveness is complete, we will enjoy the coming of a sense of relaxation about what happened to us. We come to know from our experiences, not merely mentally, that God produces lessons of value in any and all circumstances of life:

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

-ROMANS 8:28, NAS

4. Can the offending party be thought of with a sincere wish that good things will happen in his or her life?

Forgiveness holds no grudges and wishes no penalties of retribution. It wipes clean the slate on which we formerly kept score and allows us to wish only the best for the other person. Forgiveness restores love and promotes reconciliation. The apostle Paul taught the bickering Corinthian church members:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

-1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-5

For the sake of wisdom, we need to remember lessons learned through trials and hardships, but we should have no continuing desire to keep score. Many people grant forgiveness in condescending ways while actually preserving mental catalogs of infractions. If their provisional forgiveness is revoked later on, the list of past infractions is then produced as ready ammunition.

Forgiveness means letting go of grudges and bitterness, moving on without dragging baggage from the past. When forgiveness is complete, we can look back with relaxation and be able to see something of value in the experience.

As well-known authors and leaders in a ministry, we have had to endure difficult exercises in forgiveness because our ministry has been attacked again and again, especially in an influential and widely circulated book. The author, whom we have chosen not to identify here, attacked our ministry and every other ministry having anything to do with inner healing. Our first reaction was to become furious because what he said about us in his book was not true. He made many false assumptions that revealed he had not bothered to research our books or to find out what we were actually teaching.

Our greatest anger was because so many people who needed inner healing were being turned away by falsely based criticism, and the legitimate inner healing they had already experienced was being undermined. Disruption of meaningful

ministry is still going on through the shadow of doubt cast by his attacks. The very concept of "inner healing" has become suspect in some circles.

Still today we find ourselves driven back to that daily discipline of forgiveness. We must continually choose to forgive and go to God in prayer to allow Him to accomplish in us what we cannot truly do on our own. The Lord says to us very clearly every day, "FORGIVE! Unforgiveness is a poison. It doesn't produce life. It brings death. Bless those who persecute you."

If we are dying due to our own unforgiveness, how are we going to bring life to anyone else?



If we want people to change from darkness to light, we are to bless them and pray for goodness to come to them.

When we forgive, we bless. We have chosen to do that. We pray blessing on the life of whoever has attacked us, and we leave it up to God to decide what form that blessing will take.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not.

-ROMANS 12:14, NAS

For many years Ami and Tony Lincoln lived next door to a neighbor who seemed impossible to get along with. Visitors coming to the Lincolns' home sometimes had to step off of the narrow driveway onto this neighbor's yard to get out of their cars, and he made it known that he considered that an invasion of his property. The teenage boys at the Lincoln household were a special irritant to him in summer when they played their stereo with the windows open.

The sound of a hard-to-start motor on a winter morning was sure to inspire the neighbor's angry and profane yelling about the noise. But in spite of the irritants, the Lincolns were willing to forgive.

Then, in the midst of this continuing neighborhood saga, the Lord spoke to Tony one day, saying, "Bless him!"

"But, Lord!" Tony replied. "You know we've forgiven him again and again."

"I said bless him!" came the clear message again.

So Tony obediently began to bless his neighbor in prayer. After that, the older of Ami and Tony's boys had a surprisingly peaceful talk with the neighbor, which set the record straight on a number of past issues. Then the miracle began to grow.

We had the privilege of watching this formerly hostile man

transform into a kind, generous person who obviously enjoyed doing things for others. We marveled as he talked with the teenage boys as if they had long been buddies. What a wonder the Lord can work when we choose to bless and not curse!

5. Has saying "I forgive you" produced a sense that forgiveness really has been accomplished?

Are you being honest with yourself about how you really feel? Is forgiveness coming from your heart, or do you find yourself saying something like, "I did it, Lord. You told me I had to do it. I made that choice, and I am a loving and forgiving person." If you are forgiving primarily because you know you should, it may mean you are just going through the motions without forgiveness becoming a real part of you.

Check your feelings and symptoms.

When you think about the persons who previously hurt you ...

- Do you generally feel OK about them, with no sense of lingering hurt or bitterness?
- Do you feel a loving warmth and desire for their success and happiness?
- Do you feel an empathetic hurt for their hurts without a private sense of pleasure that perhaps they are getting what they deserve?
- Do you miss having fellowship with them and wish you could restore relationship (even if wisdom tells you that you can't)? If you happened to see them

walking down the sidewalk toward you, would you be happy for the encounter, or would you want to cross the street to the other side or duck into a store to avoid having to meet them?

-Are you able to feel comfortable about opportunities of being around them? If invited to a meeting or a party where you know they would also attend, would that spark joy in your heart for the opportunity to see them, or would you decline to attend so you wouldn't have to be around them?

Before a comfort level can be reached toward those who have hurt us, it likely will require time, a conscious effort to redirect negative attitudes, and a lot of turning to the Lord for help in healing wounded feelings. But ideally, forgiveness ultimately should produce reconciliation and perhaps even restoration of broken relationships.

Selfish and insensitive wounding

We (John and Paula) had a close friend in a parish years ago in whose home our children would often go to play. She would bake them cookies and do other nice things for them. We opened our hearts to her. We were vulnerable and risked with her. We shared with her and prayed with her about many things. Then we found out that she was circulating throughout the community and talking about the private things we had shared with her.

She also twisted some things that were said and invented others that had never happened. She would state her own interpretations of events in our family life as though they were established facts. For example, when we were expecting our sixth child, she told people we did not want the baby. The truth was that this was a child we wanted and planned. But in her mind, she would not have wanted a sixth child, so she told that story to others. This was a mild betrayal compared to many others, but it was especially painful because we had let her inside our family and our hearts. Somehow, her betrayal of confidentiality hurt more than any persecution we had experienced in the church.

For a long while, even though I (Paula) wanted to forgive her and tried to identify with her feelings of insecurity that caused her to spread gossip, I had to choose again and again to ask the Lord to accomplish forgiveness in me. For a very long time I knew forgiveness wasn't accomplished because I could feel peaceful about her while away from her, but if I ran into her on the street or in a store, I would instantly feel uptight and would not go out of my way to greet her.

Overcoming this was a matter of going through a discipline of continual choices. I had to confess, "Lord I can't make this happen, but You can make it happen in me." Some time later, after we had moved away from that town, we went back to the community and passed her house. We saw that the family was home, and to my delight, something of joy leaped up in me. We stopped and went in to see them. We had a very pleasant visit,

and I recognized at that time that the Lord had healed our hearts so that John and I could really open to her and embrace.

She never apologized for what she had done. She had needed to feel important. Sharing these intimate things was a way she had of saying, "Look, I'm on the inside with them." It could be that she never realized how badly her actions had hurt us. That wasn't important, except perhaps for her and her relationship with the Lord. But the Lord managed to heal the hurt in us, and there is no longer discomfort in our hearts when thinking about or being with her-though wisdom cautions us not to share intimate things in our life, which could tempt her to err again.

6. Is forgiveness producing positive results?

When a lifestyle of forgiveness is effectively achieved, it will produce wonderful fruits in the way we feel about ourselves and in the quality of relationships we are able to have with others. Conversely, lingering unforgiveness results in insecurity, suspicion, criticism, and inability to be at peace with others and with ourselves. This is fact. It is one of the immutable laws of spiritual cause and effect so clearly unfolded for us in Scripture:

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

-MATTHEW 6:14-15

A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.

-MATTHEW 7:18

THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS

We characteristically have the most difficulty with others when our relationship with them triggers issues for which we have not forgiven ourselves. This is especially true between parents and children. For example, a father who regrets not having enough personal discipline to realize his own athletic potential as a teenager may be critical of his son's work ethic and experience resistance and difficulty with his son as he pushes him to excel in sports. Or a mother who regrets wasting her own educational opportunities by partying in college may be judgmental of her fun-loving daughter and press her too heavily to be more disciplined and to excel academically.

Usually, weaknesses we see and criticize in others (and find most difficult to accept or forgive) are those things about which we have not forgiven ourselves or in which we most fear being deficient. This is true in areas as divergent as personality traits, financial management, athletic prowess, or sexual behavior.

Look at what angers you in others. Look at the kind of person you just can't abide. You will likely see something in yourself that you have been unable to forgive. As Christians we have many undiscovered pockets full of grudges and unforgiveness.

We have convinced ourselves we are clean, when in actuality we may be seething inside with intolerance, fear, and hate-much of which is focused on the reflection we see of ourselves as we encounter others:

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

-ROMANS 2:1

Letting go of our denial and facing the truth about ourselves is a fearful step. The tension between the Holy Spirit pushing the truth up and our fearful minds pushing the truth down is known as anxiety. It is the fear of the unknown. Part of us is wise and wants to know the truth. Part of us is foolish and fears the truth. The Holy Spirit will only bring healing to those who are willing to be cooperative. We have to let go of our fear of the truth and trust God to forgive us as we are. Then we can begin to forgive ourselves and learn to relax in the shelter of God's grace.

Forgiveness of ourselves effectively dissolves many of our insecurities, fears, and self-deprecations. It allows us to let go of who we were in order to focus on who we are in Christ and who we are becoming. That in turn will enable us to cease our critical judging. When we have effectively forgiven ourselves, we can be more accepting of the frailties of others, seeking to encourage and develop them rather than to criticize or fear

what they represent.

FORGIVENESS OVERCOMING BLAME

Most marital problems are rooted in unforgiveness of parents. We transfer onto our marriage partner the job of fulfilling needs that were unfulfilled by our parents. We misdirect our anger and accusations toward our spouse that truly belong against our parents.

For example, you may believe in your mind that you have forgiven your parents for their slowness or negligence in complimenting, affirming, or recognizing you as a child. But in your relationship with your spouse you strongly demand constant presence and punctuality, undivided attention when you are talking, unfailing remembrance of anniversaries and birthdays, and affections that are expressed in just the right way.

This kind of behavior normally indicates lingering unforgiveness of parents who paid less attention to you than you needed. Disappointment and overreacting when your spouse doesn't perform according to your expectations usually indicates longstanding insecurity about being loved by parents and siblings.

Inability or unwillingness to forgive also breeds unfaithfulness. Constantly focusing on hurts, frustrations, or disappointments about what we want from our spouse creates temptations to look for needs to be fulfilled by other persons

outside the marriage.

This is especially insidious and deceptive in that we may be unaware of unfulfilled needs until someone else unexpectedly begins to fill them. We're caught off guard and into the beginning of an affair before we're aware.

When forgiveness is complete, we will find ourselves more at peace about what we did or did not receive in our childhood, and we will be delighted to discover ourselves being more tolerant, understanding, and accepting of what our spouse and others are able to give to us.

Dear God, creator and giver of all that is good in life,

I don't want to hold anything in my heart and spirit that could block my relationship with You, cause me to miss Your blessing, or prevent me from becoming all You created me to be. I recognize I have often suppressed my feelings, not realizing they could fester and become poison to others and myself.

Sometimes I have denied my real responses, pretending that everything was OK when it wasn't. And many times I have held on to anger and nursed irritations, making up speeches because I thought I had a right to feel the way I did. I confess there is much unforgiveness against others lodged in my heart. I don't know how to let

it go, but I am choosing right now to forgive for

I trust You, Lord, to enter the depths of my heart by the door of my repeated choices and make forgiveness real in me. Please forgive me for the ways my unforgiveness has afflicted others and grieved Your heart. Enable me to identify compassionately with the pain others feel.

By Your grace I ask for a blessing of love and wellbeing for those who have injured me. Amen.

Chapter Three Discussion Facing Truth and Reality

Review the four levels of wounding requiring forgiveness that are discussed in this chapter.

How many of these woundings can you identify as having happened in your own life? What are they?

Identify below the kinds of "pain" you have experienced in each of these situations. Check these feelings against the kinds of responses you have made at this point in your life. (See the third column of the chart on pages 39-40.)

Bruise:

Cut:

Open wound:

Crippling injury:

Uncovering incomplete forgiveness: If there is a person in your life who has hurt you deeply at some time and you believe you have forgiven him or her, apply the measures of determining whether unforgiveness is still lodged in your heart. (See pages 41-50.)

Share this evaluation with a friend or with your group members. Identify any clues you have discovered that indicate your forgiveness is not complete, and write them in the space provided.

Review the sections on "The Importance of Self-Forgiveness" (pages 50-51) and "Forgiveness Overcoming Blame" (pages 51-52). In what ways do you recognize yourself in these descriptions? As you write your answers on the lines below, pray for God's forgiveness and for the ability to achieve a greater degree of self-forgiveness.

CHAPTER_FouR_

THE PROCESS OF FORIVENESS

GIVING FEET TO OuR_Goo| INTENTIONS



Centuries ago, the prophet Jeremiah admonished the people that it was as difficult for them to escape their sin as it was for the leopard to change its spots. (See Jeremiah 13:23.) This wisdom applied to us means that ingrained patterns of thought and behavior are difficult, if not impossible, to change

by the efforts of our flesh. We shouldn't be surprised when our good intentions are not enough to overcome and reshape the deep issues of our hearts.

PREPARATION FOR MOVING TOWARD FORGIVENESS

The person who says, "Forgiveness has always been easy for me because I'm just naturally a forgiving person," hasn't really entered into what unforgiveness is all about and has no awareness of what is lodged in his heart. Even with the grace of Jesus, achieving forgiveness is not easy. The reason forgiveness is so difficult is that whatever has become lodged in our heart is, indeed, stuck there.



Unforgiveness gets stuck in us like rust on an old frying pan.

Unforgiveness is comprised of hate, no matter how much we have euphemized. We hedge our feelings by saying such things as, "Well, I've forgiven him, but I don't have to like him; and besides, he did that on purpose!" We hate people we blame for doing us wrong. Strikingly, we most often hate people who are closest to us. This doesn't mean we don't love

them. We are ambivalent creatures; we can love the people we hate and hate the people we love. Hate and love can live side by side in our hearts.

In reality, forgiveness is so difficult to accomplish because all our grudges are expressions of hate that have been given dwelling places in our heart. We don't like to think that we hate, but if we are not expressing love, we are really hating, and hate murders. Our grudges are sinful because grudges murder relationships between people and destroy God's purpose for us to live in unity. Grudges also are sin because they afflict the other person with energy that is spiritually wounding.

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.

-1 JOHN 3:14-15

According to Old Testament law, there was no remission of sins and no forgiveness without the sacrificial shedding of blood in worship to God. In St. Paul's letter to the Hebrew Christians, he reminded them of this fundamental requirement of the Mosaic Law. However, Paul taught that the blood sacrifice, required by God's law, was completely and everlastingly fulfilled through Jesus Christ, God's Son, who by dying on the cross became the sacrifice for all who would believe in Him and come repentantly before God for salvation.



Only through the blood of Jesus does God grant the power to cancel sin and grant forgiveness.

That is the first and most important lesson to be learned about forgiveness.

FORGIVENESS STARTS WITH YOU

In order for the power of Christ's forgiveness to work in us, we must make ourselves available in the following ways.

Believe that the Lord Jesus has power to accomplish forgiveness in us, through us, and for us.

If we have trouble letting that belief really penetrate into the doubting recesses of our heart, we need to affirm the power of Jesus in us by praying in confidence again and again:

Lord, I believe that what You did on the cross is effective for me. I believe that You live in me. I believe that as You live in me, what I can't accomplish in my flesh, You can accomplish in me, through me, and for me. I can't do any more than

choose to forgive. I don't know how to make anyone feel forgiven. I can't get it done, but I believe You can, and I trustingly give it up to You.

Be patient about what it will take to achieve forgiveness.

Logic should tell us that if we spend a long time building up practices of unforgiveness, it may take a long time to dismantle them. When we realize that we have unforgiveness lodged in the heart, it is natural for us to want to go immediately to the cross, pray about it, and root out the unforgiveness so we can get on with our lives. We are conditioned by our society to expect fast communication, fast food, and fast travel. We want instant gratification for our desires.

But that may be too easy. It may take a lot of patience to learn to do things God's way rather than according to our own wishes. Such a quick fix of an unforgiving heart would not teach us to become sensitive to other people. We would not develop openness and the wise understandings that are so essential for the healing of broken relationships and the maintenance of those that have been restored. The healing is of God, but the lifestyle of forgiveness grows through our faithful discipline of letting Christ live in us.

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over

all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

-COLOSSIANS 3:12-14

Prayerfully seek to become empathetic with those we perceive have wronged us.

Because the Lord wants us to come into true healing, it is as if He says to us, "You go through Gethsemane as I went through Gethsemane."

Let's consider what that means. On the night in which Jesus was arrested and tried, He went with His disciples to Gethsemane, a garden area in the Kidron Valley below the Mount of Olives, opposite Jerusalem. That night, in fervent prayer and anguish, Jesus struggled with and accepted the purpose of God-He would take upon Himself the burden of mankind's sins. He would drink the cup of wrath of the nations:

For thus the LORD, the God of Israel, says to me, "Take this cup of the wine of wrath from My hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send you, to drink it. And they shall drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword that I will send among them." Then I took the cup from the LORD'S hand, and made all the nations drink, to whom the LORD sent me.

-JEREMIAH 25:15-17, NAS

He would take into Himself and become our sin. His struggle

in the Garden of Gethsemane was not to accept having to die physically for us. He knew He had come from heaven to Earth for that very purpose. But He had never been separated from His Father. Sin separates!

Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart.

-PSALM 24:3-4, NAS

That spiritual death of separation from His Father by becoming our sin, thus unable to stand in the holy place of His Father's presence, was why He cried out, "Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from me; yet not My will, but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42, NAS).

Becoming our sin, becoming one with us, was necessary to fulfill the law of God. The next day He would die as a sacrifice that we might be forgiven and brought back into right relationship with God. Therefore, in the intensity of that Gethsemane experience, Jesus stepped across time and space. He became us in order to reap as us, for us, on the cross the death we were due to reap. Praying as the God-man, He identified with us, entered into us, and became our sin. Legally, He had to become our sin in order to reap on Himself what we were due to reap-death.

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

-2 CORINTHIANS 5:21, NAS

When we experience the Gethsemane prayer in relation to a person who needs our forgiveness, we are saying to the Lord, "Help me to empathize with him. Take me inside his heart. Let me feel his hurt, his fear, his doubt, his grief, his anger, his insecurity." Such an honest prayer is intended to open our minds and hearts to feel empathy with the very person who violated us. When we enter into oneness with Jesus as He identifies with the sin of the other, the lines that separate us get blurred:

- I We lose the sense of us (the good guys) and them (the bad guys).
- I We commence to change our attitude about being the wounded party or the noble martyr.
- M We start seeing what we may have done to cause the other to behave in hurtful ways.
- I We begin to sense what vulnerability in us drew harm from the other person.
- I We may also recognize how we both have been affected by the sin of all mankind.
- I Our prayers change from "O God, help me forgive that dirty rascal who doesn't deserve it" to "O God, we are caught in sinful reactions. Forgive us! We stand at the foot of the cross, both of us sinners,

crying out for mercy."

Apply this to your marriage or to a close friendship. It may seem to you that your partner is judgmental and continually wounds you with criticism. But when you enter into the Gethsemane prayer with Jesus, you enter into your partner's heart with empathy and understanding. You link that one's behavior with understanding of your own history and see that because of your response to those who have wounded you with criticism in the past, you have developed a pattern of actually drawing criticism from others.

Your subtle behavior of withdrawal, defensiveness, or even callousness defiles the relationship with your partner and draws him or her into judgment and criticism of you. Understanding this will enable you to see the situation from the other person's perspective rather than only from your own. You can begin to respond in openness rather than blame.

Repent of your own part in the subtle dynamics that cause relationships to be broken.

Freedom for us may come only when we learn to repent of those things in ourselves that draw people to hurt us.

Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.

-COLOSSIANS 3:9-10, NAS

We lie to ourselves and to each other when we insist we are lily white and that the other one, and only that one, is all wrong. With time, by the Gethsemane prayer, and with growing insight, we can gain an understanding of our enemies and ourselves in new and more humble ways. We are not as innocent as we at first perceived ourselves to be. And those persons whom we first saw as the enemy are no longer perceived to be unfeeling monsters. They can be seen as they truly are-weak, needy, and insecure, just like us.

That is the secret. When we can get into the depths of our feelings and those of others, we lose our sense of isolation. Let's say it again for emphasis. Say it aloud as you read: "We begin to feel at one with those who hurt us, and we cry out to God to forgive us our sin. We have sinned together."

We must pray as in the Garden of Gethsemane, to give up our self-righteousness, break through our self-imposed isolation, and overcome false feelings of martyrdom. That is the price we must pay. We must recognize our own sin and repent of it. Recognition of sin and repentance break the cycle and begin to set us free.

This may sound like a lot of work, and it is. But we should remember that it is the Lord Jesus Christ through His Holy Spirit who gives us the power to move through the process of forgiving and to be made new in His likeness.

Admit our own inadequacy to achieve forgiveness and humbly seek the Lord's help.

Like a child who is struggling unsuccessfully to pull a tightfitting sweater over his head, we may have to get to the point of crying out in frustration, "Somebody please help me with this!" We can overcome the old and be made new. The Lord expects us to become new creatures, living in forgiveness. He will equip us to do so if we come in repentance, asking for His help to overcome. He will free us of our old clothing of sin and clothe us anew in righteousness as we allow Him to live within us.

As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

-COLOSSIANS 3:12-13

SIX STEPS TO ACHIEVING FORGIVENESS

Ability to forgive is an individual matter and is influenced by one's personality, temperament, social and cultural standards, spiritual maturity, readiness, and relationship with God. No formula can be used to guarantee success. However, in seeking to move through the process of forgiveness, we have found the following steps to be very important.

1. Honestly desire to become free of the burden of unforgiveness.

No one can make you forgive, and forgiveness is not likely to

happen if you are motivated only by feeling you "should" or "ought" to forgive. You must genuinely want to experience forgiveness. If possible, clearly identify what is causing your anger, disappointment, frustration, or hurt. Identify who and what it is that you need to forgive, and then be able to say openly and honestly, "I choose to forgive."

Making such a choice may be very difficult, especially if the wound is fresh and the hurt is personal. Time helps to develop new perspectives less clouded with emotion. Logic about the benefits of forgiveness will mellow the hurt. And oftentimes an ability to respond in humor will break through the heaviness and become therapeutic.

A dear friend and fellow counselor tells of a time when she was ministering to a very angry young woman at a family camp. The young woman's husband had left her to marry a Catholic nun. The young woman was embittered by the hurt and rejection and was at a seemingly impossible impasse about reconciling herself to the divorce. She refused to be comforted, and choosing to forgive seemed totally out of the question.

"No, I can't forgive her!" she cried. "What kind of a nun is she anyway, to take away someone's husband?"

Finally, the prayer minister said to her, "I don't think we can go any further. The only thing I can ask you to do is to pray for grace.

The young woman looked up at the counselor, astonished,

and cried out, "That's her name! Her name is Grace!"

At that, the prayer minister couldn't contain herself and began to laugh openly. Then, the young woman started giggling and soon broke out in laughter, too. That was the very thing she needed to tumble her walls of anger, come into the presence of the Lord, and let the Holy Spirit begin the process of forgiveness to accomplish healing in her life.

2. Sit down with a fair-minded prayer minister or friend and talk over the situation that requires forgiveness.

Don't attempt to be your own counselor, because you probably will see the situation only from your point of view and in relation to your own hurts or bitterness. Talking this through with a prayer minister will give you the perspective of another person and allow you to clarify and talk out your feelings.

The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him.

-PROVERBS 18:17

Do not seek counsel from someone who obviously harbors grudges and judgments of his own. Choose a neutral person who has no stake in the situation that has caused the hurt. Choose a person who is a good listener, who is wise, and who will not make quick judgments.

A wise and fair-minded prayer minister or friend can perceive whether you are holding anger within and still have unresolved issues or bitter roots with which you need to deal. Be honest with your minister or friend. Listen and give serious thought to what he or she is saying. Then, with the guidance of your prayer minister or friend, take the issue to the Lord in prayer.

3. Pray specifically about the person or situation that is the focus of a forgiveness issue.

Identify and clarify what it is you need to forgive. Verbalize your feelings and your desire to forgive. Say aloud in prayer, "I forgive !" Be specific and detailed. Be real! Believe it in prayer, and expect the Lord to accomplish it as you continue to choose to forgive.

4. Do something to bless the one who has been forgiven.

Forgiveness is not a neutral act to be achieved only privately in the head and heart of the forgiver. To effectively free us from our burden, forgiveness must move from intellect to action. God's gracious gift of forgiveness is no gift at all if we quietly place it unopened on a shelf. To come into the fullness of its reconciling power, the gift of forgiveness must be unwrapped, cherished, and shared.

True forgiveness is demonstrated in our willingness to pray for and to facilitate good things happening in the life of the one who has hurt us. Without the outflowing of our blessing for the one who hurt us, we miss the point of our forgiveness and

fall short of the blessing of grace that God has for us:

All of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

-1 PETER 3:8-9

Let's look closely at what the apostle Peter is saying here. He directs us to repay with blessing, because we are called to bless so that we may inherit a blessing!

The very purpose of a Christian is to bless others. We are not to callously hold grudges, behave haughtily, or repay evil with evil and insult with insult. It isn't enough to put unforgiveness to death. We must then pray blessing into the life of the person who hurt us. When we do that, we receive blessing.

This principle is honored by God even on a national basis. After the defeat of Germany in World War I, France insisted that Germany be punished with burdensome reparations. These ultimately contributed to financial depression in Germany, social chaos, the rise of Nazi Germany, and the Second World War. Continuing unforgiveness against Germany blocked God's blessing from being realized, and the entire European continent suffered the consequences.

After World War II, the people and the government of the

United States pushed past the hurt and suffering of that cruel war and chose to bless its enemies. The people of Germany, Italy, and Japan were not punished. Rather, they were given our hand of support and friendship in order to rebuild socially, economically, and politically and in order to ensure future peace. Now Germany and Japan are strong economically and have become two of our staunchest allies.

The United States received blessings from that gracious act and will continue to be blessed so long as it acts in humility and compassion and seeks to bless other nations in need. Nations and individuals who live without compassion and return evil for evil write their own downfall.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

-ROMANS 12:14-18

Continuing in this section of the Scriptures, Paul says:

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to revenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something

to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.

-ROMANS 12:19-21

At first, this seems like a strange passage. We have heard a story from missionaries about how natives, when first exposed to this teaching, literally filled up containers with hot coals and dumped them on the heads of their enemies while they slept. The message here is more profound in its meaning and has been lost to our modern understanding.

In the time of the writing of this scripture, people didn't have electric and gas cookstoves, or even matches to start a fire. They cooked over an open flame between two little bricks on the floor, using dried camel dung, water buffalo chips, or little twigs. Fuel was in short supply, so nobody could keep a fire going all the time, and starting a fire was not an easy task.

One person in the village was appointed to keep a small fire going all night. In the morning he would add fuel to make a larger fire and let it burn down to glowing coals. Then he would take a scoop, place the hot coals in a metal brazier on top of a wooden block on his head, and go around from kitchen to kitchen, using tongs to deliver hot coals between the bricks so the women in each family could have their own fires to prepare the morning meal.

This practice of heaping burning coals on someone's head

gave birth to an idiomatic expression. To heap burning coals on someone's head is to turn him into a servant who brings the fire of love into the life and homes of others. Paul is saying that by returning good for evil and by blessing those who would hurt us, we turn the hurtful event around. Mean-hearted people who hurt others may be won over by our kindness and may become servants of God's grace in blessing others. Saul was holding Stephen's coat when Stephen was stoned to death. But Stephen prayed blessing for his persecutors, and Saul became the great apostle Paul!

How are we to bless those who have hurt us?

Start first by praying for them. Ask for God's will to be done in their life and for God's compassion, mercy, and grace to be with them. Then, seek to fulfill those admonitions clearly defined in Scripture:

- I Do not take revenge or repay evil for evil, but attempt to live in peace. If justice is due, leave it for the Lord to repay. Obedience to this command might be as significant as refusing to retaliate with acts of violence or choosing not to seek a punishing lawsuit. It might be as simple as choosing not to participate in gossip or speak unkindly of the one who caused the hurt.
- I Attempt to be kind and understanding and to live in harmony. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and mourn with those who mourn. Many hurtful

situations begin because one or both parties in a relationship feel slighted when the other person has been insensitive or has failed to give the recognition and respect they believe they are due. Taking the time to notice other persons and to express a sincere interest in their successes and their sorrows rebuilds many bridges.

+I Put aside pride and conceit, and be willing to associate with those you previously held in low esteem. Simply assuming a nonjudgmental attitude and being available for reestablishing relationships create an environment in which blessings can unfold naturally. This is a primary purpose of the Gethsemane experience, to "be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation" (Rom. 12:16, NAS). Or we could translate that: "Do not be self-righteous in your own estimation"-more righteous, that is, than the one who sinned against you.

-H Be available to graciously lend assistance in your enemys time of need. Take the opportunity to be encouraging and supportive. Actions speak more loudly than words. Kindness can break down longstanding walls.

If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.

-ROMANS 12:20

5. Be prepared to suffer hurt to fulfill God's purpose.

Sometimes God cannot reach a person He wants to save because the person won't listen. God might then prompt the rebellious one to hurt a Christian in order to set in motion a chain of events that will demonstrate the power of God's love and draw the rebellious one into belief.

If a Christian is true to his calling, he will go into the Gethsemane prayer when he is persecuted or hurt, become one with the other, and through the process of forgiveness begin blessing the one who hurt him. That act of forgiveness and subsequent blessing builds a bridge over which the love of God can flow into the rebellious person's heart.

Why do non-Christians persecute us? For many reasons, but one of the most important is that it may very well be that God is prompting them so that He may use those events to turn their hearts around, to bless them, and, subsequently, to bless others. This is why historically the blood of the martyrs has always been the seed of the church. God views this process of the Gethsemane prayer, forgiveness, and blessing as one of His most powerful evangelistic tools. Thus it is that our suffering can be used for God's purposes. We are His avenue of entrance to the hearts of God's recalcitrant children. That is why we must hold fast to Christ our Lord and His example of forgiving love. We must forgive others their sins against us and pray for

those who persecute and spitefully use us:

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But 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. It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

-1 PETER 3:15-17

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

-MATTHEW 5:11-12

Spend yourself in love for the person who hurt you. Christ's love in you will set you free. One of the primary purposes for the command to bless those who hurt us is to restore love in our hearts for them. This sets us free-and may be the Lord's way of causing that person to be healed and saved!

6. Seek reconciliation.

Though reconciliation may not always be possible, it is still that wonderful objective that completes the circle of

forgiveness. People who have been separated by pride and sin move past their differences by forgiveness and blessing and come together in new understandings and restored relationships. Let us share how one family has worked through a moving experience of forgiveness and reconciliation in their own lives.

In this story, a father found himself overwhelmingly disappointed, deeply hurt, and tremendously angry with his son and the family conflicts the son was going through. In the midst of the father's emotional turmoil over this, the Lord spoke to the father through James 5:16, saying, "How can you possibly be a minister of love and restoration to others when you have so much unforgiveness lodged in your own heart? Take responsibility for your feelings and reactions, confess your sins, and be healed."

Obediently, the father went to a trusted friend who could be honest and lovingly confrontative with him. He repentantly confessed without making excuses and received assurance of forgiveness for his judgments against his son.

A little while later, the son was totally alienated from his parents and was in jail. He refused to receive mail, phone calls, or visits from his parents. But the Lord impressed upon the father that he was to make the choice to forgive his son and go to the jail that afternoon to visit him.

Knowing that he would not be included in the visitor's list, the father had little hope of being able to see his son. But as he

stood in line to enter the detention center, he and the son saw each other through the window. The son mouthed the words, "What are you doing here?" The father replied, mouthing the words, "I love you! I'm praying for you, son!"

That encounter at the jail and the father's choice to repent of his own judgments and to forgive provided the basis for communication, reconciliation, and healing that is happening in the entire family now. The son has come into a new and open relationship with his parents and with the Lord.

We are moved by the beauty, pathos, and truth in Jesus's story of the prodigal son. We grieve over our own prodigal relationships and wish that somehow reconciliation could always be the happy ending toward which our life moves.

Some Christian apologists say that forgiveness is never complete until reconciliation is achieved. Others argue that in the realities of human relationships, full reconciliation may be unachievable and often not even desired.

Time and circumstances change us. We cannot experience the anguish of betrayal and the pain of alienation and remain the same persons we were. Nor can we expect the other persons to remain unchanged. Trauma makes us different.

Realistically speaking, reconciliation is never solely to return to the way things used to be. Reconciliation brings with it new parameters of knowledge, understanding, and feelings.

If we have forgiven another person and sincerely want that person back into our life, we must realistically ask a series of questions:

- I Between the fragmenting of our relationship and our coming into forgiveness, what has happened to each of us?
- M Does the other person want reconciliation? Has that person moved on to new commitments and new relationships?
- M Will the reestablishment of intimacy be constructive or destructive in the other's life and/or our own?

If too much water has passed under the bridge, we may have to adjust to what is now possible-or impossible-between two people who are quite different than they used to be. A love may become only a friendship. A dear friend may become no more than an acquaintance. Forgiveness may heal anger and bitterness, but realistically it may have to fall short of reconciliation or even of establishing a friendly relationship. We may have learned, the hard way, that we can't trust that person, so fullness of reconciliation and restoration may be impossible. But forgiveness through our Lord is always possible.

Such adjustments maybe less than what we want and may carry pains and griefs of their own. But moving toward the

freedom of forgiveness is worth the very best we have to give.

Lord Jesus Christ,

We bless You and praise You. You knew in Your wisdom that we would never be able to accomplish forgiveness on our own. And You knew that if we did not accomplish forgiveness, we would destroy ourselves and all our sins would be back on us.

And so we thank You, Lord, that You came and that on the cross You said, "It is finished." You took away the weight of our sin and our inability to forgive, and You died with it. Your death is our death. Your freedom is our freedom. Your life is our life.

We pray that we will learn again, hearing with a new heart, those things we have always known. May we hear from the depths of our hearts and be set free. Show us the places where we still hold grudges, where we are still angry. Show us how to walk out forgiveness with You and be free. Amen.

Chapter Four Discussion The Process of Forgiveness

Applying this chapter to your life is not merely a thought process-it will require an action plan to achieve forgiveness where unforgiveness issues continue to burden or cause you alienation from others.

Select an unforgiveness issue in your life. In a notebook, make a list of specific actions you can take in each area below. Be specific. Set a date and time and place to take action. Detail your plan. Carry out your plan, and keep a journal of your progress and your feelings about what is happening.

1. Identify whom and what it is you want to forgive.
2. Pray specifically about the person or situation. Repentantly confess your role in the alienation and ask for God's guidance and wisdom. Ask the Holy Spirit to achieve forgiveness in you.
3. Do something to bless the one who has been forgiven. Don't just pray blessing; take specific actions.
4. Be prepared to suffer further hurts or continuing rejection. Think through an appropriate response ahead of time in order to be prepared. Be patient, and give the process time.
5. Seek reconciliation with the offending party. Is this desirable? Is this reasonable? Is this possible?

CHAPTER-FIVE

FOI.GIVENESS AS A LIFESTYLE

OVEEQ COMING LIFE'S BITTER-ROOTS



Forgiveness is refreshment for our spirits. It is the essential lifestyle of Christians who are serious about faithfully following the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, many people view forgiveness begrudgingly as a duty that occasionally must be extended to someone who has done us dirty. We really don't want to think of forgiveness as a way of life to be lived in every moment and in every relationship.

Coming into the lifestyle of forgiveness is not easy. It is a process that begins with our will to forgive and is brought to completion through the power of Jesus Christ, who alone can work the necessary transformation in us.

In many ways we can compare the process of forgiveness to a skill that must be learned and practiced until it becomes as automatic as breathing. Think for a moment of what it takes to become competent on snow skis. Skiing requires mastery of fundamentals and considerable practice to combine balance, coordination, agility, and speed into a safe and exhilarating run. Similarly, playing a musical instrument requires learning to handle the instrument properly and spending many hours in practice to develop even a semblance of artistry. Skiing and performing on a musical instrument are skills that are wonderfully enriching. They are skills that can be learned, enjoyed, and put to good use. However, they are not skills essential to productive living.



Forgiveness is a necessary skill, an essential ingredient for living a productive life.

To the degree in which it affects who we are and how we relate to others in our world, the skill of forgiveness is more like walking, talking, and eating. We can do without skiing and without being able to make music. But if we don't learn how to walk, talk, or eat, we can't survive! If we don't learn the skill of forgiveness and practice it diligently, until we develop mastery over every wounding, we become severely crippled in our ability to relate to others and to live in harmony in our world.

Perhaps the most evident sign of holding unforgiveness in our hearts is the way we sometimes attack other people when we are wronged and become irritated. If the heart is full of unforgiveness, that's what naturally will be reflected in our speech. Look at what Jesus said:

For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.
The good man brings good things out of the good
stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil out of the
evil stored up in him.

-MATTHEW 12:34-35

It's not acceptable to unstop what is in our hearts, run off at the mouth, and pour intemperate negative feelings on others whenever we're stimulated. God will hold us accountable for all that we say and do. Forgiveness is necessary.

But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.

-MATTHEW 12:36

We are not talking about suppressing feelings. Legitimate feelings should be recognized, and they often need to be expressed. But we need to become aware of the vast difference between rehearsing feelings and attitudes and confessing them. We are in constant relationship with people who stimulate us-often to anger and hurt. In the name of honesty and in an attempt to defuse our angers, we can go around spilling all that is in our hearts, thinking that speaking feelings is the same as dealing with them. But without repentance and willingness to give our anger to Jesus to be put to death on the cross, what we actually are doing is continually rehearsing our negative feelings, which spreads strife and wounds hearts.



When we rehearse our grievances, they become more and more ingrained in us and can become permanently lodged in our heart.

If we are truly willing to deal with our issues and give our anger and bitterness to Jesus to be dealt deathblows, then

what comes from our mouths will be confession.

Jesus accomplishes forgiveness in us, but we must first repentantly confess our feelings and seek to forgive as a daily, moment-by-moment discipline. This must be practiced repeatedly, continuously, so that our heart is softened and our negative feelings become malleable to change. This opens us to receive the grace of Jesus Christ and leads to release and healing. Confession does not always have to be aloud to another person. James 5:16 says, "Confess your sins to each other." But we need to be careful about when and to whom. There is a fine line between confessing and gossiping. Proverbs 17:9 says, "He who repeats a matter separates intimate friends." Nevertheless, we must not let such proper reservations prevent us altogether. Confessing our sins is so important that we must not let any alibi stop us.

Paul encouraged those in the church at Ephesus to put their quarreling aside and to adopt the forgiving nature of God:

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

-EPHESIANS 4:31-32, NAS

In James we also find this sound advice:

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and

slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

-JAMES 1:19-20

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

-JAMES 1:26

With it [the tongue] we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.

-JAMES 3:9-10, NAS

We have to be aware that we must stop our intemperate remarks at the very beginning, because once a harsh, angry, or false word is spoken, the entire stream comes out. An ancient proverb says this in a very graphic way:

The beginning of strife is like letting out water, So abandon the quarrel before it breaks out.

-PROVERBS 17:14, NAS

The Bible can be very down to earth-no one can stop once he or she begins to urinate! Thus, the proverb means that once you begin to unleash your emotions in quarreling and strife,

you'll not be able to stop until it's all said and done. It warns that we have to practice a daily discipline of not letting ourselves speak in anger or bitterness, because once we speak it, we are into strife. We stimulate each other with negative feelings that invariably result in hassles that destroy us and the people we love:

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.

-JAMES 4:1-2

HURT BY THOSE WE KNOW THE BEST

It is easier to take criticism from a stranger than from someone we love. With strangers, we tend to play down the value of the comments or dismiss complaints as being "their problem." We can ignore their criticisms and walk away without being seriously affected. On the other hand, primary people in our lives have great capacity to hook into us and trigger passionate unleashing of our emotions. We react with more volatility to those we know and love because we care more about what they think and how they treat us. We have higher expectations of them to deal with us fairly and with kindness.

For example, if someone you hardly know insults you, how long does it take you to get over it? Most people say: "A

moment or two." "A flash prayer." "It's done in a few seconds." But if your wife, husband, father, or mother says exactly the same thing to you, how long does it take you to get over it? Some people have groaned and said, "A lifetime!" Others have said, "A long time, because it really hurts!"

Consider the impact these comments can have when they come from someone you love and live with:

-I "You never listen to me. You never hear a word I say!"

-H "You always criticize!"

-H "You never think how that might make me feel!"

-H "You're a failure as a mother!"

-H "Why can't you keep this house neat?" (when you live in a very small house with half a dozen children)

So we see that a word carelessly spoken by a loved one hurts. We begin to think, "What are they questioning? My worth? My performance? The love I have poured out? The years of service I have given? The sacrificial considerations I have given?"

Very quickly we can be undone! In our anger and hurt we begin to rehearse catalogs of how we have been treated unfairly. We lash out in anger to counter the injustice we feel:

-I "You don't do so good yourself."

-I "I don't see you doing much to help."

-I "You could:

"... carry a few dirty dishes to the kitchen."

"... not drop your dirty clothes wherever you take them off."

"... not leave newspapers strewn around the room.

"... clean up the messes you make."

"... supervise the kids once in a while."

it ... give me a break!"

Angry reactions stimulate counterreactions, and quarrels erupt. Continually rehearsing hurts turns them into bitterness, guaranteeing that unforgiveness becomes lodged in the heart.

To avoid this, we must check what is in our heart and, with the Lord's help, deal with our issues of unforgiveness at their root through short, immediate "flash prayers." This does not mean we should deny our feelings or suppress them. Rather, we should seek to understand why we feel the way we do, put our feelings in perspective to see how unbridled emotions can hurt us and others, and seek the Lord's help in coming into real forgiveness. This will have to be done momentarily, every day,

as a lifestyle of prayer and forgiveness.

RECOGNIZING OUR FALSE SENSE OF FORGIVENESS

The mystery of unforgiveness is that most Christians know they should be forgiving, but they understand very little how forgiveness is really accomplished. What typically happens is that when we experience a hurt, we attempt to handle the need to forgive by simply repressing our feelings. Or we attempt to deal with serious matters of the heart by handling them mentally. Feelings are thus denied, rationalized away, or simply shoved down inside.

We may go through the motions of praying forgiveness on the surface, unaware that our heart hasn't been in it and that forgiveness hasn't really happened.

This is the reason so many of us wind up fighting battles with each other and within ourselves. Our true feelings are neither defined nor dealt with. We think we have accomplished forgiveness, but we have mostly suppressed feelings in an attempt to "be Christian." In reality, suppression of feelings avoids dealing with them and creates a false sense of being a forgiving person. Then when the pressure of so many pent-up feelings becomes too great, an explosion of emotion erupts, and our stored-up, suppressed hostility comes spilling out.

Repression of feelings can often result in tragedy in the home. It is not uncommon for staunch Christian parents who are rigidly focused on uncompromisingly appropriate behavior

to be radically intolerant of the natural expressions of feelings their children have. Although they maintain controlled demeanors of gentility to the outside world, their anger and intolerance are suppressed to the point of extreme frustration, by which violence erupts in the home. The parents explode into frequent outbursts of verbal abuse, abusive spanking, and the setting of rigid rules to enforce behavior. The hypocrisy between public appearances and actual at-home behavior destroys trust, causes confusion, and fosters rebellion in the children. The structure of the entire family is put in jeopardy.

Only by going through a daily discipline of honestly acknowledging feelings, choosing to forgive, and coming repentantly to the Lord for help can forgiveness become a healthy lifestyle skill.

DAILY DISCIPLINE OF FORGIVENESS PRAYER

Discipline means consistency-consistency of staying in touch with our feelings of hurt, disappointment, rejection, and bitterness as they come up, moment by moment, each day. Individual hurts may seem like tiny barbs we can pass off by saying they don't really bother us. But when we become a pincushion full of needles, we start experiencing physical and emotional pain and discomfort that make life miserable. The healthiest thing we can do is to admit our feelings honestly and seek ways to constructively remove those painful barbs through forgiveness.

A daily habit of prayer is the most effective way to do this. Developing a habit of prayer doesn't mean we have to retreat into solitude and fervent supplication on our knees every time a negative feeling pops up or every time someone says something hurtful to us. We can stay tuned through "flash prayers"-instant turnings to God for immediate morsels of understanding, guidance, courage, wisdom, and release.

When a loved one says something hurtful that angers us, we can deal constructively with our feelings through a flash prayer, somewhat like the following, silently delivered to God:

Lord, those words hurt me, and I'm angry. Please help me understand why they were said. I repent of the role I may have played in causing this outburst. Put my negative feelings to death through the power of Your cross, and enable me to live in Your pure love and forgiveness. Amen.



Flash prayers allow us to admit our feelings, repent of our

sinful responses, submit ourselves to God's ability to accomplish forgiveness in us, and move on to live in the freedom and refreshment of God's grace.

Prayer is communication to and from God. Our prayers don't have to be pretty or formal. They can be a mere few words spoken in the midst of our confusion and delivered up silently in our minds. God asks only for honesty and the desire to come into relationship with Him.

The value of flash prayers is that they deal immediately with our needs. They save us from stockpiling our feelings, falsely massaging our situation until we can make sense of it, or taking fleshly control through our own strength and knowledge. We get ourselves into trouble when we postpone coming to God with our pain. He is the only one who can truly heal us. When we postpone coming to Him, we condemn ourselves to failure by trying to do it all on our own. The Lord has asked us to come to Him when we are weak and burdened, and He has promised us that He will give us rest.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.

-1 PETER 5:6-7, NAS

How should we pray? We should pray simply, honestly, and continually. We should establish a habit of prayer so that moment by moment we live in a discipline of forgiveness that

becomes a lifestyle.

Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

-1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18

UNFORGIVENESS AT THE ROOT OF OUR NATURE

Forgiveness becomes most difficult to achieve when a pervading attitude of unforgiveness exists because it is at the root of one's nature-when it has become built in (oftentimes unknowingly) as a practice of life. Paul describes this in Hebrews as a "bitter root" that has the capacity to defile others by its lack of grace.

See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

-HEBREWS 12:15

Unfortunately, many people do not understand what a "root" is in our spiritual and emotional makeup.



A "root" is a hidden, practiced way of drinking nurture or unnurture from God, others, ourselves, and nature.

Consider how the root of a tree functions. A tree is much more than what we see above the ground. It sends roots deep into the soil of its environment to drink nourishment. If the soil is good, the root system is healthy and strong, and the tree flourishes. Healthy roots enable a tree to hold firm to the supporting soil in stormy weather and give the tree resiliency to stay healthy in times of drought.

If the soil is bad, the root system will be weakened, causing the tree to languish or to fall. Without a good root system, a tree can easily be destroyed by disease or storms; it will not have the capacity to thrive in times of stress.

In Austin, Texas, there was an ancient oak tree called the Treaty Oak near the state capitol. It had been the site of many historic meetings in pioneer days and was much revered by the citizens of Texas. Several years ago, a man maliciously poured herbicide on the ground around the base of the Treaty Oak in a ritual designed to end his affections for his counselor at a

methadone clinic.' Despite desperate attempts by state botanists to treat the tree and purge the soil of poison, the root system drank the toxic chemicals, and the Treaty Oak began to die.

We drink nurture and harm from the soil of our environment in a similar way. A "root" is the way we reach into others through our spirits and through the structures we have built to drink either life or that which destroys life. Because we are mixed vessels, we do both.

Roots developed in earliest childhood become the very warp and woof of our nature. For example, a child who lived with parents who never gave him affection and continually shoved him aside is likely to have developed that style of relationship as his own root behavior. If we have not been lovingly and attentively nurtured, we will not have practiced habits of reaching into and expecting nurture from others. Rather, we will develop "bitter roots," which are practiced habits of not giving or expecting to receive nurture. Such bitter roots can cause the "heart of stone" referred to in Ezekiel 36:26 and 11:19. Healing requires that the bitter root be taken out—a wonder of transformation accomplished through the power of God:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

-EZEKIEL 36:26, NAS

What we experience in life, particularly in early childhood, imprints attitudinal and behavioral patterns in us so subtle we may be completely unaware why we think and behave the way we do. Our bitter roots may seem completely normal to us-until we enter into experiences in which our life patterns conflict with those of other people.

This is especially true when we get married and are called on to relate to our spouse in a level of intimacy never experienced before. If we have a bitter root of never learning how to drink nurture from another person, then we will not know how to receive nurture even when it is lovingly offered, or know how to give it. We will avoid intimacy, withhold affection, and not recognize sincere caring when our spouse reaches out to us. We will expect rejection, coldness, and manipulation. We will be suspicious or perhaps cynical about expressions of affection. Thus our bitter roots spring up to defile the marital relationship-and the entire family structure.

Our bitter-root structure can be so deep and so hidden that we are not even aware of its presence. Yet we continually drink harm that can negatively impact the lives of those around us and eventually destroy us. Every one of us has hundreds of bitter roots that affect our attitudes and behavior.

DRINKING HARM OR DRINKING NURTURE

How do we drink harm from God?

-I By falsely projecting onto Him the unwholesome

images and negative expectations we have developed through our experiences with our natural fathers and other authority figures. That false god, created from our misconceptions and judgmental responses to woundings, will inevitably poison our lives and the lives of others around us.

With the pure Thou dost show Thyself pure; And with the crooked Thou dost show Thyself astute.

-PSALM 18:26, NAS

How do we drinknurture from God?

- I By faithfully and thoughtfully grounding our root structure in the true and loving Father God, who is revealed to us in Scripture and in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- I By letting Him love us through His presence in corporate worship and private devotions. We can only do this if our root system is trained to do it by our relationship with our parents. Only a good tree can produce good fruit.

How can we drinkharm from ourselves?

- I By drinking from the accumulation of unhealed wounds, unrepented judgments, and negative expectancies in the storehouse of our hearts.

How can we drinknurture from ourselves?

- I By drawing from the treasure of blessings we have received.
- M By recalling and celebrating the good times we have enjoyed with parents and family friends.
- M By recounting the valuable lessons learned as we struggled through difficult situations and by praising God for it all.
- I By remembering the times when all seemed hopeless, celebrating the fact that we are no longer in that state.
- I By choosing to know our integrity in Christ and to stand in it, no matter what the world thinks of us.
- I By celebrating our identity and belonging as beloved children of God-apart from performance-whether we feel His love or not.

Dear Lord,

Forgiveness isn't easy. I've made so many choices to forgive, and just about the time I think I've finally made it, something happens to upset me again. How long is it going to take?

You said I would have to walk in a momentby-moment discipline offorgiveness before it could

become a way of life in me. But I'm discouraged, especially when I don't see any real change in the people I'm forgiving.

Uh-oh! I'm sorry, Lord. I'm rehearsing my negative feelings again. And forgiving others isn't supposed to change them. It changes me.

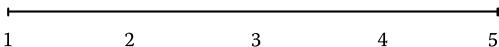
Soften my heart. Enable me to receive Your grace and healing in such a way that my heart's desire is to extend Your quality of grace and love to others for their sake, not just for mine. And thanks for the reminder, Lord, that You have forgiven me again and again although I haven't done anything to deserve it. Amen.

Chapter Five Discussion Forgiveness as a Lifestyle

What is your personal pattern for handling stressful and/or hurtful situations? Do you express your emotions openly and try to forgive immediately? Or do you tend to hold emotions inside and brood about hurtful situations? Do you hold a lot of old resentments inside? Rate yourself on the following scale from one to five.

Open expression
of feelings and
immediate
forgiveness

Holding feelings
inside and
brooding
over hurts



What is the difference between confessing feelings and rehearsing them? Write out your definition of these concepts below.

Confessing feelings:

Rehearsing feelings:

Can you identify any deep hurts that you have been holding inside for a number of years-perhaps even from your childhood-that you have been unwilling or unable to forgive and release? What are they?

What bad fruit in your life might be traceable to those hurts you haven't forgiven? Write out a list of those situations so you can identify areas where prayer is needed to deal with root causes.

When we encounter situations that are hurtful or that bring up painful old memories, we seldom have time immediately to enter into solitude and prayer to deal with the feelings. However, we can pray "flash prayers" silently at those times to help us cope and to keep feelings from festering into bitterness. In the space below, construct for yourself a carefully thought out "flash prayer" that you can lift up to God at times when stressful and hurtful situations come up during the day.

Many of our troubles seem bigger than they really are because we have not practiced a pattern of self-nurture. Review in this chapter the list of ways we can drink nurture from ourselves (pages 92-93). Then, write a letter to a friend. In the letter, refrain from mentioning the troubles you may be having right now. Rather, utilize this catalog of self-nurturing ideas to testify to the positive view you can take of your life.

CHAPTER-SIX

BALANCE THOUGH

FORGIVENESS

UNITY IN PRIMARY RELATIONSHIPS



B

asic principles of walking daily in forgiveness can be applied to every area of our lives. In this chapter we will be focusing mainly on relationships within marriage. But we would like for you to take what we say here and apply it to all other relationships as well. The same dynamics happen between employee and employer, brother and sister, pastor and congregation, and friends. Principles of forgiveness apply any time we enter into day-by-day relationships with other people.

We have been fortunate that in all our years of marriage we

have never lost the spark of romance and have a very blessed relationship. From what we have already shared, you know that is something of a miracle. But we want you to understand that the miraculous relationship we have is not something that just happened to us-it took a lot of work and much turning to the Lord for wisdom, strength, and guidance. Marriage is a special kind of relationship. It is more than just love or friendship. When a man and woman marry, they become one flesh.

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church-for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh"

-EPHESIANS 5:22-31

St. Paul has often received "bad press" as a woman-hater

because he taught that women should be subject to their husbands. But note here that he is writing to husbands and wives, saying that they should be subject to one another. Nowhere in the history of the world until that time had anyone taught that men should be subject to their wives! This is a recurring theme with Paul.

Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

-1 CORINTHIANS 7:3-4, NAS

Paul was no woman-hater. He was a revolutionary advocate of the liberation of women, saying that husband and wife should be mutually subject to one another in love and respect. No one before this had ever said that a woman rules over a man's body!

This love and respect is to be accomplished out of reverence to Christ, an important principle for us to remember. To the degree that each of us is subject to Jesus Christ, the Lord enables us to relate to each other in mutual love and respect. The reverse corollary is also true. To the degree we are not subject to Jesus Christ, He will not rule our hearts, and forgiveness will not be built into us as a moment-by-moment daily practice. When we do not submit our wills to Him, He will not empower us to live with others in unity and forgiveness.

We will be subject to one another, but to each other's selfish control rather than in blessing.

Good, bad, or indifferent, each of us does relate to every person with whom we come in contact. We affect others in some way, both individually and corporately. In that sense, we cannot avoid being subject to each other. Without the presence of Jesus in our lives, we will relate to others only according to the flesh and not in the Spirit. Only when the cross is present is the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ able to transform our relationships to produce blessing rather than harm.

Our distance from the cross of Christ, practically, in daily living, is why we have so many broken relationships and divorces today. People are paying lip service to Jesus, but they don't know how to walk with Him moment by moment. They can't maintain long-term relationships because the fire of unforgiveness burns within them.

When a man and woman enter the marriage relationship, the husband and wife often tend to counterbalance each other. For example, if one tends to talk too much, the other is likely to remain silent. If one is a strong disciplinarian, the other probably will be more lax. When this tendency to counterbalance one another occurs, tensions develop between partners because one or the other is pressed to lean uncomfortably toward behavior contrary to his or her normal temperament or beliefs. The same counterbalancing dynamic is

also true between siblings, friends, or business associates who work closely together.

The key to overcoming this dynamic is in sensitive applications of the cross and forgiveness. We must evaluate what is happening in all relationships and put our own ego in proper perspective. Then, moment by moment, day by day, we can take the practices of our relationships to the cross and ease the tensions through forgiveness so that through the power of Jesus Christ our selfishness can be put to death and our wounded feelings healed.

If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

-MATTHEW 16:24

BALANCING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH FORGIVENESS

One plus one is more than two.

The Lord has made us in a very fearful and wonderful way. Quite a few years ago I (Paula) had an auto accident in which I sustained an injury to my back. I don't understand everything about the bone and muscle structure of the back, but to put it simply, the doctor told me that the injury would cause me some temporary trouble in moving my left leg. However, he said not to worry, because in time the other muscles and nerves would take over and my leg movement would be restored.

The doctor was right; it happened just as he said it would. I came to understand with awe and wonder how when certain parts of our body lose their capacity to function properly, the Lord has so built us that another part takes over to compensate. This is evident when blind persons develop heightened senses of touch and smell.

Applying this to our "one flesh" relationship in marriage means that when one part of John's capacity to function is somehow crippled, at some point I take over to compensate for what he is not able to do. This is because I am part of him, and I feel it. My compensation may be unconscious and completely automatic, but it is real. Likewise, John automatically compensates and counterbalances for me. The Lord made us that way for blessing, so that we can be effective as a unit together.

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

-ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12

Within the body of Christ is a corporateness that allows a similar balancing effect to take place. When one of us is weakened or incapacitated, somebody else is there with God-given ability to take over and compensate for the other. But this natural compensation meant by God for blessings can also cause friction between those involved. Sometimes our taking over to compensate for the other's weakness tends to put the other person down, and that one becomes hurt or bitter. Or we may become angry when we are thrust into a position in which we have to compensate for the other person. We resent being put there. Or perhaps the other person's inability forces us to do something we don't want to do or that goes against our nature.

We may not be happy about it, but there we are. We have to learn to accept the other person anyway, forgive, and minister to him or her. We have to learn to submit everything to the Lord Jesus so there can be balance without strain, without judgment, without accusation, without bitterness, and without

resentment.

Achieving balance in relationships

Our struggle to achieve balanced relationships is much like playing on a teeter-totter. I (Paula) remember going to the playground as a little girl and getting up on the teeter-totter with a friend. Sometimes my playmate would be much larger, and the unbalanced weight would cause his end to go clear to the ground, leaving me stranded way up in the air. I would bounce frantically to make my end come down, but the balance was just off. I wanted to have a good time going up and down, up and down. Both of us were supposed to enjoy it, but we couldn't.

In our immaturity we'd start yelling at each other. We'd say, "You're too big;" or, "You're not playing fair, and I'm not having any fun;" both trying hard to make it work but blaming the other person.

Then maybe a big brother or a dad would come along and see our dilemma. Taking pity on us, he would get up on the middle of the teeter-totter and stand on the board, straddling the fulcrum, exerting the power of his muscles to shift the balance back and forth to allow us to go up and down with fun. We didn't have to wait until we had grown to the same size to put ourselves in balance. That big brother or dad supplied it. He maintained what we couldn't achieve.

God said to me that the Lord Jesus Christ is our big brother in all relationships. We don't have to demand that the other back off or back down. We don't have to insist that the other person change. We just accept and embrace the other person as he is right now-love him where he is, and give the difference to the Lord Jesus Christ. To achieve balance through forgiveness in our relationships, we must begin by inviting Jesus moment by moment to be that dynamic power of love in our lives. When we do this, our differences become blessings rather than threats.

Achieving balance in parenting

In John's and my relationship, the issue of how to discipline our children was one of the most difficult things for us to give to the Lord for establishing balance. By his nature John always wanted to think issues through. When one of the children would get into trouble, John would resist leaping in immediately to administer discipline. He wanted to mull things over-to think about the situation slowly. He wanted to refine and polish his thinking and decide logically, calmly, and coolly what he was going to do. He and I grew up in big families, so it wasn't just that there were a lot of children around needing quick action or that we weren't used to the constant needs of children.

Because John liked to carefully think about how to handle issues of discipline, he would often withdraw inside himself when troubles arose. Later he would come out to do something

about it.

The way I was raised in my family, parents were much more likely to jump in quickly to express an opinion or to settle a dispute that was erupting. Discipline was swift. When my father was absent and my mother was too busy to notice what my younger brothers were doing, I felt that I had to leap in to discipline them, or I would be run over by the mob. There was something in me that needed to control and manage in order to defend myself. I realize now there was unforgiveness behind my need for control.

Later in life as a young mother, I had not yet really forgiven the rambunctiousness of my brothers. Consequently, my impatience and my driving need to discipline my own children were based in unforgiveness of my brothers. It was also fueled by my anger at John for not disciplining as quickly as I thought he should and for sometimes being preoccupied and unaware of the children's behavior.

On the other hand, John's mother characteristically jumped in too quickly to discipline-oftentimes harshly and unfairly. John's father was normally very good and fair with discipline, but he would prefer to think a situation over thoroughly beforehand. Oftentimes John's mother would push his father to jump in immediately, and the subsequent discipline would be corrupted by her quick judgments rather than his own wisdom. The result was often harsh and unfair, nobody being happy. John became determined to be like his dad and not like his mother. Behind

that is a judgment of his parents and consequent abiding unforgiveness.

These kinds of reactions are built into all of our root systems. In our marital relationships, we develop patterns of one flesh struggling to balance the other. I would often discipline the children with impatience, angry with John for not being right there on the spot to handle the situation for me. I really had not given him the opportunity to be there to handle it his own way, yet I would blame him for not being there in the way I wanted him to be.

When I would try to restrain myself from jumping in too soon, I would inevitably find it necessary to remind John that disciplinary action needed to be taken. I tried to program him into doing it, and not always very quietly. You can imagine what impact that had on John and the children.

John tried to get in there and perform his duties more quickly. But sometimes he had stored up so much of what he was mulling over to polish and perfect that when I would push him, he would passionately explode and react toward the children in an out-of-balance way. Then, when I would see that the situation was out of balance, I would leap in and say, "No, John! No, not that way!"

I remember one experience that our poor son Loren had to live through. Loren really did need a lot of discipline. He was the kind of kid who would look you right in the eye and say, "No!" If you spanked him for something, he would stoically

reply, "That didn't hurt!" What do you do? You don't want to beat your child, but he is standing there unrepentantly, defiantly saying, "That didn't hurt." He was tremendously gutsy.

I (John) think Loren had been in a long spell of this kind of behavior, and I was fed up with it. Paula had been pushing me all along with comments like, "John, we're going to have to do something about Loren-we can't let him go on like this."

Finally, one day I exploded and said, "Loren, you are going to learn to obey! Whether or not you see any reason for it, you are going to do what you are told!" So I got a little jar of dried beans, dumped them on the kitchen floor, and told Loren that as an act of obedience, he was to push each of those beans across the kitchen floor with his nose! (I'm ashamed of that today, but in the heat of the moment it seemed to make sense.)

There Loren was, a poor little kid down on his knees. Under great duress he began pushing beans across the floor with his nose. I (Paula) was a distraught mother who all the time had been nagging my husband with "You've got to do something drastic to get this kid into shape:" Now I was saying, "Oh, John, please, not this! You are going too far!" The necessity for forgiveness was all intertwined in us. Everybody had to forgive everybody, and there was no easy way to do it. (Thank God, that experience taught John more than it did Loren; he never tried anything like that again.)

When another one of our sons was in his teenage

"individuation process," it was very difficult to break through his sullen barrier to obtain any kind of information or even to have a decent conversation. In my impatience, again I pushed John, saying, "Your son is being very difficult, and you are going to have to have a talk with him." (Notice-he had now ceased to be our son and had become your [John's] son.)

John would quietly sit there mulling over how he would approach this kid. Then when I would really hold the torch to John to get him to do something against his nature, he would explode emotionally at me and at our son. You can imagine how effective that was in promoting better communication!

We had to forgive. We had to undergo a round of forgiveness, calling on the Lord to provide the balance for us. Until that point, we had not grown adequately in the Lord to really understand what was going on or how to stop ourselves in the midst of unbalanced situations. We had to call on the Lord, repent, and forgive each other.

Jesus will corral our sinful nature if we are walking with Him and if we ask His forgiveness for the off-balance things we have done. That's the real key. I had to quit praying earnestly, "Lord, get John's attention! Lord, change John! Lord, make John aware! Lord, cause him to be there when the kids need discipline!"

By the power of the Lord, I had to arrive at complete forgiveness of John and of myself before Jesus could really take over and be the balance between us.

It is still hard for John to confront. It remains too easy for me to express my opinion in some situations. I'll be nice in public, but at home I can express my opinions quickly and loudly. Jesus is the one who can and will hold the balance if we ask Him to do so.

In trying to strike a balance in the way Paula and I (John) disciplined our children, I knew we were going to have to go to the Lord for help. Unfortunately, my initial prayers were misdirected and ineffective. I would pray fervently, "Oh, Lord, if you would just calm Paula down, I could handle discipline in my own way. Please give her the patience not to jump in and take control of the problem."



We can't expect Christ to intervene when we pray confessing another person's sin.

It took me quite a while to realize that my prayers were not being answered because I was praying wrongfully. I was trying to make the Lord change Paula without accepting responsibility for my own role. Only when I became repentant for my own actions and began to pray for my own forgiveness

and my own inability to adjust did the situation begin to change for the better between us.

A more enlightened prayer eventually became, "Lord, I repent that I jeopardized Paula in that way. I repent of my abdication of responsibility, which induced her to jump in and take charge. Forgive me for my insensitivity, and help me to assume a properly active and decisive role in disciplining the children."

The point is, we must confess our own sin and be willing to do whatever is necessary to set things straight.

Achieving balance in social situations

I (John) have to confess that the issue of discipline was not the only area of tension in our family. There were other behaviors I had to take responsibility for in order to come to a place of forgiveness and death of self within the family.

As a youth, I was destined to be a prophet-with all the gifts and none of the wisdom! Therefore I was a mystical dreamer, frequently drifting off into my own imaginative world. For example, my family would send me upstairs to get something, and I would not only forget what it was I was to get, I would forget I was sent! They would have to send someone to retrieve both me and what I was supposed to find.

At dinner I would start thinking and dreaming about what someone had said. Meanwhile, the conversation would switch to several other topics. When I finally figured out the first

topic, I would interject a comment. Everyone laughed and said, "Where were you, John? Having your quiet time? We quit talking about that five minutes ago."

Later in life when I was in the pastorate, Paula and I liked to make calls on people as a couple. Because I knew I was a dreamer, I developed a pattern of letting Paula do all the talking. I'd sit there sensing where people were and analyzing and thinking. Because my mind was drifting, I would lose the turn of the conversation. When I would finally come around and make a comment, it often came from way out in left field.

Before we would go to visit, Paula would say, "John, as the pastor you have to meet people where they are. You have to visit with people and really listen. It hurts them when you're in a dream world and don't communicate."

So I would be determined to do better and really visit with people. But when I fell silent for a few moments, Paula would get nervous and jump in to take over the conversation. I'd get interested in some point and lose the drift of the conversation. Then when I'd come back in and say something, as usual, it would be off the subject and inappropriate, and Paula would wish I hadn't said anything at all!

That pattern didn't stop when I prayed, "Lord, will you make Paula give me a chance to talk? Just corral her, Lord."

Only when I repented of my part and brought my dreamy nature to death on the cross could I begin to really be there

and to stay tuned in to conversations. I had to pray that the Lord might bring me out to be more present. I had jeopardized Paula, making her feel overly responsible to visit with the people.

When we counterbalance and drive each other to unhappy positions, we will not accomplish anything by appealing to God to change the other person. We have to be willing to change ourselves by confession and repentance.

As a child I (Paula) was extremely shy. It was against my nature to make conversations with people. At home it was easy enough for me to be open and talkative, but meeting new people and taking the lead in conversations in public had always been difficult. But in pastoral ministry together, I felt the need so deeply to balance what John was not doing that I had to thrust myself into conversations that were really stressful for me.

I felt resentment at being forced into that kind of position. It was of my own choosing, of course, and John was not deliberately causing me hurt or discomfort. Nevertheless, my hostility continued toward him. What he could not or would not do was causing me to stretch beyond my comfort zone. As part of my praying, I had to repent of that resentment and hostility. I had to thank the Lord for using this kind of an uncomfortable situation to force me to come out of myself to meet people. And I had to ask for the Lord's help to change my pattern of judging John and pushing him to be different into a

pattern of acceptance and encouragement.

John: What we are saying is that any time God unites a couple, He brings together people who are perfectly designed to grind against each other. We don't usually perceive the grinding as blessing, but it is. Our grinding against each other becomes blessing when the balancing power of Christ is there at the center of our living to bring us to personal repentance, death of self, and forgiveness of each other. The prayer from our hearts should be, "Lord, forgive me!" That's forgive me, not forgive her (or him).

Achieving balance in attitudes toward adventure and spontaneity

Another difficult area lay in our attitudes toward adventure and spontaneity. I (Paula) remember as a child doing adventurous things. I often chose to skate down a steep hill in front of our house or climb high up in a tall tree. I enjoyed feeling adventurous. But that was all under my control. Adventure was OK if I was choosing to do it.

I think that tendency to control was in me from the very beginning of life. My in utero and birth experience was as dangerous as jumping off a cliff because my mother had a ruptured appendix shortly after her marriage and had been advised by the doctor to postpone having children for several years. When she became pregnant with me, the fact that I was developing in her womb endangered her life. There was a lot of fear, tension, and anxiety during the months of my being

formed in the womb. Insecurity as a fetus and then as a baby resulted in frequent and prolonged crying my mother didn't know how to handle.

As a very small child I opened the door to the laundry chute and fell down the chute headfirst. Fortunately I landed in a basket full of clothes rather than on the concrete basement floor. But as a child I remember that fear of leaping into something because there was terror of letting go and losing control.

As a young woman when I came into relationship with John, he didn't have that kind of cautious fear in him. He seldom stopped to count the danger or the cost. He was always ready to plow right in to adventure.

When we were in seminary in Chicago and would go to Lake Michigan for a picnic, John and my brother Jerry would jump into the lake and begin swimming straight out from shore until we couldn't see them any more. When John would return after my long period of anxiety, I would angrily remind him, "You are my husband-the only one I have. These are your small children. You are the only father they have:"

When I came to the point of forgiving him for not taking thought, his heart became able to hear. Then the Lord prompted him to swim along the shoreline instead of out of sight (from 57th Street to 87th Street).

Many years later when we moved to Idaho, it was a terror for

me to ride in a car with John on snow-covered roads in the mountains. If I was driving the car, I wasn't that afraid. I was in control. I had practiced into myself, "I will put one foot in front of the other, and I will overcome the thing that causes me fear." I can remember, in every area of my life, facing my fears and difficult things by consciously choosing to risk. The Lord honored that and empowered me to overcome many fears. But I could not seem to trust when things were out of my control in the hands of other people.

When John was driving, I constantly found myself gripping the armrests with white knuckles. "John, for goodness' sake, please slow down."

This became a real issue. I experienced a lot of resentment because he would so often say, "Get hold of yourself, Paula. Just decide you're going to get over it!"

On snow-covered mountain roads, I would nag, "Slow down, John!" He'd reply, "We're only going twenty miles an hour!" And I would say, "Well, slow down!"

I would nag until finally John would say, "Shut your eyes and shut your mouth. Just lie back and pray in the Spirit"

That was effective, but still it seemed as if he was being very unfair and insensitive, just telling me to get over it. That's what I had been doing all my life-getting over my fears by just taking it and bulling my way through. I wanted John to undergird, strengthen, comfort, and reassure me-not just say, "You're on

your own, kid; now just do something about it." I was angry with him, and my anger didn't do anything but reinforce his response.

I had to come to the point of forgiving all the way back to the beginning-forgiving the people, the circumstances, and God for everything I had reacted to that had instilled insecurity and fear in me. I had to ask forgiveness for building all those defenses. I asked the Lord to break up the dry and resistant soil of my past experiences-to prepare me to be more receptive to the new seeds of adventure He wanted to plant within me. The Lord is in process of doing that still today!

I (John) had to come to see that I was not in fact as courageous as I had thought. The Lord revealed there had been much to fear in my childhood, and I had overcompensated by reckless courage. The real root of my courage was actually fear. When I was able to acknowledge that in myself, I could be compassionate rather than contemptuous in regard to Paula's fears. I no longer had to compulsively take chances just to prove my manhood. The key was death of self, forgiveness of those who had frightened me, and surrender of myself to the Lord's kind of courage. Then I could ask forgiveness of Paula.

Celebrating our uniqueness

Although I (John) was always the adventurous one, I also perceived myself to be the logical one. Everything had to have

a reason. I would frequently say, "Now, Paula, what's your reason? What's your starting point? Where do you plan to come out?"

Paula wasn't made like that. You should see the way the house got painted. I'd come in the door and find Paula painting a room-a squiggle of paint here and a squiggle of paint there. I'd say, "What are you doing?" And she would reply, "I'm painting the room."

It was obvious to me that anyone with logic started in the upper left-hand corner of one wall and painted across and down, and so proceeded around the room. But to Paula, that was boring!

It seemed logical to me (Paula) that when you have a pan of latex paint and a roller, you don't have to get stuck in boring ways. You can take liberties and express your creativity, because no matter where you start, the paint blends in. I'm an artist, so I'd put on some music and make lovely patterns all over the walls, and then fill in the spaces. That was fun! And it seemed plenty logical to me!

You should see the way we paint the walls these days. Paula makes designs all over and then fills them in. I (John) paint the trim at the ceiling, floor, and windows. This is a way of saying that when forgiveness becomes a daily practice, our differences become the spice of life-and we can have fun rather than be threatened.

You can see the kind of dynamic we were always in. We had to quit judging each other as being right or wrong. We had to choose to accept the other one in the midst of diversity.

Forgiveness has to happen on a daily and hourly basis. When that happens, life becomes a blessing. An ancient sage once said that if two people always agree, one of them is unnecessary. Our differences in life become blessings when the cross and the blood of Jesus Christ are at the center and we can forgive each other through His intercession about the ways in which we are different. The grace of God's forgiveness releases us to be forgiving, and we don't have to be afraid of our differences any more.

From push-pull to balance

In our marriage relationship, I (John) was the mystical one, always searching for some new and wonderful thing in the Lord having mountaintop experiences and sailing off into the heavens. That meant I was out there having all kinds of experiences while the kingdom at home was marked by skid marks-Paula's. She would frequently say, "We're not going down another blind alley, are we, John?"

Of course, the more Paula didn't understand my searches and remonstrated against them, the more I was determined to launch into them. And so, the more I'd be out there frantically trying to find reality and discover new things, the more she'd react leaving black skid marks all along the road of our history!

Dynamics of this kind are bound to happen in any relationship, especially in marriage. We pull back and forth against each other, struggling to overcome resistances and to put limits on the other's perceived excesses. Balance lies in forgiving and calling on Christ through the power of the cross to bring our own selves to death-and since we're stubborn, calling on Him to intercede for us moment by moment.

He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

-ROMANS 8:27, NAS

RENOUNCING OUR NEED TO MAKE DEMANDS ON THOSE PERSONS WE LOVE

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters-yes, even his own life-he cannot be my disciple.

-LUKE 14:26

These words raise an important issue, although it may be difficult to understand. Jesus was asking for undivided devotion from His disciples. He knew they would have to cut themselves free from the demands other relationships would make on them. Of course, our Lord would never call us to that wrongly. We use words in many ways. I love God, my wife, my dog, and a hot dog, all differently. Just so, the word hate has different levels and different meanings.

Our father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, race, nationality, culture, school, church, and friends can all be viewed as a womb in which our character was formed. All were shot through with sin, and so in many ways we reacted and were formed in sinful ways. When we are born anew, it is like being born out of that sinful womb. If we don't turn and cut the umbilical cord, the old blood of the old life flows into the new and spoils it.

Practically, this means that when we are born anew in Christ, we must cut free from all the old ways of relating so that we can be formed anew solely by the Holy Spirit in Christ. To do that, we must "hate" the continuing carnal influence of all those that formed us and choose only the Lord and His way to reform us. (More on this need to be cut free can be found in our book *Restoring the Christian Family*.)

In our humanity, we press others to obtain what we want and need, and we are pressed by others to give what they want and need. There is a world of demand coming from and foisted upon each of us.



All unregenerate love is use, exploitation, manipulation, possession, control, and demand.

We learned how to love in the world before we came to Jesus. All our ways of loving are filled with the world's ways of demanding, controlling, measuring, judging, and manipulating others to fulfill what we want.

Unspoken demands controlling our responses to each other

Living with Paula, I (John) was not free to be who I am because there was a world of demand coming across from her flesh saying I had to be a certain way for her. Living with me, she was not free to be who she is because there was a subconscious world of demand coming from me. We would say to each other, in subtle ways, "If you love me, you are going to act the way I expect you to act. If you don't act this way, you don't love me, and I need love."

After a hard day at work, I'd drive home, thinking I would come in and give Paula a big hug and visit with her. But the moment I would come through the door, I could sense demand coming from her that said, "You come in here and talk with me!" The demand took away the gift. It immediately dampened my desire to visit with her. I reacted with quiet reserve, choosing not to communicate as I had planned.

I (Paula) had been thinking all day that I would like to greet John warmly with a big hug, but then give him time to collect himself. I planned to bring

him a glass of iced tea and let him settle down and be himself without making demands when he would come in. But the moment John came through the door I sensed a demand that said, "Just let me alone. Get out of my face. Don't ask me to do anything!" His demand prevented my giving him a gift of quiet solitude. I would begin to think angrily, He should realize I've had a tough day, too, and that I have a need for communication with him that deserves to be fulfilled.

John: This world of demand is built into all of us. And sometimes our demands are not subconscious or even subtle. We can make very conscious strident demands. If our demands are not satisfied, we can feel disappointed, deserted, and even betrayed. When we receive Jesus into our lives, we need to renounce and bring to death that entire world of demand. Paula and I never fell out of love with one another, but when we came to understand these internal demands, each of us said, "In Jesus's name, I renounce my love for you."

That may sound strange-that we should renounce our love for each other! But what we were renouncing was our fleshly way of loving that places unreasonable demands on the other person. The Lord quickly resurrected His kind of love in us for each other. Human love imprisons. The Lord's love in us sets others free.



Opposing poles of demand such as this operate unconsciously between married couples, family members, and co-workers all the time. Unspoken expectations are passed back and forth, and we respond in ways difficult to analyze or even understand. Our unconscious demands, even those growing out of sincere love, erect barriers that keep others off balance and keep us from freely giving and receiving through God's grace.

What we need to do after we receive Jesus into our lives is to pray, "Lord, let my entire world of demand come to death. I renounce my love that places demands on others."

God is still in the love business, so when we do this, the love of Jesus through us will set the other person free to be who he or she is. Because of demands born out of our own needs, our unregenerate love imprisons others. When we renounce unregenerate love, the love of God fills us and sets the other person free. The cross and forgiveness are central because we must bring to death all the worldly ways we've learned to love and to demand love from each other. When our own demanding love is dealt a deathblow, the love of Christ can flow through us to the other person in a free and undemanding way. Jesus said:

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the

ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant will also be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

-JOHN 12:24-25

Until we die to our self-centered, selfish way of loving, we are, in fact, trying to control everyone and everything around us. People don't want to be controlled. They resent being reduced to satellites in our orbit. Consequently, our selfish love isolates us. We remain alone, and the fullness of life is lost to us. I used to say to Paula, "You've got a carousel going. There's only one place for me to jump on, and if I don't get on there, you think I don't love you!" Now I'm free to be myself, knowing she'll choose me and love me.

If our self-serving way of loving is brought to death on the cross, we radiate a warm and nurturing environment characteristic of the nature of Christ. Others then feel free to be themselves around us, and they feel free to respond to us in trust and love. Thus, through death to ourselves, we gain a life of fruitful relationships.

REVERENCE FOR CHRIST IN OUR LIVES

We need to understand fully what reverence for Christ means. Christ came and gave His life in order that we might be set

free in order that we might become who we were created to be and not have to remain in bondage to sin.

To have reverence for Christ means to allow Him access within us to accomplish effectively everything for which He died on the cross. That means we need to submit to Him all of our feelings, our past, our present, our daily irritations, our demanding attitudes, our manipulations, and our unforgiveness. We have to give all of this to Christ so that He might effectively bring these things to death on the cross and live in us fully:

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.

-GALATIANS 2:20, NAS

Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

-GALATIANS 5:24, NAS

If we allow Jesus full access to our entire being to accomplish within us what He came to do, then we can be subject to our partners or our friends in blessed relationships. Otherwise, we will be subject to every unregenerate thing within ourselves and others, and we will experience an unending series of struggles, striving, unforgiveness, and pain.



Jesus did a finished work in our salvation by dying on the cross. But we must respond by incorporating His grace into our reborn life.

DEATH TO SELF, REBIRTH TO LOVE OTHERS TO LIFE

We have witnessed a number of situations in which people have worked out this wonder of death, rebirth, and forgiveness in their lives. One of these was a young woman who was an active member of our church, but at that time her husband was not at all involved in church activities. She prayerfully sought God's will how she might better relate to her husband so that he might more fully share in her faith. The Lord spoke to her heart, telling her to back off from many of her church activities because she needed to meet her husband where he was so that he might be able to draw closer to where she was:

Wives... be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

-1 PETER 3:1-2

She determined to do this by limiting her church activities just to Sunday morning worship for a while and by staying home to devote special attention to her husband to deepen their relationship. She took care to express herself to him with renewed affection and to give of her time and energy to be a good wife and homemaker. This new focus of her time and attention soon began to melt his heart. It wasn't long before he began to be won over to the Christian faith she professed. The Lord enabled him to identify the grace she was sharing and the love she was giving as coming from God and His people.

Her husband became active in the church, and he grew so quickly that he soon surpassed his wife in spiritual depth, maturity, and ability to serve the Lord. At first, this angered her, and she complained to us, "After all the time I spent learning and growing in the Lord, how is it that he can come to the Lord and so quickly race right on past me in Christian growth?" The Lord then prompted her to realize that her husband's spiritual growth was what she had been praying for all along. All the grace that had poured into her life had spread through her into him. Also, she realized that Scripture tells us that the unbelieving partner is sanctified through the believing partner:

For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband.

-1 CORINTHIANS 7:14

She had chosen to honor her husband with renewed intimacy and devotion, and it had released the grace that was already upon him. We need to know that our prayers will be hindered if we pray for somebody with judgment, blame, and unforgiveness in our hearts. This housewife had chosen to forgive, to let the Lord cleanse her heart, and to love her husband unconditionally. Because of this, her prayers were empowered and effective in winning him.

She realized that everything she had been learning in her relationship with the Lord, in spirit her husband had been participating in because he was one flesh with her. It was only that his spiritual growth had not yet come to a conscious level. It hadn't begun to be worked out in his life. But he had been drinking in blessing at deep levels through who and what she was. Her forgiveness and her laying down of her life for him enabled all of that to take root. It gave him the power to choose and to stand for Jesus Christ on his own.

Forgiveness and regenerate love work the other way, too, for husbands who pray that their wives might come into relationship with the Lord:

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

-1 PETER 3:7

When one partner comes to the Lord before the other, it is not a sign that the one who becomes a believer first is more spiritual. If it happens that a wife comes to the Lord before the husband, this does not mean she should assume leadership as the head of the family until the husband becomes a believer. It is the husband's role to be the head of the family whether or not he has accepted Christ as his Savior. The wife should support and encourage her husband and set an example for him of Christian love and grace. A Christian husband should do the same for his wife.

GOD'S TRUTH REVEALED IN A FAIRY TALE

Fairy tales live on through history because they reveal truths about human interactions. Our need to work out love and forgiveness is beautifully allegorized in the fairy tale of "The Snow Queen."

Kay and Gerda were two friends who cared for each as brother and sister, and they enjoyed life together. But one winter evening the wicked Snow Queen visited Kay and hurled a dart of ice into his heart. She left him but came back some time later and took Kay off with her, leaving Gerda behind, who wept long and bitterly.

Gerda went through all kinds of perils trying to find her friend Kay. When she finally found him and began to draw near, he was not happy to see her, and he drew away. The closer she got to him, the meaner he became. Whenever Gerda came close,

her love was like warm fire that threatened to melt the ice thorn that had developed a life of its own and hung on tenaciously to keep from losing its power. At last, her love melted the ice thorn, and it fell out; Kay returned to himself-and to Gerda.1

That kind of dynamic often happens between married couples. When one partner comes into a life-changing experience with the Lord and becomes more loving, the other partner may at first fail to rejoice in the experience. As that new kind of love begins to be expressed by one toward the other, it's an unsettling experience. The warmth of the new love is a threat to the frozen heart. Vulnerability is frightening and often causes the partner to withdraw or act with hostility. Why? Because the warmth of love and deeper intimacy melts the heart of stone, the other is afraid; he knows he will have to change. To resist the threat of change, we often choose to hurt the other person in order to keep the fire at a safe distance.

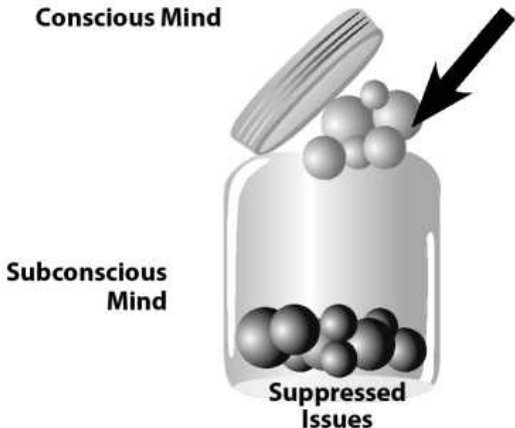
I (John) used to do this with Paula. We would have a wonderful time together in prayer, in sharing, in teaching, and in bed. Then within about two or three days I would find myself doing something mean to her. The reason is that her warmth and love were getting too close to my heart of stone. It was making me uncomfortably vulnerable. There was hurt in my heart from unforgiveness toward my mother. I dared not allow myself to enter too deeply into trust with a woman. Because Paula was getting too close to me, my castle was being threatened. Therefore, I unconsciously sabotaged our intimacy.

TENSION BETWEEN SIN AND SPIRITUAL HEALING

In our conscious mind we don't want to admit there's anything we haven't faced or gained mastery over. We don't want to be threatened by thoughts of our own weaknesses and sins, hostilities and unforgiveness. We want to feel that we are in control.

Our mind is like a container that stores various thought processes. At the top is the conscious level where we actively deal with issues of life and interact with others in relationships. The conscious level represents perhaps 20 percent of what our mental container holds. The other 80 percent is on a subconscious level-within us but suppressed so as not to clog our thinking or throw us into mental overload.

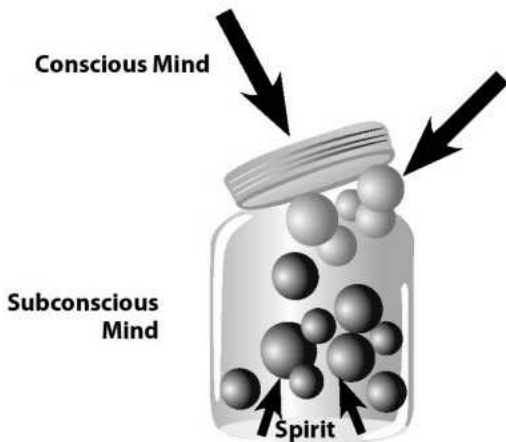
However, we run into difficulty when we confront problems or sin issues that we have not reconciled or adequately processed on a conscious level. We tend to shove those painful issues down into the subconscious mind, pretend they're not there, and put up a front of having it together and being in charge of our lives. Out of fear, insecurity, unforgiveness, or whatever other reason, we clamp the lid on our mental container and try to keep those problem issues from surfacing to a conscious level.



We push down problem issues we don't want to face or don't want to admit are even there.

We cannot comfortably keep sin issues contained in our subconscious mind because our spirit yearns to be clean. Constant tension results. Through dreams or sudden insights, our spirit begins to push up each of those suppressed issues. Our conscious mind continues to shove them back under, not

wanting to deal with them.



Our mind pushes issues down to be buried in the subconscious. Our spirit pushes issues up to be healed. So, the war begins!

As long as we battle solely within our own conscious mind, uninfluenced by others, we can somewhat successfully keep the lid pressed down, continue to shut down the emergence of

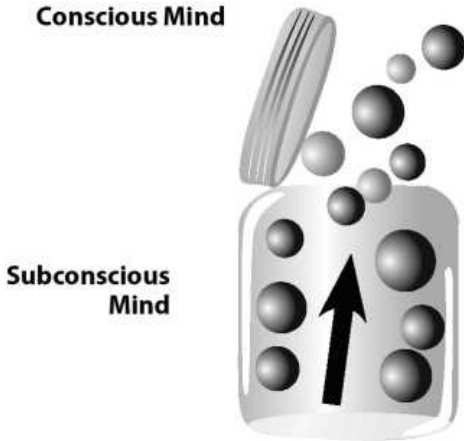
unsettled issues, and maintain appearances of peace to the outside world. But if the purity of someone's love or the presence of the Holy Spirit becomes too powerful, we no longer can suppress problem issues, and they begin to boil around within us, threatening to explode irresistibly to the surface.

Isn't this true of many people you know? The face they wear for the outside world encourages you to believe they have it all together, but you can look into their eyes and know they have a lot of unresolved issues. They have won the battle of suppression they should not have won. Instead of openly dealing with issues that enslave them, they have shut everything down and live in false and troubled peace.

And they have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, Saying, "Peace, peace," But there is no peace.

-JEREMIAH 6:14, NAS

Let someone like this encounter the love of a spouse, a brother or sister, or the moving presence of the Holy Spirit, and you have a surge of power that penetrates into the depths of the spirit. That power pushes up to consciousness each of those hidden things that have been suppressed within our mental container. This kind of love won't be denied, so the embattled soul erupts.



When the Holy Spirit acts with power on someone's life, the sublimated trouble issues force to the surface to be dealt with. The result is often an eruption of emotional turmoil.

UNRESOLVED ISSUES OF SIN STIRRED UP BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Psychiatrists have told us that after a successful evangelistic crusade in a community (in which the power of the Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of many people), their offices are filled

with counselees. Why? Because the power of God's love through the Holy Spirit has flooded deeply into people, stirring up sin issues they have long suppressed, so that great battling takes place.

The same is true within the body of the Church. After the Holy Spirit moves in great waves within a church, you will often see eruptions of strife and dissensions among the members. Why? Because we have not fully understood how the Holy Spirit works. A major function of the Holy Spirit is to convict us of sin. The Holy Spirit empowers the inner being to bring up suppressed sins so they can be dealt with. Because people don't want to admit they have unresolved sin issues, they go into denial, project their turmoil outward, and fight with other people instead of facing the real issues.

This is a part of what Jesus meant when He said:

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

-MATTHEW 10:34

When the Lord enters our lives, He begins to stir us up because He wants to cleanse our hearts. He wants to purge the sin from our lives. We would like to think that since the Holy Spirit is present in our lives, we must be all right and can expect only happiness and peace. It's just the other way around.



The Holy Spirit brings turmoil as He convicts us of sin. Peace comes as we learn to repent, submit ourselves to God's will, and thus begin to manifest the fruit of the Spirit.

Actually, it is not the Holy Spirit who brings turmoil, but our rebellious reactions to His cleansing fire. The Holy Spirit is interested first in the condition of our souls, not in the present state of our superficial happiness or contentment. He wants the deep wounds of our souls healed.

To understand this dynamic, it all boils down to one thing. After enjoying a good honeymoon time with one's spouse, experiencing warm vulnerability with friends, or having spiritual growth in the church, we can expect trouble. The reason is not a bad reason. It isn't the devil attacking (although he may make use of this vulnerable time if we don't understand the dynamic). The painful stirring is from the Holy Spirit's bringing our sinful flesh up to consciousness to be dealt with.

Don't be disappointed if you have wonderful experiences in your prayer meeting, only to find that the next time you are at

each other's throats. You are probably grinding against each other because the Holy Spirit has done His job in bringing up issues you have been unwilling to face. The key is to resist the temptation to submerge them once again or to project blame on others. Be honest with yourself. Search your soul for your own transgressions, and take them to the Lord in repentance. Ask forgiveness, and lay yourself open to live in a spirit of forgiveness toward others.

Often when a time of love and intimacy is followed by meanness or hostility directed at us, we take it personally as an attack. This most often is not the case. We need to look beyond the superficial to understand what may in fact be happening.

Learning to recognize the Holy Spirit at work

When I (John) would withdraw after a time of special intimacy by being mean to Paula, she used to take it personally. She would think, "What did I do to deserve this?" The fact is, she didn't do anything wrong. She did something wonderfully right. My meanness resulted from what was in me that was threatened by the love that was growing between us. It was melting more of my cold, stony heart, and I was afraid.

Coming to understand this, Paula learned not to take my behavior personally but to be at peace within herself, to help me to understand what was happening, and to allow the Holy Spirit time to deal with me. The Holy Spirit then taught her to

strengthen my spirit through prayer so I could maintain in vulnerable times without having to flee.

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts.

-EPHESIANS 3:16-17

Paula: We need to recognize also that it is usually when the pastor has been prophetic in his understanding, on target with his preaching, or especially loving in his confrontation that he is apt to receive the most persecution from his congregation. This was our experience in the pastorate. At those times when John, in his searching for truth, was somewhat off base and would preach super-liberal or esoteric sermons that really didn't get at things in people's hearts, they loved and idolized him. But when he was back on track and preached the Word powerfully, and the Spirit of God was penetrating people's defenses to the deep parts of their hearts, the people would become frantic to stop it. "Get rid of the message. Get rid of the pastor." They would do anything rather than face the deeply suppressed issues of their hearts. That's when they would persecute-never when John was in error, but always when he was right on!

EVALUATING OUR ATTITUDES

We need to look at our own hearts when we find ourselves being critical of someone in the church and ask ourselves,

"Why am I angry about that? Can it be that he (or she) is exposing an area in my life that I haven't yet dealt with?" We need to stand on level ground at the foot of the cross, confessing our own sin, praying:

-H "Lord, give me a teachable spirit and help me to see if the conflict I am experiencing is because I'm acting in fleshly piety that drives the other person to react negatively just to counterbalance me."

I "Lord, am I out of balance, so the other person has to compensate for something in me that hasn't yet been fully submitted to You for forgiveness and cleansing?"

-I "Lord, what are You wanting to show me about my own heart? Bring my sin and unforgiveness to death. Set me free to be a blessing to others."

Death of self and forgiveness are always at the center of our life. Achieving them is a day-by-day, hour-by-hour, moment-by-moment exercise.

Gracious Lord,

How wonderful it is that You are revealing to the Church in this day the secrets of the kingdom-that You have given us birth and second birth in the day in which You are teaching the Church what it is to be sanctified.

You are revealing to the Church that which we have never really known before-how to cleanse our hearts so that we may be pure before You.

Lord, we want to understand more about forgiveness, and we want to walk daily both in the confidence of being forgiven our sins and as gracious forgivers of those who sin against us.

Help us to achieve a loving and forgiving balance and counterbalance with those who share our lives. We pray that Your Holy Spirit will be our constant teacher. We thank You, Lord. Amen.

Chapter Six Discussion Balance Through Forgiveness

What is meant by the term "being subject to Christ"? Write out your own definition below.

How is being subject to Christ different from being subject to other people?

Counterbalancing another person in a relationship is often good and healthy because it helps to compensate for our weaknesses. When does counterbalancing become uncomfortable? Discuss this with a friend or with your group members.

Review the section in this chapter about renouncing the demands of love (pages 114-118).

How can our love for others make demands and become manipulative? Write an example of how your love makes demandsexpressed in terms of a relationship you have with someone.

What does it mean to renounce the demands of love? Paraphrase that concept in your own words.

Construct a statement renouncing the demands you are making in one of your relationships with another person. Then write a prayer inviting Jesus to put to death your demands and raise up in you a new way of relating.

CHAIPTEK-SEVEN

BEYOND

LINDEYSTANDING

GE-ACE TO COPE WITH LIFE'S TRAGEDIES



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tephen, a man richly blessed by God and full of spiritual power, boldly preached the message of Jesus Christ and performed many miracles and wonders among the people. But he met strong resistance from some men in the local synagogue who felt threatened by what he taught. When they could not refute what Stephen said with their own arguments, they seized him and brought him before the ruling council, where they bribed witnesses to testify falsely against him.

In defense of his teaching before the council, Stephen spoke

powerfully of the way in which God had revealed Himself through history and how the people had continually rejected the word of God. He spoke of Jesus as the anointed one of God-fulfilling their own prophecy, yet also being rejected, just as so many of God's prophets had been rejected before.

"How stubborn you are!" Stephen went on to say. "How heathen your hearts, how deaf you are to God's message! You are just like your ancestors: you too have always resisted the Holy Spirit....."

As the members of the Council listened to Stephen, they became furious and ground their teeth at him in anger. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw God's glory and Jesus standing on the right side of God. "Look," he said. "I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right side of God:"

With a loud cry the Council members covered their ears with their hands. Then they all rushed him at once, threw him out of the city, and stoned him. The witnesses left their cloaks in the care of a young man named Saul. They kept on stoning Stephen as he called out to the Lord, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" He knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord! Do not remember this sin against them!" He said this and died.

-ACTS 7:51, 54-60, TEV

What a tragedy of injustice! Stephen spoke only of the truth

he had found in Jesus Christ, yet he became a victim of others' fear, hate, and religious intolerance. There was no repentance in the hearts of those in the religious establishment, and the murderers were never held accountable in this world for their crime.

But there was a surprising degree of forgiveness and mercy in the heart of Stephen. His life had been so changed by the love of Christ that he was able to plead for forgiveness for his attackers even while they were in the act of stoning him to death. There is perhaps no better example of how the Holy Spirit can perform miracles of love in those who are willing to choose forgiveness and leave vengeance to the Lord.

By the standards of our world, extending forgiveness is a radical position for a person to take in the face of extreme hurt, cruelty, or injustice. The very idea seems to violate our sense of right and wrong. It runs contrary to natural responses to hurt and betrayal. When we suffer abuse or feel overwhelmed with injustices in life, it seems natural to want to lash out to even the score or to punish those who have injured us.

In the terribly trying years following the death of Stephen, many Christians in the Early Church were put to the test. They were not criminals, and they didn't deserve to die, yet they were martyred for their beliefs. Christians became innocent victims of hate, religious prejudice, political expediency, and gross barbarism by a culture that seemingly had lost all reverence for human life. They were stoned to death, crucified,

beheaded, impaled, and fed to wild animals as sport in the arenas. The Roman government sought to destroy the Early Church, but through it all, the Church flourished and grew.

Many historians have said the impact of the Early Church on the culture of the Roman world had less to do with the way Christians lived and more to do with the way they faced death. With Stephen and other early martyrs as an example, they steadfastly refused to renounce their Lord under threat of death, chose to forgive their persecutors in Jesus's name, and went to their deaths in an incredible demonstration of courage. The Holy Spirit equipped early Christians with a spiritual strength that became such an example to others that eventually the body of Christ won over the very government that had for so long persecuted it.

Today, as in New Testament times, many people experience situations in life that call for extraordinary inner strength with which to simply cope with their sufferings. Physical brutality and emotional woundings are everywhere around us. Daily newspapers are virtual catalogs listing episodes of thefts, rapes, murders, abuses, and political coercions. Many of these crimes are clearly committed against people who are victims in the true sense of the word. They neither invite nor cause their injury. Often intense responses to being wronged come out of the victim's anger, frustration, and injustice.

When criminals are brought to trial, the most common response of those who have been wronged is to demand the

full measure of retribution allowed by law. This sense of justice appeals to the Old Testament formula of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." Unfortunately, responses to crimes or to injustices often are generalized beyond the perpetrators to direct condemnation toward the perpetrator's family, toward the culture that has provided the context for the injustice, and even toward the race or nationality of those involved. Vengeance becomes a pervading attitude that reaches far beyond the scope of crime or injustice and ultimately can lead to feuding, class conflict, racial and ethnic prejudice, and even the support of racial and ethnic cleansing. Both the perpetrator and everyone possibly related are vilified.

Brutality and killing, such as that spawned by intertribal intolerance in Africa, religiously motivated terrorism in the Mideast, and the hate-mongering that led to the Holocaust in Europe during the Second World War, have not taught us the senselessness of prejudice, hate, and vengeful violence. We live in a world in which injustice and inhumanity are virtually inescapable.

Many people, out of their frustration and hurt from being wronged, would prefer the concept of "penal" rather than "correctional" institutions for persons convicted of crimes. Criminals often are perceived as unforgivable monsters that either should be put to death or put in prison permanently. It is common for family members of victims to be quoted as "angry and incensed" that the convicted felon would someday have a chance to be paroled or "devastated" that the convicted

murderer was not given the death penalty.

CAPTIVE TO OUR OWN PAIN AND ANGER

Consider what it does to us if we reduce those who wrong us to the role of unforgivable monsters. Viewing someone as a monster gives that person the power to condemn us to live with the hurting memory of our painful past. We give them the power to keep on hurting us and to stay in control of our lives. Is that what we want?



Viewing someone who wronged you as a monster gives them the power to condemn you to live with the hurting memory of your painful past. You are giving them the power to control your life and keep on hurting you.

This is not to say that forgiveness should mean looking the other way as if hurts and injustices had not happened. We cannot deny evil or even try to tolerate it without confrontation. As Lewis Smedes says in his book *Forgive and*

Forget: "There is no real forgiveness unless there is first relentless exposure and honest judgment. When we forgive evil, we do not excuse it, we do not tolerate it. We look evil full in the face, call it what it is, let its horror shock and stun and enrage us, and only then do we forgive it"

From time to time we catch a glimpse of praiseworthy exceptions when Christians have called on the deepest resources of God's grace to accomplish forgiveness in the midst of intense pain and suffering.

Howard Olsen is a veteran whose combat experiences during the Vietnam War resulted in deep bitterness toward the enemy he faced, the United States government for its management of the war, and the American people for the hurtful reception he received upon returning home. Howard's struggle to heal those emotional and spiritual scars is chronicled in his book, *Wounded Warriors, Chosen Lives: Healing for Vietnam Veterans*. By God's grace he was able to overcome the burden of his unforgiveness and now is a Christian counselor who compassionately ministers to his fellow veterans who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. Thirty-two years after his tour of duty ended, Howard chose to return to Vietnam to give expression to his healing and spiritual liberation. In the epilogue to his book he tells of that journey back to Vietnam:

As I traveled [the areas where I had served], the depth of God's healing in my life became obvious. He had erased all pain associated with my Vietnam experience.... Here I was, crisscrossing the country and I didn't need

an artillery battery to call for backup. I didn't need a perimeter surrounded by barbed wire, claymore mines or bunkers. I didn't need the familiar, comforting sound of helicopters circling overhead. I was able to move freely, talk to people to learn of their feelings and to witness to them openly of my Christian faith. I prayed over the land where over thirty years ago I had brought such death and destruction. As I buried portions of scripture in the ground where our firebases had been located, I asked God's blessing on the land itself and on the Vietnamese people.²

What does it take to overcome that kind of bitter wounding and lingering trauma to become a forgiving person? The fundamental key for Howard was to accept accountability for his own choices that may have contributed to his traumatic experiences, to be willing to let go of anger toward others for their hurtful actions, and to submit himself to the healing power of the Holy Spirit to bring peace and transformation into his life.

Is there such a thing as a culture of forgiveness that can protect us from being consumed by feelings of vengeance? In October 2006 the world was stunned with the news that five young Amish schoolgirls had been held captive, terrorized, and brutally murdered in their rural Pennsylvania classroom by a local man they didn't even know. While barricaded in the classroom, their attacker then turned a gun on himself and committed suicide. The senseless brutality of this act stirred the anger and emotions of millions who became aware of this

tragedy through the national news media. How could such an evil act leave room for any kind of forgiveness?

Yet among Amish Christians there is a culture of forgiveness. They take seriously the example of Christ, who bore the suffering of the cross and extended forgiveness to His tormentors. The Amish families and friends of these girls certainly grieved their terrible loss, but, remarkably, they chose to extend words of forgiveness to the family of the one who had slain their children.

According to Anabaptist scholar Donald Kraybill in an article in *The Christian Century*:

Their forgiveness was more than words. Fresh from the funerals where they buried their children, grieving Amish families attended the October 7 burial of the 32-year-old non-Amish killer, Charles Carl Roberts IV. Of the 75 in attendance, at least half were Amish. The Amish families greeted Mrs. Roberts and her three children. She was deeply moved by their presence, according to eye witness accounts. Plans were set to continue the conversation between the families of the killer and killed. And forgiveness was more than a graveside presence: the Amish helped to establish a fund for the assassin's family.³

Fortunately, not all of us will have to suffer the trauma of being victims of a crime as terrible as this, or of having to bear up under the trauma and violence of war. However, most of us

will have to deal with other circumstances that will try our souls and our faith. Tragic accidents, illnesses, divorce, betrayals, and financial setbacks are so common that virtually every one of us will be confronted with several major crises of faith in our life. Love of God does not isolate us from trials and suffering.

As stated previously, we need to be honest by confessing to God our anger against Him and against others who we perceive have wronged us. God is not guilty of anything and certainly does not need our forgiveness. Our anger and unforgiveness are our own. However, God can use every circumstance of life to bring blessing to us and to write wisdom in our hearts if we respond according to His will.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

-ROMANS 8:28, NAS

When we are abused, when circumstances weigh upon us, when troubles mount beyond our control, we are not without hope. God promises victory as we act on our faith and sow forgiveness, pray blessings into our circumstances, and trust in God's mercy to heal our wounds and provide for our every need.

Consider the following examples of those who reaped the grace of God by sowing forgiveness that goes beyond

understanding.



God can use every circumstance of life to bring blessing to us
and to write wisdom in our hearts if we respond according to
His will.

Facing financial crisis and loss of life's work

After fifteen years of hard work in planning and developing the nation's largest general aviation airport and industrial park in suburban St. Louis, Paul and Gretel Haglin had just gotten the project to the point of standing on its own and were on the threshold of realizing their dream of becoming multimillionaires.

At this otherwise positive milestone in the Haglins' business career, the Securities and Exchange Commission cited the insurance company that put together their multimillion-dollar financial loan package for fraud in a totally unrelated business deal. As a result of the citation for fraud, the Texas Insurance

Board forced the insurance company to call in all their real estate loans, including the Haglins:

Paul and Gretel were absolutely stunned, because in the time they were allotted to pay off the recalled loan it was impossible to find alternate refinancing. Consequently, the insurance company that held their loan, after previously having been cited for fraud, declared the Haglins in default and literally stole the entire project through foreclosure.

This turn of events seemed almost too much to bear for the Haglins. The loan was in good shape and was adequately protected, but the forced recall caused them to lose everything. The recall had nothing to do with their airport project, and they had done nothing wrong. It was simply because the lenders in some totally unrelated business transaction had been wickedly dishonest.

The Haglins' response to this incredible financial blow is a great testimony to how God's grace accomplishes miracles for those who choose to take the high road to forgiveness. The following account is in Paul's own words:

We thought, How could this happen to us? We had tried hard to be good stewards of what God had given us. God had blessed us and graced us by putting this project together, and we had tried to be righteous in our business dealings as we went along. There certainly had been a lot of tests. We were tempted to pay bribe money and to pay people to withhold information. But

each time we were faced with a shortcut decision, we heard the Spirit of God say, "No! This is the way I want you to walk!" Then we had this setback happen to us, and we lost everything.

We knew that if we did not choose immediately to forgive, to release, and to pray blessings on those who were so spitefully using us, we were going to be in deep trouble with resentment, demands for revenge, and all of those ungodly things that would come to eat us up.

I think Gretel and I did pretty well considering the immensity of the problem. But our faithful secretary had a very hard time with it. I think it is sometimes more difficult to have something horrendous happen to a loved one than it is to experience it ourselves. We don't always have the amount of grace to apply on their behalf that God gives us when we are stressed ourselves.

We recognized this with our secretary, so I started praying with her three times a day-when we came into the office in the morning, when we broke for lunch, and before we left for home at night. We prayed together, and we started to pray blessings on those insurance people who were taking everything from us that we had worked so hard to achieve.

We prayed about not getting bitter, and we prayed about forgiveness. We took layer after layer off the

onion of our hurt. Each layer brought fresh tears. Gretel and I were fighting bitterness, and we were helping Susie fight as well. We were fighting together so we would not let our feelings turn to hate.

As we continued to pray day after day, our feelings changed. We began to feel that we really did want God to bless these people. Our testimony is that finally, on the day when that prayer-soaked vice president from the insurance company came with his two lawyers to take our company, there was literally nothing in our hearts but love for those men.

My secretary got up and treated them as though they were the finest customers we ever had. "Can I take your coat, sir? Would you like a cup of coffee, sir?" Nothing but love came from her.

As we sat there in the conference room across the table from each other, we were surrounded by God's grace, and He was literally in our presence, guarding us. Susie sat in an anteroom where she could look in on our discussions. She had a vision as I was sitting there talking about these papers, signing our life away; she could see Jesus standing behind me, reading over my shoulder and guiding me in what to say. I called their attention to one section of the papers that seemed to take matters too far. They immediately agreed and had the section corrected and retyped.

When they walked out with everything we owned, there

was peace. We were able to conduct that transfer without agony and without disappointing bitterness because we had done what God had asked us to do.

The amazing end to this story is that on the way to the airport, the vice president had his driver stop. He got out of the car and went to a pay phone to call me. Susie and I were still in the office cleaning up after everything had been taken. On the phone he stammered around a bit and finally said, "Paul, I just had to call you to say thank you. You made my job so easy for me:"

Of course, then I had another problem. I had to deal with God for asking me to make his job easy for him. But that was nothing compared to what we'd been through.

Then the vice president said, "I felt such a peace in your office:" This insurance company officer felt the peace of God that surpasses human understanding even while he was totally ripping us off. That is an awesome testimony.

We have often found comfort in recalling the story of Joseph from the Old Testament. His jealous brothers had sold him into slavery and reported to his father that he was dead. Joseph had every reason to be bitter, but he withheld his judgment of them out of reverence for his God.

Years later, when Joseph was in great authority in Egypt and his brothers came before him begging for food in a time of famine, he didn't seek revenge. Rather, he wept

for joy that they could be reunited, and he blessed them with his protection and provision. Joseph said to his brothers: "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Gen. 50:19-20, NAS).

The lesson here is not just Joseph, a story in the Bible. There is a spiritual principle that will work with each of us. No matter what happens to us, we do not have to be debilitated by disappointment or be consumed with thoughts of anger or revenge. We don't have to. If we choose the high road, God will be with us.⁴

Coping with lifelong pain and physical disability

Judy Beemiller will always be remembered by friends and family for her indomitable spirit, positive attitude, kindness toward everyone she met, and her enduring Christian faith. Reflecting on her own life, Judy wrote a poem that reveals the special kind of focus she had developed. In one stanza she proclaimed the following:

I'll work and I'll strive for my future—
For the treasures this world can't provide,
For my treasures, they're stored up in heaven
Up there, by the Master's side.

This poem is especially poignant because Judy had a lot she

could have been resentful about regarding the "treasures" life had brought her. Judy was a double amputee with numerous other health problems, including heart trouble and diabetes.

As a very young child she developed dermatomyositis, a rare disease that causes the calcification of the muscles. The illness caused extreme pain throughout her life, forced amputation of both her legs, and caused her to lose the use of one arm and partial use of the other. Yet Judy never considered herself to be disabled. She preferred the term "physically challenged." Her health problems presented her with a lifelong struggle, but she never gave in to bitterness. Rather, she approached her physical challenges as obstacles that needed to be overcome, and she joyfully celebrated each small victory.

When her illness was diagnosed at the age of eight, the doctors gave her only a few years to live and told her parents to make her as comfortable as possible in the time she had left. Instead, she lived at home for the next eleven years. At the age of nineteen, shortly after moving into the residential facility at Los Angeles County's Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, Judy had both legs amputated. Unable to use the prescribed prostheses because of the intense pain, she was fitted with an electric wheelchair and subsequently experienced her first glimpse of independence.

She spent the next twelve years as a resident at Rancho Los Amigos, whirling throughout that vast medical complex in her wheelchair. She took classes, got her high school diploma,

volunteered to work with newly disabled patients, and befriended everyone with her indomitable spirit, infectious grin, and caring attitude. Despite her own problems, she became an inspiration to others, blessing all who knew her.

When Rancho Los Amigos became strictly a rehabilitation facility, Judy and a friend moved to a two-bedroom apartment across the street. She developed even more skills in independent living and was able to go shopping, take the bus to church, and continue her education-obtaining an associate degree in special education from Cerritos College. She continued to work with children in the Rancho classrooms, became very active in lobbying for legislative issues supporting the disabled, and even sang in her church choir. In 1987 she was selected from among some 79,000 volunteers to be named one of the six "Distinguished Volunteers of the Year" for Los Angeles County.

Despite her limitations, Judy Beemiller believed that she led a charmed life. Once, when being interviewed by a reporter for a feature story, Judy stopped to ask, "This isn't going to be one of those sob stories, is it? One time a friend of mine was interviewed by a newspaper reporter, and when we read the article we all cried. We didn't realize we were so bad off."

Judy died at the age of fifty-one as the result of a tragic accident when her van inadvertently backed into her wheelchair and overturned it. Injuries to her frail body brought on complications that resulted in heart failure. But her legacy

lives on. Her positive response to the hard knocks in life never allowed bitterness to settle in her heart. Her kindness, positive attitude, and empathy with others kept her open to all life had to offer and allowed her to focus on how God would empower her to overcome. In testimony to her faith, she penned the following poem not long before her death:

My cross in this world is heavy,
And I'll carry it my whole life through
For, you see, I will never be able
To walk in this world as you do.

People ask how I can have faith
And love God who permits this to be,
And I answer as honest and open
As a heart full of His love can be.

If it weren't for my heavenly Father
Who sent His Son down here for me,
If it weren't for my dear blessed Savior
Who in love died on Calvary's tree,

There'd be no dreams or hopes for my future
I'd be lost 'neath the wages of sin.

But I can keep right on smiling
For He's put His love down deep within.

So I'll work and I'll strive for the future
For the treasures this world can't provide,
For my treasures, they're stored up in heaven
Up there, by my Master's side.

One day when my work here is ended
And I'm called to my home on high,
With a heart full of love I will thank Him
That He chose for my sins to die.

So you see why my heart is so glad.
One day I'll be gloriously clad.
I'll walk and I'll run around heaven,
I'll sing and I'll shout with joy!

And from there I shall live forever
In God's peace and His tranquility.
For you see the words of the Master
Have especially come true for me.

Dear Lord,

I understand that just by being a Christian we cannot expect to escape the hard knocks in life or even the cruel injuries that may come our way. Everywhere I look I see pain and suffering, touching even my friends and family. I want to stand tall in faith and be a strong example of one who affirms life, but it is difficult. I often feel weak, and I'm tempted to despair.

Lord, I ask that You take this burden from me. Lift me when my spirit falls. Equip me through Your Holy Spirit to be so grounded in Your love that I can walk with a sense of peace and confidence through the darkest of valleys.

Help me to know and to live daily with the assurance that You are able to work through any circumstance in life to bring good to me and to further the work of Your kingdom. Amen.

We can never be fully prepared for tragedies that may happen. However, if we are well grounded in our trust of a righteous and loving God and have sorted through those values that are important in life, we can be better prepared to cope when the unexpected happens and hopefully to choose forgiveness.

With a friend or your group members, discuss how you think you might respond if the following situations were to happen to you. Do you think your response would be typical of the general population, or would you choose to respond in a different manner?

Where is God in these situations? How do you balance holding a person accountable for their actions and your ability to be forgiving?

A family tragedy: You go shopping with your family to a nearby mall, and while you are gone, several neighborhood children playing with fireworks accidentally set your house on fire. When you return, you find your house burned to the ground, destroying everything you own except the clothes you are wearing.

Accidental death of a loved one: Your teenage daughter goes to a party at a classmate's home with her boyfriend. While there, they do some drinking. Driving home, the young man misses a curve and runs his car into a tree. Your daughter is killed instantly. The young man escapes with minor injuries. He is remorseful and begs your forgiveness.

Robbery and violence: Coming home from a movie one night, you are accosted in your driveway by two young men who demand money. They become angry with what you give them and brutally beat you, causing injuries that require three months convalescence and tens of thousands of dollars in medical bills. When they are caught and brought to trial, you learn they come from broken homes where there was a history of physical abuse and drug use.

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ridging our separateness from others is what forgiveness is all about. Such bridge building requires piecing together new relationships through presence, communication, mutual understanding, and acceptance. It is an awesome task, but incredibly worthwhile and rewarding. What is it, then, that we need to understand about forgiveness? Let's review!

- I Forgiveness is a necessity-to be forgiven by God, we must be forgiving toward others. We must work out our salvation by responding positively in forgiveness to God's gift of grace.
- M Forgiveness can often be easy if we practice it as a daily discipline, but it becomes more difficult when we allow our hurts and resentments to linger and deepen into bitterness.
- M Forgiveness is a major battle when hurts become lodged in the heart and spirit and become part of our root nature.
- I Forgiveness is achievable through the Lord Jesus Christ if we surrender our thinking and behaving to Him so that every circumstance of life may be used for His good purposes.

Until now, we have been looking at the issue of forgiveness from the perspective of our own salvation and sanctification. But now let's try to see forgiveness from God's point of view.

Why did God pay the price of sacrificing His Son to return us to right relationship with Him? Why didn't He just wipe us out and start all over? Did He provide for forgiveness and our salvation just because He loved us so much as individuals?

Perhaps love for us as individuals would have been enough. But God sees His creation from a much broader perspective. God wants to restore us because He wants to build unity; He wants to build a kingdom of sons and daughters.

The first sin fractured unity. It broke the unity between mankind and heaven. It fractured the unity between man and woman. It destroyed the unity between man and nature:

Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.

-GENESIS 3:17-19

God is interested in more than just our personal salvation. He wants us to share in the restoration of unity throughout creation, fulfilling His purpose throughout the heavens.

Through the Church, He wants to bring all creation into His eternal purpose:

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

-ROMANS 8:19-21

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

-EPHESIANS 3:10-11

Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

-PHILIPPIANS 2:2

The message for us is that forgiveness is the very ground of unity for the restoration of the kingdom of God.

How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of

his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.

-PSALM 133:1-3

When a priest was ordained in the time of King David, the high priest anointed him with oil. Not just a dab-they poured it on until it rolled down over his head and neck, spilling onto his robes. The anointing was the high point of celebration because, through the priest, all the people of his region would come into their destiny.

The ordination was a great celebration of unity. In this psalm of David, he tells us that to live in unity is to be refreshed and to be showered with God's blessings of life, forevermore.



Bitterness spreads and can damage even the innocent who are far removed.

After years of traveling around speaking in one church after another, Paula and I immediately can sense whether there is

unity or disunity within a church body. If there is disunity, there will be heaviness, rancor, and distrust. If there is unity, there is lightness, joy, and a sense of blessing pouring over all. Forgiveness restores unity, and only where unity exists can blessing be poured out.

This is true for marriages as well. When married couples fall out of loving relationship with each other and go through divorce in a spirit of unforgiveness, the results are spread far beyond their personal relationship. Their children suffer. Even their adult children suffer. The blessings lost in the breaking of their unity subsequently are lost to friends and other relatives as well. Bitterness spreads and can damage even the innocent far removed.

We have noted that tragic circumstances often fall upon the children of parents who have split up in bitter unforgiveness. Almost always when we see a tragic death of a teenager, we find that some kind of drastic fragmentation has happened previously between the parents. Their disunity fractured the cover of protection and blessing over their children.

We don't want to make this into an unalterable judgment so as to say to all those who have lost a child or a close relative that they are at fault because they were out of unity. That is not always the case. Many other factors may have opened the door to trouble. But we must recognize that we are created to live in corporateness. We can never successfully be islands unto ourselves. We share in blessing as we live in unity

because we are vital links in many kinds of family relationships. Likewise, we share in pain when fractured unity blocks the fullness of blessing.

Consider the prayer of Jesus:

I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one.... My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

-JOHN 17:11, 20-23

In this passage we can feel the intense yearning of the Lord's heart for us to come into the unity He wants for us. What grieving He must feel because of our lack of unity! He has given us many gifts so that we might become one with each other and with Him. Yet so often the Church has not used those gifts for unity, but to promote disunity. It seems to be a law that however wonderful a gift from God, to that degree we can and will misuse it to disunity and harm!

The Lord gave us water baptism as an expression of repentance for our sins-to be buried with Him in water and resurrected to new life. That was designed to bring us into unity with Him and with one another. And yet we manage to argue with one another about how and when water baptism should be applied, how much water is needed, and who is doing it right and who isn't.

The Lord gave us Communion that we might experience deep fellowship with one another and with Him. And yet we argue about what it means, how it should be served, and about who is doing it in a valid way and who isn't.

He gave us the baptism of the Holy Spirit that we might be united in His Spirit. Yet what division and rancor have often arisen in the Church over the gifts of the Holy Spirit and how various gifts should find expression in the lives of those who use them!

He gave us understanding about inner healing and transformation of the inner man so we might be enabled to deal with the deep things of the heart and come into unity with God and others. Yet what disunity has resulted because we have not really tuned ourselves to God's heart! We argue about whether inner healing is biblical and whether and how we should be involved in it. We have not focused on Him and poured our energy into what He is doing in the healing and transforming process.

We have had many eruptions of disunity over contrasting

theories of what holiness is. Holiness is a state of having been cleansed by the Lord, identifying with Him, and participating in His purity of mind, heart, and spirit. But we would seek to categorize holiness-each in his own possessive and divisive way. We attach limiting names and definitions to holiness, judge one another according to our own idea of who is holy and who is not, and measure who is more elevated in holiness than someone else. In doing so, we greatly defile the gifts of God.

THE DISCIPLINE OF FORGIVENESS IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

We believe there is a distinctive discipline one must maintain regularly over one's own heart to be pure before the Lord-a discipline of forgiveness. Lack of this discipline throughout the body of Christ is an issue we have grieved about for years. Why does the body of Christ fail to catch the vision of forgiveness? Why does the body of Christ remain so lazy about keeping the heart clean and clear? Why does the body of Christ avoid the practical, daily discipline of forgiving others?

We do not come into good and true repentance because we have little awareness of the kingdom of God. We don't understand how our unforgiveness shatters the kingdom of God. We so lack love for the kingdom that it matters little to us anyway.

All too often we hear some brother saying, "Well, I only hurt myself; I don't hurt anybody else. I guess I'm my own worst

enemy!"

That's a total lack of awareness of the kingdom. We need to ask, "Are we preaching the same message Jesus preached?" Our focus seems to be on individual sin, forgiveness, and salvation. But wherever Jesus went, He preached the kingdom of God-how being restored to right relationship with God should restore us to right relationship with our fellow man within the kingdom.

Jesus wants to build such corporateness that we realize fully we are not just separate individuals; we are in a marriage and a family. We are so united to one another that everything that happens to my brother is critical to what happens to me! His life is my very life. That is the kingdom of God.

There is that in us that actually makes a fetish of enjoying pain. We feel more worthwhile if we are suffering, and we too often believe we suffer alone. We talk to people like we "just have to bear that cross." We like being noble martyrs and have little awareness of how our sin and pain affect others and drag them down as well. We don't understand that our brother needs us to be whole in order for him to be whole. Our pain destroys his celebration.

IN LOVE WITH THE KINGDOM OF GOD

We need to be in love with what Jesus is in love with-the whole kingdom of God. We don't love what He loves enough to pay the price of linkage to our brothers and sisters and to take

personal responsibility for unity within the kingdom. We personalize and trivialize our own particular sin and pain because we have not caught the vision of corporateness.

When we have a limited view of our role in the kingdom, we don't repent of how we contribute to fracturing the unity. We tend to connect repentance only with our own individual salvation.

Good repentance is when the Lord's love for His total family so fills us that we repent of the way our sin and unforgiveness rapes the body of Christ of the unity the Lord so loves. A good repentance is not just that we get straightened out, but that we repent for the sake of the Church and the entire family of God.



Unforgiveness learned early in life is like mud in our eyes. It keeps us from seeing with clarity and truth because we are so bothered by what has happened to us previously.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE HANG ON TO UNFORGIVENESS?

There is no way we can see reality-all we have are our own subjective perceptions.

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

-MATTHEW 6:22-23

The responses we make to the circumstances and events of our life when we are very young determine the way we are apt to respond to events throughout life. Unforgiveness learned early in life is like mud in our eyes. It keeps us from seeing with clarity and truth because we are so bothered by what has happened to us previously.

A typical example of this was when a young woman came to us for prayer ministry, complaining that her father had always yelled at her. She described how she would fall into terrible fear whenever her father would raise his voice. Any present confrontation with him made her want to flee. Consequently their relationship had broken down, and there was virtually no discussion or understanding between them.

The actual fact was that in their recent history her father seldom really yelled at her, but she perceived it that way because of how often he had expressed himself with anger when she was a child. At that time, he was immature, didn't yet know the Lord, and had not come to repentance. Those

frightful experiences of being yelled at as a child were burned into her heart. She had never forgiven him and was not able to let go of that original hurtful response. Even a quiet reprimand from him was now perceived as angry shouting. Her failure to let go of unforgiveness was blocking her from having a loving relationship with her father-and with others.

This young woman's unforgiveness spilled over into other relationships. Whenever anyone from the body of Christ would come to her to speak the truth in love, she would perceive it as critical yelling at her. Thus, her unforgiveness of her father fractured her relationships with others. She was seriously concerned that she responded this way to her father and to others, but she didn't know how to overcome her inward spontaneous reactions of anger, fear, and flight.

In his letter to the Roman church, St. Paul revealed the struggle he had between his mind, committed to the law of God, and his sin nature, held captive to the law of sin:

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law, but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God-through Jesus Christ our Lord!

-ROMANS 7:21-25

Paul is speaking here of more than just the physical body. He is speaking of the entire "body" of the way people think and feel the sin nature lodged in our hearts against which our renewed minds must do battle. That "body" of the way we think and feel is not ours alone; it is part of the corporate structure in which all of us live.

There are unregenerate elements in the cultures that surround us—the way our family thinks and feels, the way our friends think and feel, even the way our church thinks and feels. If we don't crucify the negative and sinful ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, they will impair and destroy the unity in which God intends to bless our family, friends, and church. That's the corporate expression of the law of sin. And as Paul says, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

In teaching various groups as we travel, Paula and I frequently encounter people who are immensely insecure in who they are because have not received enough wholesome nurture, but instead they have received much criticism throughout their lives. The insecurity becomes evident when individuals begin to take personally what is said in a general group discussion of common problems. Rather than hearing the discussion for what it is and applying whatever principles fit, they feel offended or accused, as if the discussion were focusing solely on them.

When this happens, we have often found ourselves trapped in a no-win situation. If individuals are threatened by what is

being said and we look at them during the discussion, they become sure they are being targeted for criticism. On the other hand, if we don't look at them during the discussion, they are sure we're rejecting them. This happens simply because, due to unforgiveness, they are unable to see reality as it is.

Our discernment becomes warped because we interpret issues from a childish point of view.

The unforgiving ways we hold within us are actually childish ways. When we are unforgiving, we see, feel, and respond childishly. The way of forgiveness and love causes increasing maturity that provides real answers and real resolution for problems. The apostle Paul reminded the Corinthian church of this:

When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; but when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.

-1 CORINTHIANS 13:11-12, NAS

He also reminded them of the opposite, which happens when the disciplined way of forgiveness has not become ours:

I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling

among you, are you not worldly?

-1 CORINTHIANS 3:2-3

When the Lord has dealt with the mud in our eyes and with the confusion in our spirits, we'll see with clarity and discernment. Let me illustrate again how one's discernment becomes warped.

A husband may feel genuine affection for his wife and decide to bring home a gift because he wants to bless her heart. But if previous hurts, especially in childhood, have lodged unforgiveness in her heart toward people she thinks have tried to manipulate her by gifts, or toward people who gave her gifts of things rather than the loving gift of themselves, then she has false eyes and doesn't have true discernment to see what is actually in her husband's heart. She is apt to assign wrong motives to his gift. She may feel that he is only trying to manipulate her because he wants something.

In another case, a wife may have a natural propensity to show affection toward her husband by hugging, snuggling, or kissing him frequently. But if he grew up with negative feelings and unforgiveness toward others who used such behavior to smother or control him, then he may not have the discernment to read his wife's affection as real and pure. He may feel smothered or abused. He will then activate childish ways. It's like looking in a carnival mirror and seeing a distorted reflection of reality. He won't be able to receive his wife's sincere feelings, and he won't see himself rightly.



As Christians, we lose our message to the world if we do not live in the unity we profess.

What should one's repentance be in cases such as this? How should we repent? If I fail often to recognize my spouse's approaches as love, my repentance should not merely be that I failed to receive her love but that I fractured the unity of our family. That is the repentance that is appropriate to the Lord. We should pray:

Lord, I have fractured the unity of my family. I have failed to allow myself to be blessed. That has wounded my partner and fractured our unity. Forgive me, Lord, that I have broken the unity of our family.

As Christians, we lose our message to the world if we do not live in the unity we profess. We must recognize how important unity is and protect it with appropriate repentance and forgiveness.

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing

with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

-EPHESIANS 4:2-3

Unity doesn't mean uniformity. Unity doesn't mean we are never to fight. We need to talk things out, even if that means hassles with one another. That is not yet disunity. Disunity results when fights are accompanied by withdrawing the heart. But if our quarreling is undergirded with repentance, respect for one another, and forgiveness, the unity of our relationship stays intact.

It causes us to fall short of the grace of God.

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.

-HEBREWS 12:15, NAS

When and how does a Christian miss or come short of the grace of God? Suppose there is a man named Bob, working in an office. One afternoon his boss jumps all over him, saying, "Bob, you have really screwed up everything you've tried to do today. What is the matter with you?"

That criticism really hurts, and Bob goes into a depressive funk because it hooks into the way his father used to berate him. But while Bob inwardly wrestles with that, his co-worker Jim says to the boss, "Wait a minute; you're off base here.

What happened today was not Bob's fault. He did his job just as he was asked to do, and if it went wrong, it was because of other factors."

Then another co-worker speaks up and says, "That's right; I can vouch for the fact that Bob did all that he was supposed to do. He doesn't deserve any blame."

Later on, while Bob is talking with his friends, he says, "You know, when I get into trouble, nobody ever defends me!"

Bob never responded to what his friends did for him. It was God's grace to cause them to speak up and defend him. That support was part of the blessed corporateness God brought into his life, but he didn't recognize or acknowledge it. He fell short of God's grace.

Bob's response wounded his brothers because it was evident he never saw what they had done for him. Subsequently, they thought, Why did we ever open our mouths to defend him? He never even acknowledged we were doing it. Because of unforgiveness, the unity of the office was further fractured when it could have been salvaged.

Or look at an office situation in another way. The boss comes in the office and gives Bob an affirmation. He says, "Bob, you really did a good job today." But then he adds a comment about how one issue could have been handled better.

Bob fails to receive the compliment. He retains only that one

word of criticism. Then his friends come to him and say, "Hey, didn't you hear how pleased he was with your work?"

And Bob says, "No, I didn't. He's always finding fault with me.

That is what fractures unity. Bob couldn't hear the reality of compliments because his mind was clouded with lingering unforgiveness toward his unduly critical father. For Bob, his repentance needs to include more than his inability to hear or for his blindness in misunderstanding, but also for the role he played in fracturing unity in the office.

Bob should pray repentantly, "Lord, forgive me. You wanted to build unity and love relationships in the office, and I fractured that."

In my (John's) own case, my mother used to work me long hours. I had two cows to milk, three hundred chickens to feed, a thirty-eight-tree orchard, and an acre and a half of garden to take care of. I worked from morning till night, but it seemed I didn't get compliments from my mother. I didn't get the affirmation I needed, and my heart was bitter about that.

It isn't important now whether my mother did or didn't compliment my hard work as a boy. What is important is that I judged her for how she treated me, and my judgments eventually resulted in my own inability to give compliments to my children.

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

-ROMANS 2:1

Realizing this, I had to come into repentance. But my repentance needed to be for more than my judgments on my mother, more than being sorry that I too found it difficult to give compliments. I needed to repent of the way my attitude and actions wounded my children and fractured the unity of the family-for their sakes.

We don't get set free unless our repentance is full and complete. When we are concerned only about our own salvation, we become sinfully self-centered. We need to catch the vision of the need for unity in the whole family and be repentant for the ways in which we have contributed to fracturing that unity.

Our sin comes back on us and must be dealt with again and again.

In the model prayer Jesus gave for us, He addressed God with the fairness that also should be expected from us. Jesus asked the Father to "forgive us our sins as we have also forgiven those who have sinned against us." If we are not willing to forgive others their transgressions against us, then how can we expect God to continue to forgive us our transgressions? We reap the unforgiveness we have sown, and

God doesn't want that.

It is true that when we come to Jesus, He washes all our sins away. But if we harbor unforgiveness deep in our heart, that unforgiveness will continue to generate the same kind of sin that stained us beforehand. Like the man forgiven of ten thousand talents who would not forgive another who owed him a pittance, all our debts (sins) come back on us.

Unless we allow the Lord to deal with the root of our sinful unforgiveness, we will have to continue to struggle with the same old things again and again. Certainly we cannot expect God to continue to give us His grace if we are not willing to give the gift of grace to others.

Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

The servant fell on his knees before him. "Be patient with me," he begged, "and I will pay back everything." The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. But when the servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. "Pay back what you owe me!" he demanded.

His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, "Be patient with me, and I will pay you back." But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

Then the master called the servant in. "You wicked servant," he said, "I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.

-MATTHEW 18:23-35

This is not merely a fanciful parable-it is a vivid description of the way reality actually works! We have seen it happen hundreds of times. Brothers or sisters won't forgive a perceived wrong. Soon their own bitterness turns back on them, and they find themselves suffering in real mental and emotional prisons. We pay a heavy price for bitterness when we could easily receive the grace and forgiveness of the Lord.

Our unforgiveness affects unity throughout the body of Christ when people see us holding on to wounds we should have been willing to give up.

When we seem to repent on the surface but keep falling back into ancient patterns of unforgiveness, people hurt for us. They are disappointed in us. It makes others question whether this thing called Christianity really works, since so many of those who profess to follow a forgiving Lord are so unwilling to be forgiving themselves. Unforgiving Christians are seen as hypocritical.

And then we begin to question ourselves, asking, "Why do I keep falling back all the time?" We wind up in isolation. We want to hide so others won't know what is going on inside our unforgiving hearts and lives. We suffer such consequences only because we don't let the Lord fully into our hearts in order to come to completeness of repentance.

Many people fall into the trap of harboring bitterness and grudges while fully understanding that Christians should not behave that way. Consequently, they fall into denial and pretend everything is just fine in their lives, despite the anger and bitterness within. This results in a "smiling depression" in which rage, bitterness, shame, guilt, and even death wishes are repressed-yet sneak out every once in a while to expose their true character.

It affects our ability to confront others.

When we are off course morally and spiritually, we need brothers and sisters in Christ to take us aside, confront us lovingly, and earnestly plead with us to correct our ways. To be

rebuked or to rebuke is not something to fear. We should welcome correction for our own enlightenment, and we should care enough for our friends to go to them with our legitimate concerns-caring enough about unity both to receive correction and to confront.

Stern discipline is for him who forsakes the way; He who hates reproof will die.

-PROVERBS 15:10, NAS

He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself, And he who reprove a wicked man gets insults for himself. Do not reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you, Reprove a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser, Teach a righteous man, and he will increase his learning. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

-PROVERBS 9:7-10, NAS

Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.

-PROVERBS 27:6, NAS

The Bible says we are to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). It is not love when we see a Christian friend stumbling repeatedly through the same mistakes while we do nothing to help him see his errors.

Better is open rebuke Than love that is concealed.

-PROVERBS 27:5, NAS

Like apples of gold in settings of silver Is a word
spoken in right circumstances.

-PROVERBS 25:11, NAS

In the culture of biblical days, hospitality was of extreme importance. Etiquette prescribed that one had to have fruit on hand with which to refresh weary travelers. Kitchilika trees produced an especially refreshing fruit that looked much like a cross between a grapefruit and an orange. The closest Western translators could come in description was "apples of gold;" and the fruit would be served on a silver tray. This proverb is saying that a word spoken at the right time and in the right way refreshes hearts as kitchilika fruit refreshes weary travelers. We are to refresh one another's hearts in the unity and love of our Lord Christ Jesus.

We are to speak the wisdom we know and not hide it. Truth spoken in love is refreshment. We need to refresh one another by rebuking one another, but my (John's) own sin is that very seldom can I make myself do the rebuking. Why? Because I saw people in my childhood confronting each other in very harmful ways. That didn't necessarily mean I feared I would do it in harmful ways myself, but my unforgiveness of those who rebuked others with harsh criticism locked me into a determination that I would not make the same mistake.

Consequently, I make the opposite mistake of not issuing good and loving rebukes when I should.

Strangely, I have discovered that I can't get free of that until I repent of fleeing the role I am destined to play in my brother's life and for causing him to fall because I failed to give him a word of loving rebuke.

In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

-1 JOHN 4:17-18

Blows and wounds cleanse away evil, and beatings purge the inmost being.

-PROVERBS 20:30

We should not fear that our rebukes, lovingly given, will bring hurt. Of course, they may, but the value of the healing is greater.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasted away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on

what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

-2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18

All of us need to receive blows that reach our inmost parts, because that is the way we learn lessons and are cleansed.

We need to understand the law of sowing and reaping. When we sow an evil deed, that sin accumulates toward heavier and heavier reaping until we repent. If a brother recognizes sin in us and rebukes us in the Lord, then we can repent; the Lord will lift from us the consequences we are due, and we will not be crushed. But if we are not rebuked, our sin will accumulate more and more dire reaping, until we reap the full harmful weight of it. Should we not then welcome the loving rebuke of a brother who cares enough to warn us of our errors, that we might repent before the crushing weight of full reaping comes?

Penalties are prepared for mockers, and beatings for the backs of fools.

-PROVERBS 19:29

We must understand that it is love to rebuke. If we do not warn our brothers, they will reap heavier penalties, and we will share the sin for withholding our love. Having the courage to speak a loving rebuke begins with our own repentance for wounding the body of Christ if we stay silent.

It makes us vulnerable to attack by Satan.

Satan wants to use any unforgiveness he can find in our hearts as part of his scheme to create disharmony and to destroy the unity of God's people. An unforgiving attitude not only separates individuals, but it also breaks down the unity that should be the strength of the body of Christ. We must be on guard against giving him the opportunity to control our lives through the way he can nurture our hurts and bitterness.

If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you.... If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven-if there was anything to forgive-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 2:5, 10-11

Satan wants to destroy the Church. His scheme is to encourage disharmony among believers in order to break down the unity of their obedience to Christ. The prayer of Jesus recorded in John 17 asked the Father to protect those who had come into unity with Him and to bless their unity so that others might know the love of the Father through their witness. Jesus said:

I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

-JOHN 17:23

Unity in the body of Christ validates Jesus before the world. Disunity causes the world to disbelieve that Jesus is who He said He is-sent by the Father. Satan uses any unforgiveness he can find to attack us in the vulnerability of our wounds. We play into Satan's hands when, through pride and selfrighteous anger, we cut others off, hold grudges, attempt to emotionally punish those who may have wronged us, or refuse to allow the healing of God's grace to be extended to others.

"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.... Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

-EPHESIANS 4:26-27, 31-32

It creates in us the necessity to build and maintain a facade.

Jesus wants us to be totally honest, transparent, believable, and consistent. He wants the transformation of our inner being to be so complete that what we show to others is who we truly are. We must be willing to be washed clean inside and out. Otherwise, we are but a superficial reflection of God's love, filled with impurity behind our facade.

Whenever we remain unforgiving, we become like the Pharisees who demanded compliance with the letter of the law, yet held intolerance and selfrighteousness within their hearts:

Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also?

-LUKE 11:39-40

Both in action and in attitude we must be transparent, allowing God's love and grace to permeate our entire being. Purity within and without invites others to know us without reservation. Unforgiveness lodged in our heart creates a false, fleshly protective wall that separates who we really are from the image we project to the world:

- I We don't want people to know our innermost thoughts and motivations, so we erect barriers to keep others from getting too close.

- I We don't invite others into fellowship with us for fear they'll see the truth of our family life.

- M We avoid telling stories on ourselves because we have to maintain an image of having it all together.

We are afraid to get help from a prayer minister because we know we will be confronted and have to deal with issues that may be painful.

- M We can't risk or be spontaneous because we have a need to keep everything under control.

- M We can't adventure because we're insecure if

asked to move outside our comfort zone and risk things we aren't sure will work.

We don't trust others to love and accept us if they really know who we are.

Building facades such as these to protect our unforgiveness means that we are living a lie. That puts a terrific amount of stress on us—stress that will eventually take its toll in alienation from others and from God, breaking the unity of the kingdom.

We must not use the security of our own salvation experience to excuse that part of us that remains unregenerate.

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.

-1 JOHN 4:19-20

If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

-1 JOHN 1:6-7

It produces physical, emotional, and spiritual exhaustion.

We become exhausted trying to carry it all by ourselves, yet our pride and self-will compel us to stay in fleshly self-control. Jesus invites us to give the load to Him. He promises to relieve the burden, to give us rest, and to be a gentle teacher:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

-MATTHEW 11:28-30

What is it that stops us? Is it that we do not trust Him to be true to His Word? There have been times in my life when I (John) spent all my energies searching-first down one blind alley and then another.

I got so tired, so completely exhausted, that finally I said, "Lord, I can't make it. Even with Your grace and with Your Holy Spirit, if it's up to me, I can't make it. I am totally lost and depraved. There is no way that I am going to be a viable person. I give up. I am totally tired and exhausted. From now on I'm going to forget about me and just live to bless people in Your kingdom."

Only when I got to that place did real freedom and joy come into my life. I was no longer focusing on trying to get me straightened out. I focused my life on ministering to other people. I reckoned that my own enlightenment was not as

important as God's call to give myself to help others.

God still had, and has, more to straighten out in me. Inner healing was and still is necessary. But now He has changed my focus and my motives. It was no longer that I would use inner healing to get me straightened out, for my own selfish, self-centered sake. I determined to serve Him for His kingdom's purposes, forgetting about me, and when He knew that my unhealed nature would harm His kingdom and His purposes, then He would step in to heal my inner nature. I was now free from the quest for my own healing and was able to leave it up to God.

That was the repentance the Lord was waiting for. That was the turnaround in my life, and it came nearly fifteen years after I was converted! From the time I repented of my own selfish search, my burden was lightened, my joy began to soar, and my pathway began to clear. All of life turned for the better, because I was no longer trying to use God to straighten myself out. I determined to live for other people and God's love of unity and to keep my eyes on His kingdom.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE LET JESUS RESTORE UNITY THROUGH THE JOYS OF FORGIVENESS?

If we are serious in our repentance and our desire to follow Jesus, we will be true to our faith and follow His commands. We will not play into the hands of the enemy. Rather, we will live out the vision and mission of our Lord. Jesus said:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full [more abundantly].

-JOHN 10:10

When Jesus cleans us from the inside out, forgiveness transforms us.

Forgiveness changes our hardness of heart into compassion. We become consistently pure and transparent. Forgiveness makes life richer, more filled with love, more expansive, more spiritually alive, and more abundantly satisfying. Although we may disagree with others, we appreciate the differences. We begin to value diversity. We learn to appreciate people for the way they provide balance for us—lifting, enriching, blessing, fulfilling, and, yes, challenging and wounding us as well. We appreciate the ways that differences, challenges, rebukes, and woundings drive us to perfection for Him.

Living in forgiveness means we are no longer threatened by others; nor do we feel accused. We get out of the business of competing and grow into the capacity to participate wholeheartedly in the joys of others and in what the Holy Spirit is doing in their lives. We rejoice more in what is happening with someone else than we do in what is happening with us.

Forgiveness allows us to let go of negative feelings and enter into a unity of fellowship with others so that everything that is a joy and blessing for them is also our joy and blessing. Because of this attitude, we ourselves are refreshed and lifted

up.

Those who live in forgiveness are given real spiritual authority.

Authority does not come from us. It comes from God and is based on God's Word, His Holy Spirit, His kingdom, and His authority.

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you:" And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

-JOHN 20:21-23

We know through the authority given us by Christ that if we pronounce forgiveness, it is going to happen. That authority is real because it has been given by God, and we know it because we have experienced it. Once we have experienced forgiveness in our own life, we know it can happen, and we can be confident in God's power.

Living in forgiveness means we will come into rest and freedom.

The reason is obvious. Forgiveness allows us to escape the battle of trying to hold things together by ourselves, and it relieves the stress of trying to hide the inconsistencies in our life. When we trust the Lord, we give up everything to Him and come into a blessedness of rest.

You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.

-ISAIAH 26:3

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

-MATTHEW 11:28-30

There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.

-HEBREWS 4:9-10, NAS

GOD COMMANDS BLESSING WHERE THERE IS UNITY!

So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, so they may live.'" So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet-a vast army.

-EZEKIEL 37:7-10

Most of us in the body of Christ have not yet experienced the power of the Spirit of God that descended at Pentecost. As in Ezekiel 37, the Spirit of God has breathed upon us, stirring us from our spiritual death like the reassembling of scattered dry bones on a desert floor. But we have only risen as individuals.

In the awakening of our sense of forgiveness toward others, our dry bones have rattled together, so the Lord has caused us to begin to have tendons and flesh. But there is not yet any real vitality and power within us. We have not yet seen the fullness of Pentecost.

Peter and John walked up to a man lame from birth who had never learned how to walk and whose muscles were atrophied. They did not even pray. Peter said, "Look at us!" And then he continued, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene-walk!" (Acts 3:4, 6, NAS). The man not only walked, but he also leaped and ran! That's power! We pray and hope something happens and are surprised if it does. Peter and John knew they had the power resident within them and could transmit it.

In Ezekiel's vision, the Lord commanded him to prophesy to the "breath," that it might come from the four winds and bring life to those dry bones. That means to call for the Holy Spirit to come, to act in power upon and in us. At the second breathing of the Spirit, the bones came to life and stood up as a vast

army.

The prophecy we must respond to now is for that second breathing to come that will make us a great army. Like the disciples of Jesus who were waiting in the upper room, we have been breathed on the first time, and the Spirit of the Lord is within us. But the real power has yet to descend.

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

-JOHN 20:21-22, EMPHASIS ADDED

Before Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was already with the disciples, just as the Spirit is with us, and the Spirit had already revealed many things to them. But Jesus counseled them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for that which He had promised them. In time the Spirit would descend and imbue them with power:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

-ACTS 1:8, EMPHASIS ADDED

What was the purpose of the delay? Why not receive that power from on high immediately? They had to be prepared by coming into unity. One hundred twenty people spent ten days locked in an upper room, dealing with their issues. They sat

down and started talking. They worked through their hassles and disagreements. They started confronting one another and speaking the truth. They discussed and selected who among them would take the place of Judas among the twelve. When they had talked it all out, prayed for one another, and had forgiven each other, they came into corporateness. They achieved unity.

That was the ground of power the Holy Spirit needed. When they were all of one accord, the Holy Spirit was able to come and equip them in power to do the work of Christ in the world. Where there is unity, there God commands blessing.

Why don't we have fullness of power in our lives? Why do we lack power in our churches and in our denominations? It is because we have been living in our own little worlds, interested primarily in getting Jesus to bring us into personal salvation and to straighten out our own personal conflicts. We have almost no sense of the corporateness of our faith. We go about our own petty personal concerns unrepentant of how we may be contributing to tearing apart the fabric of the body of Christ.

We don't have our eyes open to the kingdom of God, which is the central focus of what the Lord Jesus Christ came to establish! Since we haven't become corporate by forgiving one another, caring for one another, and praying for one another, the fullness of power through God's Holy Spirit can't be sent.

This is why we need forgiveness. We haven't caught the vision of what we mean in Christ to each other. When we get

that and are really open to one another, when we share with one another in love, then the power will descend.

Our heavenly Father,

We are so grateful that, looking upon us, You did not leave us in the isolation, loneliness, and despair that our sinfulness fully deserves. But rather You moved upon us to gather us up to Yourself. And You moved upon us so that we might become one people.

Lord, we confess that we have not really seen our oneness and have not really discovered the corporateness to which You have called us. This is our sin. Not the only one, but certainly that which acts to block healthy relationships with others and to prevent the fullness of Your kingdom.

Lord, we want to understand forgiveness and corporateness and truly be the body of Christ, doing Your work in the world. Help our spirits to stay awake in Your Spirit and to be alert that we might hear and understand what You would give us each day. Amen.

Chapter Eight Discussion Restoration of Christian Unity

Consider the following statement: "God is interested in more than just our personal salvation. He wants us to share in the restoration of unity throughout creation, fulfilling His purpose

throughout the heavens:"

Think about the areas where you influence people on a regular basis beyond your immediate family. Identify ways you can become more constructively involved to encourage unity in these broader issues of life.

If we are to be truly corporate, we must feel a linkage to all of our brothers and sisters and take responsibility for restoring unity where the sin of any (or all) has caused separation.

Identify several areas of disunity within the family of God for which you can express repentance for the sake of the entire Church.

On behalf of the Church, ask God's forgiveness for these corporate and personal sins.

Review the eight results of hanging on to unforgiveness listed in this chapter (pages 159-176). Evaluate yourself to discover ways in which each of these situations applies to a relationship problem you currently face. Focus on one of these situations, and repentantly confess to God your contribution to the problem and ask His forgiveness.

What can you now do to remedy the situation with the person or persons involved?

For continuing application through the following weeks and months, make a list of every significant person in your life since birth. Write out details of how each of these persons impacted you, both positively and negatively. Get in touch with any repressed grudges or even rage toward these persons.

Make a choice to forgive each of them by name, even if they don't deserve it. Forgive each of them for the specific offenses committed against you. Pray for the Lord Jesus Christ to take the unforgiveness from you and put it to death on His cross.

POSTLIII_)E

**DAILY/ THOUGHTS FOIE
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FORGIVENESS**



T

houghts from this book and the accompanying Scripture references serve as a thirty-one-day devotional guide to nourish you along your journey toward forgiveness.

Day 1

What will I make of this day? Will I be a helpless victim choosing to live in bitterness or a proactive affirmer of life, willing to forgive and to bless those who would harm me? Each moment is mine! No matter what my journey has been... no matter what nurturing or lack of nurturing I have experienced... no matter what pain and scars I bear-from this moment on, life is a choosing.

Therefore as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

-COLOSSIANS 3:12-14

Day 2

Sin is what isolates us from God and from one another. Our unforgiveness preserves and calcifies the isolation, keeping us from seeking reconciliation and wholeness. Choosing forgiveness is an antidote to the poison of sin.

"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

Day 3

If we are to be happy, to be healthy, and to grow in relationships with others, forgiveness is not an option; it is a necessity. Choose this day what you will do and how you will respond to the hurts in your life.

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything

against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.

-MARK 11:25

Day 4

God gives us the ability to make choices, but we must live with the results of our choosing. We can be stuck with unforgiveness forever and be miserable, or we can choose to forgive and enjoy the benefits of freedom that forgiveness brings.

Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

-HEBREWS 12:14-15

Day 5

The principle of sowing and reaping is one of God's absolute laws. If we sow unforgiveness, we will reap unforgiveness. If we sow forgiveness, we will reap forgiveness. Which will we choose?

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will

reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

-GALATIANS 6:7-10

Day 6

The process of forgiveness must begin with a simple act of choosing to begin the journey of forgiveness-of being willing to say, "I want to forgive."

May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

-1 THESSALONIANS 3:12-13

Day 7

To show true love toward others is to respect them enough to allow them to be accountable, particularly for the wounds they inflict on other people. Love and forgiveness should not shield even those we love the most from the consequences of their decisions.

Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent, forgive him.'

-LUKE 17:1-4

Day 8

Forgiveness is not the same as pardoning. To pardon is to end all judgment, to lift away all due reaping for sowing. God may pardon if He so chooses. We are called and given authority only to forgive.

Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

-ISAIAH 55:6-7

Day 9

Those who struggle with forgiveness may say, "I have tried

and tried to forgive, and I just can't seem to get it done." If we think it is up to us to accomplish forgiveness through our own striving, we will never "get it done."

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who 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 men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

-2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-21

Day 10

Sometimes, in God's wisdom, He knows shortcuts won't be good for us; we'll have to take the long road of struggle and discipline, making ourselves obey when everything in us cries out to go the other way.

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

-PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13

Day11

We must continually remind ourselves that the Lord has a work to do in us, and we had better clear the way by choosing to forgive.

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident in this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

-PHILIPPIANS 1:3-6

Day 12

I give up my right to be paid back for my loss by the one who has sinned against me-and in so doing, I declare my trust in God alone as my righteous judge.

Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

-MATTHEW 7:9-12

Day 13

I ask Jesus, my healer, to please release the Comforter to take my pain. It is too heavy and crippling to continue to carry, and I cannot heal myself.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.

-2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-5

Day 14

My choice to be vulnerable is my own, and transparency is my own. No one can take them from me. They are mine to give and take back whenever I want. What freedom and release there is in forgiveness!

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose

them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you:"

-EPHESIANS 5:8-14

Day 15

A life of unforgiveness is a life of bitterness and torment a life open to demonic oppression, bondage to addictions, and compulsive behaviors that seek to gratify the flesh in some hope of alleviating constant emotional stress. It is a life of unrest and violence-really no kind of life at all.

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourself of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.

-COLOSSIANS 3:5-8

Day 16

Judging others to place blame serves only to deepen feelings

of alienation and to keep us from seriously considering our own need for repentance. There is real hope only for those who are willing to cry out, "O Lord, have mercy upon me, for I am a sinner! Have mercy upon us, for we are all sinners!"

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

-1 JOHN 1:9-10

Day 17

As Christians, we should recognize that unforgiveness is a sin issue that cannot be remedied through our striving. Without the power of Jesus, we can expect little relief. Forgiveness only gets done when hurts and sinful practices are taken to the cross.

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing and rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been

justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

-TITUS 3:3-7

Day 18

Irritants in life may not be worth elevating to major issues, but they must be dealt with on some level rather than just stuffing them down inside.

When I kept silent, my bones washed away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD" and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

-PSALM 32:3-5

Day 19

Giving our unforgiveness to the Lord requires that we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. We must accept Him as the Son of God who has authority and power to forgive sins, to overcome death, and to make us into new beings. We must come to Him repentantly so that we become malleable spirits in

whom Jesus can work.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

-ROMANS 8:1-4

Day 20

True forgiveness is demonstrated in our willingness to pray for and facilitate good things happening in the life of the one who has hurt us. Without that, we miss the point of our forgiveness and fall short of the blessing of grace that God has for us.

Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another.

-ROMANS 12:11-16

Day 21

We cannot experience the anguish of betrayal and the pain of alienation and remain the same persons we were. Nor can we expect the other person to remain unchanged. Reconciliation brings with it new parameters of knowledge, understanding, and feelings. Forgiveness may heal anger and bitterness, but realistically it may fall short of reconciliation or even of establishing a friendly relationship.

So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

-1 PETER 4:19

Day 22

In the name of honesty and in an attempt to defuse our angers, we can go around spilling all that is in our hearts, thinking that speaking feelings is the same as dealing with them. But without repentance and willingness to give over anger to Jesus to be put to death on the cross, what we are actually doing is continually rehearsing our negative feelings.

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and

cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

-JAMES 3:9-10

Day 23

Jesus accomplishes forgiveness in us, but we must first repentantly confess our feelings and seek to forgive as a daily moment-by-moment discipline. This must be practiced repeatedly, continuously, so that our hearts are softened and our negative feelings become malleable to change. This opens us to receive the grace of Jesus Christ and leads to release and healing.

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

-EPHESIANS 4:31-32

Day 24

Individual hurts may seem like tiny barbs we can pass off by saying they don't really bother us. But when we get a whole pincushion full of needles, we start experiencing emotional and physical pain and discomfort that make life miserable. The healthiest thing we can do is to admit feelings honestly and seek a way to constructively remove those painful barbs through forgiveness.

Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him;
do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when
they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from
anger and turn from wrath; do not fret-it leads only
to evil.

-PSALM 37:7-8

Day 25

We can't expect Christ to intervene when we pray confessing another person's sin. We must confess our own sin and be willing to do whatever is necessary to set things straight.

And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

-JAMES 5:15-16

Day 26

To have reverence for Christ means to allow Him access within us to accomplish effectively everything for which He died on the cross. That means we need to submit to Him all of our feelings, our past, our present, our daily irritations, our demanding attitudes, our manipulations, and our unforgiveness.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

-HEBREWS 4:15-16

Day 27

Our anger and unforgiveness are our own and grow out of our need to control. However, God can use every circumstance of life to bring blessing to us and to write wisdom in our hearts if we respond according to His will.

And 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

Day 28

We play into Satan's hands when, through pride and selfrighteous anger, we cut others off, hold grudges, attempt to emotionally punish those who may have wronged us, or refuse to allow the healing of God's grace to be extended to others.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each

of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

-PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4

Day 29

Forgiveness allows us to escape the battle of trying to hold everything together by ourselves, and it relieves the stress of trying to hide the inconsistencies in our lives. When we trust the Lord, we give everything up to Him and come into the blessedness of rest.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

-MATTHEW 11:28-30

Day 30

Forgiveness allows us to let go of negative feelings and enter into a unity of fellowship with others so that everything that is joy and blessing for them is also our joy and blessing. Because of this attitude, we ourselves are refreshed and lifted up.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-

seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

-1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

Day 31

Forgiveness changes our hardness of heart into compassion. Forgiveness makes life richer, more filled with love, more expansive, more spiritually alive, and more abundantly satisfying. Although we may disagree with others, we learn to appreciate people for the way they provide balance for us: lifting, enriching, blessing, fulfilling-and challenging and wounding us as well. We appreciate the way differences, challenges, rebukes, and woundings drive us to perfection for the Lord.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

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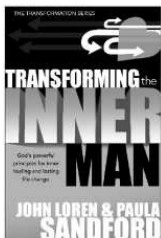
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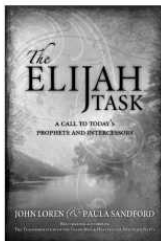
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