

The Road to Forgiveness

Special Note to Pastors: Some of this is taken directly from the Bible Study. I have added quotes and illustrations that are not in the Bible Study and are very suitable for preaching through The Road To Forgiveness.

You may copy or use anything you wish for preaching purposes from this document.

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For information and to place orders, visit our website:
www.TheRoadToForgiveness.com

Available products include this study guide, the full-size, full-color *The Road to Forgiveness Map* (28" x 22"), and The Color of Feelings palette. The Color of Feelings palette is found at www.FeelingsUnlimited.com

Resources intended for *study group leaders* are available on our website.

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A PERSONAL WORD FROM JIM

Some days change your life *forever*. June 4 was one of those days—the day my world collapsed. A car traveling down our street careened out of control, jumped a ditch, smashed through our neighbor's fence, and plowed into a wading pool in our front yard. My six-year-old daughter was killed.

Three days later, the earth was scarred, and I laid my daughter in her grave. The following week, reality struck home. *I was angry*. With the numbness gone, the devastating consequences and the enormity of the loss were painfully acute. I was not prepared for the emotional aftershocks to follow.

How do you forgive a joy-riding nineteen-year-old girl driving without a license? How do you deal with a father who hands over the keys to the car? How do you come to terms with a judge who metes out a \$750 fine and eighteen months probation for killing a six-year-old girl in her front yard?

These events set me on a journey. I knew all the theology, but was totally unfamiliar with the emotional terrain.

I struggled with an anger that would not let go. I had suffered a terrible injustice that devastated my family, and I was unable to do anything, as a man, to stop the pain. Emotionally, I was hemorrhaging. Anger, or at least what I thought was anger, oozed from my pores. I craved revenge. I longed to rectify the wrong but was helpless to do so.

I knew something inside of me was resisting change, something that was immune to sense and reason, and that found no solace in the sympathy cards and expressions of sorrow from others. I desperately needed release. The bottom of my world had collapsed; I found myself in an internal concentration camp, where I was both the prisoner and the guard.

The journey for Rachel, my wife, was different from mine. She cried, prayed, read books, talked, and trusted that God was sovereign and that His love did not change. My anger and pain took me down a different road—I wanted to see someone else hurt. I had no one to talk to; I was alone with my agony.

I held the girl's father responsible because he allowed her to drive the car. His irresponsibility shattered my world. He needed to die. It is a frightful obsession to contemplate just how and where this could be accomplished; to spend fitfully sleepless hours seeking, and finding, comfort in the scenarios of someone else's death.

Twelve months passed. I finally cried out to God for help. I remember, as if it were yesterday, saying, "God, if you don't help me, I will spend the rest of my life in prison for murder." I had never realized how deep pain could go.

I had just finished reading Genesis 49 and was starting chapter 50. The patriarch Jacob had died and Joseph's brothers feared desperately that now that Father was gone, Joseph would kill them. Joseph's response stopped me in my tracks: "And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God?" (50:19). The implied completion of Joseph's question seemed obvious: "...that I have the power of life and death over you?"

I wept. Life and death belonged to God and God alone. I had been assuming a prerogative of deity in wanting to take someone's life. I saw my arrogance and pride and the wickedness of my own heart. I mourned and God graciously removed the dagger from my heart. I released the injustice—alone.

This study on forgiveness is not theoretical. It has been refined in the crucible of pain. It describes the terrain with which I became so familiar. There isn't a place on the Map I haven't personally been. If only I could have visualized at that time what the journey to releasing pain and injustice looked like. If only I could have understood the emotional, spiritual, psychological, and relational signs along the path to healing and forgiveness.

As you make your way through this study on *The Road to Forgiveness*, you might on occasion find yourself compelled to ponder some deep things. Take your time. Find a seat on a rock alongside *The Road*, and rest for awhile. Take the opportunity to reflect. And before you resume your journey, look carefully. You'll probably see etched somewhere on that rock—"Jim sat here."

INTRODUCTION

No one travels through life without injury—hurtful words, deception, abandonment, broken trust, smashed dreams, betrayal, rejection, childhood trauma, abuse, and even murder. Wounded and bleeding, each person faces a choice as to how he or she will respond.

Resentment, bitterness, anger, and depression are natural responses. Many people feel an overwhelming urge to get even—to bring emotional or physical harm to the offender. Still others use distance and silent treatment as tools of punishment.

Starting at the site of the injury, countless paths lead off in every possible direction, many of them well traveled. You've chosen a Bible study, so we assume you're not as interested in the paths "everyone else" follows as you are in the path God says leads to freedom. Rest assured that God's Word provides timely and practical instructions for navigating the trails and trials of human relationships—and in particular *The Road to Forgiveness*.

If you are tired of holding grudges, harboring deep resentment, feeling consumed with anger, or enduring a strained relationship, *The Road to Forgiveness Bible Study* will guide you to freedom. Are the tentacles of bitterness squeezing the joy out of your life? Do you sense that a family member or friend is angry with you—things just don't feel right and you're not sure what to do? If so, engage yourself honestly in *The Road to Forgiveness Bible Study*, dig deep into the riches of God's Word, and follow the road signs that point the way to forgiveness.

Consider two different models of learning:

The Greek Model: "If you know it, you got it!"

The Hebrew Model: "If you do it, you know it!"

This is written on a Hebrew model. Jesus said, "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them" (John 13:17).

Truth is not just something to be learned; it's something to be lived. It is only in the *application* of the truths about forgiveness that its power and promise for our lives can be fully realized.

Part I

Starting on the Right Foot

(Note to Pastors: This explanation is in the Bible Study)

Let's imagine that your waste disposal service makes you an amazing offer. On a certain day, they will haul away anything you put out for them, as much rubbish as you wish to leave at the curb—all free of charge! No dumping fees. No borrowing the neighbor's truck. Fill as many bags as you wish, drag out broken appliances and furniture, rotten lumber, expired medications, nuclear waste... You name it, they'll take it.

Let's further imagine that you're also preparing to move to a different city in a few weeks. Seizing your opportunity to travel as light as possible, you begin systematically sorting through every room, closet, cupboard, shelf, drawer, nook and cranny throughout your home. Not only do you bag up the contents of every waste basket you own, but also those socks you're never going to darn, that sweater you've always hated, the dog's smelliest chew toys, and the dryer lint. Here's your chance to get rid of the dishwasher sitting in the side yard, your eighteen-year-old's Big Wheel, the upstairs toilet that runs constantly, your 1985 Sears catalogs, and the frozen 'possum steaks your cousins sent seven Christmases ago. You sweep the garage, the attic, and the shed out back.

Why? Because this is your chance to rid yourself of *all* your garbage, and you're going to do it thoroughly. You're going to make sure it will all go away forever, so you don't have to carry it with you when you travel from place to place through life.

That's what Part I (Lessons 1–4) of *The Road to Forgiveness* is about. In these lessons you'll learn why forgiveness of an emotional injury—or perhaps a series of hurtful events in a relationship—requires a thorough housecleaning related to that injury. Rather than simply reciting the formula, “I forgive you,” and moving on, you're going to examine the full dimensions and extent of the injury, how it has affected and changed you, and the consequences that have spun off from it. In order to release that burden of pain through forgiveness, you want to do it well. You want to be sure you're getting rid of *all* the litter it has spilled into your life.

Through these early phases of the forgiveness journey you will be dealing with some tough issues. You'll be challenged to reflect deeply on at least one painful event in your life, to evaluate the ways you've responded to your wounding, and to apply the Bible's truths about forgiveness. Most people are ready for this. But take a moment and ask yourself, *Am I feeling strong and safe enough at this time in my life to engage in this study?*

If you're part of a group, keep in mind that no one should ever pressure you to share your responses to any question—especially a question of a sensitive or personal nature. You have complete control of what you share; so share only when and what you want to.

He who lives long knows what pain is.

—French Proverb

Forgiveness is the giving, and so the receiving, of life.

—George Macdonald

In other living creatures the ignorance of themselves is nature, but in men it is a vice.

—Boethius

The longest journey is the journey within.

—Dag Hammarskjöld

It is easier to hurt than to heal.

—German Proverb

*Be still, sad heart! and cease repining;
Behind the clouds is the sun still shining;
Thy fate is the common fate of all,
Into each life some rain must fall,
Some days must be dark and dreary.*

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “The Rainy Day,” *Ballads and Other Poems*, 1842

Know thyself.

—Inscription over the entrance of the temple of Apollo at Delphi

The unexamined life is not worth living.

—Socrates

FORGIVENESS: PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive.
— C.S. Lewis

The longest journey is the journey within.
—Dag Hammarskjold

Sorrow and ill weather come unsend for.
—Scottish Proverb

Pain is inevitable for all of us, but misery is optional.
—Barbara Johnson

Note to Pastors: This is in the Bible Study—just including it so you can get the flow.

God can forgive in an instant. We usually can't. Forgiveness might be a one-time decision for some people in some situations, but more often it's a more extended process.

You may experience frustration in letting go of your past injuries. You've been hurt. Maybe deeply traumatized. Perhaps a friend betrayed your trust. Maybe someone was promoted over you because of their dishonesty. Perhaps someone mistreated you unspeakably when you were young.

You've tried various strategies, like stewing over the hurt, taking revenge, trying to forget, or just numbing out. At some point—whether because you thought it was a good idea or because someone told you to—you decided to try forgiving.

But still the pain and anger remain, the original embarrassment plagues you, the weight of the grudge feels as heavy as ever. You're still hampered by hatred, bogged down in bitterness, tied up with tension, ensnared and encumbered by exhaustion's endless, empty embrace.

Trapped.

But I forgave, you argue. Well, maybe you didn't completely forgive, despite your good intentions. Maybe you lacked a full understanding of what goes into the process of thorough, beginning-to-end forgiveness. Perhaps you unconsciously avoided some of the uncomfortable stages of the journey, or forgiveness was premature. If so, you're a very normal human being; you're like all the rest of us.

Because forgiveness can be a difficult road, this study will help you understand, not only *how* to forgive, but *why* forgiveness is worthwhile. Throughout this study you'll discover many reasons, but at its root, forgiveness is worth granting to others because it's one of our own deepest needs. Forgiveness is God's heartbeat, woven throughout His

plan for history. We see it in God's reprieve of the human race (Adam and Eve) from instant death in Genesis, along with God's first promise of a coming Redeemer (Genesis 3:15). And forgiveness wraps up the story in Revelation, with God's redeemed people enjoying an eternity of perfect relationship with Him.

Questions, Questions

Forgiveness is often not as simple as it might seem. It raises numerous dilemmas. What if the individual who hurt you is dead? Or indifferent? Or hiding from confrontation behind a company title? How do you forgive someone who can't or won't face you? And what if it's not safe for you to have any dealings with your offender?

What about timing? Is it possible to forgive prematurely, before you're really ready? How do you deal with your ongoing pain, even after you've tried to forgive?

And do we really even need to forgive the little hurts? Why make a big deal about the pebbles when so many people are dealing with boulders?

Let's consider that last question now, because you must understand how universally important forgiveness is. **We often tend to measure the severity of an offense based on the size of the rock thrown at us.**

Illustration: But consider it from a glass window's perspective. If you throw a four inch rock through the window, what happens? It shatters. If you throw a two inch rock through another glass window, what happens? It shatters. You see, it isn't the size of the rock—it's the damage to the window. If you start talking "little" hurts and "big" hurts, or comparing one person's hurt with another's, you're comparing the sizes of the rocks, not the damage to the windows. We need to respect each person's unique, subjective experience of their own injury.

As the offended one, it's the wound you've sustained that needs healing. The emotional aftershocks overwhelm your senses in a moment of crisis and perhaps also during an ensuing period of ache-filled recovery. That's why The Road to Forgiveness must begin with a period of honest reflection on your injury.

A small hurt in the eye is a great one.

—English Proverb

* * *

If the will remains in protest, it stays dependent on that which it is protesting against.

—Rollo May

Sorrows are visitors that come without invitation.

—Charles Spurgeon

No matter how long you nurse a grudge, it won't get better.

—Anonymous

Lessons I Learned about Wounds as a Child by Jim Velez

- Lesson #1 Wounds Hurt
- Lesson #2 I Didn't Want to Look at the
Wound
- Lesson #3 I Didn't Want to Touch It
- Lesson #4 I Didn't Want Anyone Else to
Touch It
- Lesson #5 When Someone Offered to Help
Me it was Painful
- Lesson #6 I Felt the Cure Was Worse Than the
Original Wound
- Lesson #7 I Felt Incredible Relief When it was Over

Our natural inclination is to NOT look at it—we just want the pain to stop.

Illus: Splinter (I need help, but don't touch it!) Avoid it.

IDENTIFY THE INJURY

Real forgiveness means looking steadily at the sin, the sin that is left over without any excuse, after all allowances have been made, and seeing it in all its horror, dirt, meanness and malice, and nevertheless being wholly reconciled to the man who has done it.

—C.S. Lewis

But my body and my emotions were given to me, and it is as futile for me to condemn myself for feeling scared, insecure, selfish, or revengeful as it is for me to get mad at myself for the size of my feet. I am not responsible for my feelings but for what I do with them.

—Hugh Prather

Note to Pastor's: This explanation is in the Bible Study

The first stage of your journey along The Road to Forgiveness is to identify your injury. Before you can find lasting freedom from your pain, it is important to reflect on your loss. Identifying your injury involves three steps:

First, what specifically happened to you? Did you experience betrayal, injustice, embarrassment, childhood trauma, abandonment, lying, deception? Did the injury involve divorce, adultery, church issues, broken trust, abuse of power, rape?

Second, what emotions did you experience, or are you experiencing, as a result of the injury? Are you feeling fear, anger, rejection, cheated, trapped, overwhelmed? Do you feel shamed, guilty, humiliated, vulnerable, confused, numb, alone?

And third, who caused your pain? Properly identifying the injury also involves honestly identifying the offender (or offenders). Who, specifically, inflicted pain in your life? A generalized “they” will not help you; naming those who caused the hurt will pave the road for you to ultimately release the offense.

Reflective consideration of these steps may be painful. You might be tempted instead to minimize, rationalize, justify, dissociate, or build a defense around your wounded area. Ask God for courage to thoroughly identify your injury.

If you need to take breaks and spread the process out over time, that's just fine. This is not a race.

Background: Jacob's wealthy family lived a nomadic existence, but at this point they were settled at Hebron, in the hilly country south of what would later become Jerusalem. Joseph's journey to find his brothers took him fifty miles north to Shechem, and then another twelve miles further north to Dothan (verses 14, 17).

Imagine yourself as a modern-day Joseph, encountering his traumatizing experiences today at age seventeen. What might you be feeling? (Consider Genesis 42:21.)

Then they said to one another, “Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us.”

—Genesis 42:21 (Conversation among Joseph’s brothers twenty years after selling him into slavery.

The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day.

—Jesus in Luke 9:22

Note to Pastors: I’ve highlighted all the words God uses to describe the “injury” that Jesus suffered. Quite revealing.

*He was **despised** and **forsaken of men**, a **man of sorrows** and **acquainted with grief**; and like one from whom men hide their face He was **despised**, and we did not esteem Him. Surely **our griefs He Himself bore**, and **our sorrows He carried**; yet we ourselves esteemed Him **stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted**. But He was **pierced** (wounded) through for our transgressions, He was **crushed** (bruised) for our iniquities; the **chastening** for our well-being **fell upon Him**, and by His **scourging** we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has **caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him**. He was **oppressed** and He was **afflicted**, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so **He did not open His mouth**. By **oppression and judgment He was taken away**.*

—Isaiah 53:3–8

*He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth. But the LORD was pleased to **crush Him, putting Him to grief**; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.... My Servant, will justify the many, as **He will bear their iniquities**.... He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.*

—Isaiah 53:9–12

When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him.... But Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”

—Luke 23:33–34

In Bible Study

Thought and Discussion: How might emotional numbness *masquerade* as forgiveness, while actually falling short of it? Why would it be premature to “forgive” one’s offender before working through this stage of honesty about one’s injury?

Alternate quotes:

The pain of the little finger is felt by the whole body.

—Philippine Proverb

The experience of the whole gamut of emotions is a part of the human condition, the inheritance of every man.

—John Powell

Respect in yourself the oscillations of feeling; they are your life and your nature; a wiser than you made them.

—Henri Frédéric Amiel (1821-1881)

Never apologize for showing feeling. When you do so, you apologize for the truth.

—Benjamin Disraeli

It is as necessary for the heart to feel as for the body to be fed.

—Napoleon

Our feelings are not the Cinderella of our inner life, to be kept in her place among the cinders in the kitchen. Our emotional life is *us* in a way our intellectual life cannot be.

—John MacMurray

When you give vent to your feelings, your anger leaves you.

—Yiddish Proverb

CALCULATE THE LOSSES

We are healed of grief only when we express it to the full.

—Charles R. Swindoll

Christ can do wonders with a broken heart if given all the pieces.

—Proverb

To know ourselves is to talk with our past hours.

—Edward Young

Self-knowledge is the beginning of self-improvement.

—Spanish proverb

Note to Pastors: This explanation is in the Bible Study

The next phase of the journey is to come to a fuller understanding of the depth and scope of your loss.

Did you experience *tangible* losses? Maybe money, your home, or your job? Your child, your spouse, or some other family relationship? Did the losses involve your health, a limb, your mobility, your career, or your friends?

Did you experience *intangible* losses? Did you lose freedom, reputation, security, privacy, dreams, or individuality? Intangible losses are sometimes more painful and even more challenging to process than tangible losses.

Now, in situations involving murder, suicide, sexual trauma, or abuse of a child, calculating the losses can feel complex and overwhelming. You would be wise to seek the help of a trained professional counselor.

Calculating the losses involves pondering and answering questions like: What did the injury cause me to lose? How did it shape my life? What was the damage? How will it impact my future? How will it affect those I love? How does it impact me physically? Emotionally? Relationally? Spiritually?

Taking careful inventory of the box labeled “losses,” and allowing yourself to feel the magnitude of your loss, is a necessary step before you can continue the journey towards forgiveness. Thoroughly understanding the depth of your loss prepares you, when the time for release arrives, to let go of the *complete* load of injustice and hurt you’ve been carrying. If you move ahead without this understanding, you risk prematurely granting forgiveness, releasing only part of the burden. Then lingering resentments, initially overlooked, may be allowed to grow in secret and hold you back from enjoyment of forgiving fully.

Illustration: Cleaning out your garage—cleaning out the mess, clutter, etc.

Joseph found favor in [Potiphar's] sight and became his personal servant; and...he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.... It happened one day that [Potiphar's wife] caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside.... Then she spoke to [Potiphar] with these words, "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me; and as I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside." Now when his master heard the words of his wife...his anger burned. So Joseph's master took him and put him into the jail.

—Genesis 39:4, 6, 11, 17–20

Background: In an age when few people traveled more than fifty miles from their homes, the Ishmaelite traders took Joseph 250 miles, onto a different continent (from Asia to Africa), into a foreign country and a strange culture. He had to learn a new language, a new set of customs and expectations, a new way of thinking. His food, clothes, and daily habits were all alien. He had gone from enjoying favored-son status in a wealthy, free-roaming family to serving as the property of foreign slave owners.

In verses 7–20, we see Joseph torn from Potiphar's house and from a position of privilege and blessing. What tangible and intangible losses did Joseph experience...

Physically?

Emotionally?

Relationally?

Spiritually?

Background: Joseph's jail sentence was apparently indefinite; he may have expected to live out his life there. We know that his actual imprisonment lasted at least two years (Genesis 41:1), and maybe much longer.

6. If you were Joseph, what would you be thinking? How would you feel?

Optional Study: Read Exodus 2. What significant tangible loss did Moses experience as a child in verses 3 and 10? As an adoptee, what intangible losses might Moses have experienced?

ILLUSTRATION

If my car is in an accident there is damage to my car. And I may get out and look at the obvious damage. The fender may be dented. The window may be smashed. The head lights may not work. And I know what the damage is. But inevitably there is some

hidden damage. There are some other problems that may not surface right now. I may fix the obvious ones, but later when I am out driving I may notice that the car pulls to the left or right...I may notice that my front tires are wearing unevenly...I may not be getting the gas mileage I once did....you see there are some hidden damages that may surface later.

It is interesting that when God speaks to us about the issue of forgiveness in His word **He often uses the analogy of someone owing us a financial debt.** Here is one of those passages...and it begins with Peter asking a question that we may be familiar with

Matt 18:21-35

21 Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

Peter was hoping for a pat on the back for his suggestion that forgiving 7 times was certainly more than Jesus would expect. IT was certainly more than the Jewish religious tradition expected....the religious leaders preached "3 strikes and you are out"

And notice that Peter puts all of this in the context of someone hurting him....not him hurting someone else.

But of course Jesus "raises the ante" so to say.

And then to illustrate the essence of forgiveness he tells a parable. Here it is.

23 "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 "And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 "But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made.

26 "The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.' 27 "And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. 28 "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' 29 "So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' 30 "He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. 31 "So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened.

Jesus begins to teach Peter about forgiveness by speaking about financial debt and forgiving financial debt. And the amounts owed in the debt are very clear...very accurate.

But it's not ONLY A FINANCIAL DEBT OR LOSS...**this is just the parable Jesus uses to help us understand the essence of forgiveness**

AND Jesus continues to make his point.

The parable continues.

Matt 18:32-35

32 "Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. 33'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?' 34 "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. **35 "So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."**

Again we see the huge implications of forgiveness in our lives

But we need to see that Jesus teaches about forgiveness by putting FORGIVENESS in a context of debt.

In order to forgive a financial debt, any sensible person would know how much debt they are forgiving. And so the same is true in forgiving someone an emotional or relational debt.

What are we forgiving?

What are we letting go of?

What has this cost us?

What will this cost us?

This process will be painful and it will be easy to prematurely end it.

Give yourself time to think about **how your life is different because of this hurtful event.**

And because pain makes us myopic. We will need some other people around us to be able to look at this in an objective way...they will help us see the bigger picture.

Someone you can trust. Someone who will keep a confidence. Someone you reveal the darkness to...so it can be seen in the light. A trusted friend. This is when we need each other.

OWN YOUR BURDEN

You can try to run from your wounds, but you'll leave a trail of blood anyhow.

—Mona, a deserted housewife, in *Forgiving the Unforgivable*

Responsibility is a detachable burden easily shifted to the shoulders of God, Fate, Fortune, Luck, or one's neighbor.

—Ambrose Bierce

When you forgive you in no way change the past—but you sure do change the future.

—Bernard Meltzer

If He bids us carry a burden, He carries it also.

—Charles Spurgeon

Note to Pastors: This explanation is in the Bible Study

When you feel the full weight and magnitude of your loss, it can seem so onerous that you might try to fend off the reality of your experience, escape from it emotionally, pretend it didn't happen, or think that it wasn't important. Substance abuse, sexual or relational addictions, and frantic activity are common responses that a wounded person may choose in an attempt to find freedom from their emotional burden. However, these are false shortcuts. You won't be able to complete your journey to forgiveness—complete freedom—until you take ownership of your life's devastating experiences. You need to admit, *Yes, these are mine. They really happened to me. They've actually been with me this whole time, and I can't ignore the fact that they've changed me.*

When you own your burden, you are accepting that your painful experiences have, indeed, impacted your life, perhaps in a profound way. They're not trivial, mere tremors that rattle the cupboards; they're of such magnitude that your life's landscape has shifted—maybe catastrophically. Your experiences may have changed the way you view your world, yourself, and those around you. Perhaps you've rearranged your values. Maybe you've lost your ability to trust.

Owning your burden means coming to a point of conscious admission: You cannot change your past. And your pain doesn't vanish simply because you don't want to feel it anymore. You've been carrying the burden this whole time anyway, and now you make a choice to accept it as reality. Your burden will never begin to feel lighter by ignoring it—only after you've owned it.

Be careful to own *your* burden, not the burdens of others. Perhaps your family, friends, or coworkers have suffered. It's good to help them bear the weight at times, but if you become encumbered by someone else's pain, your view of what has transpired in your own life will probably become cloudy, hampering your ability to forgive.

Background: According to Genesis 41:46, Joseph was thirty years old when he was released from prison to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. That means that he had been away from his home in Caanan—as Potiphar's slave, and then imprisoned—for a total of thirteen years.

I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon.

—Genesis 40:15

Two sons were born to Joseph.... Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh [literally "causing to forget"], "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." He named the second Ephraim [sounds like the Hebrew word for "fruitful"], "For," he said, "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."

—Genesis 41:50–52

Note: “Ephraim” doesn’t mean “fruitful.” If anything, it’s meaning might be related to a Hebrew word for “bandage, covering”—both Hebrew words deriving from an unused and perhaps indefinable prior word.

The reason Joseph chose this name is because it sounded like the Hebrew word for “fruitful,” not because of its meaning.

Why is owning your burden necessary before you can obey the following gracious commands from God?

- *Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you* (Psalm 55:22).
- *[Cast] all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you* (1 Peter 5:7).
- *Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, 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).

Read Galatians 6:1–5. At first glance, verses 2 and 5 seem to contradict each other. But “burden” (verse 2) refers to a boulder-sized object, while “load” (verse 5) is more like a backpack. In this light, what can you learn about forgiveness from this passage?

You cannot change what has happened to you.
The burden is yours.
But now you’re bringing your mind and heart
into agreement with reality.

A wise man once observed, “There is a proper time and procedure for every delight, though a man’s trouble is heavy upon him” (King Solomon, Ecclesiastes 8:6).

That same wise man’s father once wrote about the best delight of all: “Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart” (King David, Psalm 37:4).

You’ve been doing heavy lifting, but the delight of God’s company makes your burden bearable, because His very presence brings strength. And in time, He will continue to lighten that burden as you heal and forgive.

OWN YOUR BURDEN: FIGHT IT OR ACCEPT IT?

Minimize, rationalize, justify, project blame, dissociate—all ways in which we keep denial in place. Addictions, chemical dependency, frantic activity, pretending—all ways we choose to numb the pain.

Accept that this has impacted your life, you’ve lost something, you hurt, your values may have changed, lost the ability to trust.

You cannot change what happened to you—you can accept it (as heavy as it may be)

* * *

Alternate quotes:

Character—the willingness to accept responsibility for one’s own life—is the source from which self-respect springs.

—Joan Didion

Responsibility is the high price of self-ownership.

—Eli J. Schleifer

Burdens—God Helps Us Bear Them

It’s not the load that breaks you down, it’s the way you carry it.

—Lena Horne

God gives the shoulder according to the burden.

—German Proverb

I do not pray for a lighter load, but for a stronger back.

—Phillips Brooks (1835-1893)

Sorrow is fruit. God does not make it grow on limbs too weak to bear it.

—Victor Hugo (1802-1885)

Past—We Can’t Change It

The past cannot be changed, but our response to it can be.

—Erwin W. Lutzer

Part II

Three Emotional Quagmires

God has made every human in His image. That means that each of us is relational to the core, as He is. We were designed for relationship with Him and with each other.

However, Genesis reveals that mankind followed paths God warned us, for our own good, not to follow. As a result, we sustained some serious damage impacting our relationship with God and with each other. The Good News is that God still treasures and loves each of us as His creations. He gave His own Son's life to pay the cost of our restoration and reconciliation. The central theme to our restored relationship with Him and with each other is forgiveness.

Because we got off the original path God designed for us, we now live in an imperfect world with imperfect people. It doesn't take long for imperfect people to experience imperfect relationships, often resulting in a demolition derby—crashing into each other with unkind words, hurtful accusations, and selfish actions. The ensuing injuries and painful obstacles can knock us off of our healthy life track. We may end up following paths that become emotional cul-de-sacs, or detouring down strange alleyways with faded lines and missing signs. It's not as though we *planned* to head in any of these directions, but major events have jarred us onto back roads, or off-road, where we sit spinning our wheels in the mud.

Along the Forgiveness Road in Lessons 5–7, we'll become acquainted with three emotional quagmires that bog down many a traveler. These are depression, bitterness, and that anger trap, the Dungeon of Despair.

Many well-meaning, hurting people can find themselves stuck in one or more of these quagmires. What about you? Are you more than merely sad...down-deep depressed? Has your understandable anger metastasized into a bitterness that sometimes seems to take over? Are you chained by your own unreleased anger in the Dungeon of Despair, slogging through self-pity, dwelling constantly on thoughts of revenge? If any of these are true, you can experience release from these quagmires as you pursue understanding and application through the next three lessons. And if you're not currently stuck, please use this opportunity to learn how to avoid these hazards, when possible, and to equip yourself to escape them if you should ever fall in.

Your reactions to your enemy can hurt you more than your enemy can.

—Hannah Hurnard (1905-1990)

Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal.

—Thomas Moore (1608-1661)

Though our feelings come and go, God's love for us does not.

—C.S. Lewis

When a deep injury is done us, we never recover until we forgive.

—Alan Paton

* * *

Alternate quotes:

We allow our emotions to arise so that they can be identified. We make the necessary adjustments in the light of our own ideas and hopes for growth. We change.

—John Powell

Suffering isn't ennobling, recovery is.

—Christian N. Barnard

He who is in pain should go to the doctor.

—Hebrew Proverb

No wonder you are sick. You are not linking yourself enough to the resources that bring healing.

—Selwyn Hughes

*Pain has an element of blank;
It cannot recollect
When it began, or if there were
A day when it was not.
It has no future but itself,
Its infinite realms contain
Its past, enlightened to perceive
New periods of pain.*

—Emily Dickinson

There is no despair so absolute as that which comes with the first moments of our first great sorrow, when we have not yet known that it is to have suffered and be healed, to have despaired and recovered hope.

—George Eliot

We crucify ourselves between two thieves: regret for yesterday and fear of tomorrow.

—Fulton Oursler

Measure not God's love and favor by your own feelings. The sun shines as clearly in the darkest day as it does in the brightest. The difference is not in the sun, but in some clouds which hinder the manifestation of the light thereof.

—Richard Sibbes (Puritan preacher and author)

No natural feelings are high or low, holy or unholy, in themselves. They are all holy when God's hand is on the rein. They all go bad when they...make themselves into false gods.

—C.S. Lewis (1898–1963)

THE VALLEY OF DEPRESSION

The longest day will have an end.

—Proverb

The most perfect being who has ever trod the soil of this planet was called the Man of Sorrows.

—James Anthony Froude (1818-1894)

On the wings of time grief flies away. (Or Sadness flies away on the wings of time.)

—Jean de La Fontaine (1621-1695)

Our friends are that part of the human race with which one can be human.

—George Santayana

The tears...streamed down, and I let them flow as freely as they would, making of them a pillow for my heart. On them it rested.

—Augustine of Hippo, in *Confessions*

Note to Pastors: This explanation is in the Bible Study

Loss and pain carry an emotional price tag. Perhaps the most common emotion associated with your loss is anger. If this anger is turned inward—either as anger toward yourself, or anger simply “stuffed” and held in—it can lead to depression.

Depression is a normal response to loss and pain.

We want to stop and make sure you understood that last sentence. When you've gone through a painful experience, *depression is normal*. For a certain period of time, it may be literally impossible for you to make yourself feel better, to “just cheer up.” However, depression that lingers for an extended period of time can be debilitating or even destructive.

The Valley of Depression is a lonely place. Feelings of emptiness and overwhelming sadness abound. Often individuals feel abandoned by family, friends, and even God.

Cognitive distortions often accompany depression. Feelings may be perceived as facts. You might adopt a black-and-white, all-or-nothing way of looking at the world. Or perhaps you “awfulize” your situation, creating in your own mind a greater catastrophe than actually exists.

You may also find yourself in a mental rut, obsessively stuck in “should” thinking. *I should have... If only I would have... Why didn't I?* You struggle and fight the same internal battle over and over again. Some battles just aren't worth fighting; it's not worth the emotional energy. Like the adage says, “A bulldog can whip a skunk, but it's not worth the fight!” The emotional consequence of beating yourself with “should” statements can create deeper depression. Remember, hurts can heal; regrets never heal.

How do you climb out of depression? We offer you five Ts: *tending* to your body, *time*, *talking*, *tears*, and *truth*.

Tending to your body—You must first address your physical needs. Adequate rest, sleep, and exercise, as well as proper nutrition, are important first steps. If the depression lingers for weeks, we suggest you consult a medical professional to assist in your recovery.

Time—Be patient with yourself. Even when you're not aware of it, your unconscious mind is doing its work, processing your thoughts and emotions in ways that only God understands. And in time, God may bring circumstances, people, and truths across your path that can serve as healing agents.

Talking—Having a safe place to unload emotionally, free from judgment or criticism, will further empower you to climb out of depression. Broken dreams, shattered trust, and multiple losses often create twisted emotions and distorted thinking that can only be untangled in conversation with someone with whom you can share safely.

Tears—Whether in your therapeutic talking or during your time alone, don't resist releasing your pain through tears—a pressure relief valve God has given to all of us.

Truth—As we've explained above, sometimes depression involves cognitive distortions and mental ruts—false and destructive “tapes” that play over and over in our minds. God has given us the truth of His Word, where we can find new “tapes” that are true and constructive. We can use these to replace our distorted thoughts.

Practical Pointer: In the initial stages of depression, some people aren't ready for truth—even comforting truth. They're so engulfed by their emotions that they may perceive the truth-speaker as unsympathetic with their pain. But a point always comes, sooner or later, when replacing false tapes with true ones is a necessary step toward recovery.

Outline on Depression: Not in Bible Study

1. The Time of Elijah's Depression
2. The Trigger of Elijah's Depression
3. The Torture of Elijah's Depression
 - a. Withdrew—alone, exhausted, emotionally drained
 - b. Wanted to die, negative thinking, distorted thinking (Depression does that)
4. The Treatment of Elijah's Depression
 - a. Physical refreshment—food, water, rest
 - b. Talk—get it off your chest Elijah

- c. Spiritual insight
- d. Encouragement to move ahead

At the center of one of the Old Testament's epic spiritual conflicts we find the prophet Elijah. He demonstrated supreme confidence in God when he, alone, confronted 850 prophets of Israel's false gods. The True God won a spectacular victory. (Optional: Read this story in 1 Kings 18:17–40; 19:1–2.) But Elijah, fearing for his life, fled into the desert and sank into depression.

1 Kings 19:3–18. What are some signs that Elijah was depressed?

How did God help Elijah ascend out of depression by *tending to his body*?

How was *time* a healing factor?

How did *talking* honestly about his thoughts and feelings, in God's accepting presence, help Elijah recover? (Notice that God encouraged this by His questions.)

The Bible doesn't specifically tell us that Elijah shed tears. But given his level of fear, exhaustion, loneliness, and despair, it's not much of a stretch to imagine him breaking down and sobbing. Why would *tears* have been healing for Elijah?

In what cognitive distortions and mental ruts was Elijah stuck? How was *truth*, gently presented by God, instrumental in Elijah's recovery?

[Elijah] was afraid and arose and ran for his life...a day's journey into the wilderness.... And he requested for himself that he might die.... He lay down and slept under a juniper tree; and behold, there was an angel touching him, and he said to him, "Arise, eat." Then he looked and behold, there was at his head a bread cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again.... And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away...." The LORD said to him... "I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him."

—1 Kings 19:3–6, 9–10, 15, 18

Two Clinically Depressed men on the road to Emmaus:

Read Luke 24:13–35. What was the "explosion"—the initial traumatizing event—in the lives of these two disciples that left them feeling depressed? In verse 19, why do you think Jesus asked these two disciples, "What things?" In verse 21, what appears to be the root of their depression? How did Jesus ultimately change the thinking, emotions and behavior of these two disciples?

Jesus himself—Good
Drew near—Better
Went with them—Best

David's Depression:

Read Psalm 142. (The background story is in 1 Samuel 18:1–22:1.) What was David feeling? List any indications of depression. What did David fear? Where was David's focus at the beginning of the psalm? By the end of the psalm?

What more can you learn about the healing power of God's truth from Psalms 19:7–14; 107:10–11, 19–22; 119:28–31, 50, 107, 143, 169–170; Proverbs 16:24?

Remember, if the depression lingers for weeks, we suggest you consult a medical professional to assist in your recovery.

“I cry aloud with my voice to the LORD; I make supplication with my voice to the LORD. I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare my trouble before Him” (David, Psalm 142:1–2).

- *Pour out your heart to God, knowing that He is big enough to handle all your troubled and painful emotions.*

“I cried out to You, O LORD; I said, ‘You are my refuge, My portion in the land of the living’” (verse 5).

Illus: DEPRESSION – there are some strange ideas about this topic of depression.

Some say that only the “crazy people” get depressed.

Some say they never get “depressed”

Most of us don't even know if we are depressed or just **NEED SOME MORE COFFEE!**

When we speak about the valley of depression on this Road to Forgiveness we speak about the normal response to a loss or a traumatic event.

A normal response to loss can be depression.

And there is a physical reason for that.

How many of you have stress in your life?

Of course we all do, but when an event or loss hits us our stress level increases. And the body's response to stress is to produce Cortisol. And Cortisol is helpful in helping us deal with a stressful or traumatic event

But we are not meant to live in a stressful or traumatic situation for long periods of time.

...stress produces Cortisol. 2 much Cortisol causes depression.

Unrelenting stressful events or events that are not resolved produces too much Cortisol and that causes depression.

So if you get depressed at times... YOU ARE NOT CRAZY

Depression is a normal response to traumatic events....the question is how long will we stay in this valley, and how will we move on.

* * *

Alternate quotes:

Give sorrow words. The grief that does not speak whispers the o'erfraught heart and bids it break.

—William Shakespeare

Let tears flow of their own accord: their flowing is not inconsistent with inward peace and harmony.

—Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 4 BC-AD 65)

Yes, he thought, between grief and nothing I will take grief.

—William Faulkner, *The Wild Palms*

He that conceals his grief finds no remedy for it.

—Turkish Proverb

Depression—The Experience of

God is to me the Great Unknown. I believe in him, but I find him not.

—Adoniram Judson, America's first foreign missionary, suffering from a deep depression following the death of his wife, Nancy

Depression—"Should" Thinking

*These poor Might-Have-Beens,
These fatuous, ineffectual yesterdays!*

—William Ernest Henley (1849-1903)

Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: It might have been.

—John Greenleaf Wittier

Depression—Time Heals

Time is a physician that heals every grief.

—Diphilus

There is no grief which time does not lessen and soften.

—Cicero (106-43 BC)

The great thing with unhappy times is to take them bit by bit, hour by hour, like an illness. It is seldom the present, the exact present, that is unbearable.

—C.S. Lewis (1898-1963)

Depression—Talking Heals

The best remedy for grief is the counsel of a kind and honest friend.

—Euripides

A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Before him, I may think aloud.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Those that lack friends to open themselves unto are cannibals of their own hearts.

—Francis Bacon

Depression—Tears Heal

To weep is to make less the depth of grief.

—William Shakespeare

Only eyes washed by tears can see clearly.

—Louis L. Mann

Tears: the best gift of God to suffering man.

—John Keble (1792-1845)

We need never be ashamed of our tears, for they are rain upon the blinding dust of earth, overlying our hard hearts.

—Charles Dickens (1812-1870)

I wept not, so to stone I grew within.

—Dante

The tearful praying Christian, whose distress prevent his words, will be clearly understood by the Most High.

—Charles Spurgeon

Tears are the ease of woe.

—Richard Crashaw

Tears are the silent language of grief.

—Voltaire

Depression and Hope—Truth Heals

Even the cry from the depths is an affirmation: Why cry if there is no hint or hope of hearing?

—Martin Marty

Sadness/Sorrow

Sorrow ends not when it seems done.

—English Proverb

He who sings drives away sorrow.

—Italian Proverb

Sorrows are visitors that come without invitation.

—Charles Spurgeon

Anger—Normal and Beneficial

When you give vent to your feelings, your anger leaves you.

—Yiddish Proverb

THE BITTERNESS TREE

Living with bitterness is like driving down the road of life constantly looking in the rear view mirror.

—David A. Whiting

Intro:

What do people do when their marriage skids to a halt, their lives are shredded, and they experience the painful realities of an unwanted divorce? What soap can be used to clean the devastating loss of innocence, a brutal rape or murder; tragic and senseless acts of violence that shake the very foundations of their lives? What do people do when they find a corporation they have loyally served has robbed them of their retirement; how do wives and husbands deal with the searing rejection that comes with the knowledge of betrayal due to an affair, causing their world to collapse? What does a mother do when she leaves the deliver room empty-handed struggling with how to put the pieces of her life back together again? What does a teenager do with the pain of struggling with an absentee father or the profound sense of rejection of not feeling wanted; when an adopted child agonizes over why or how someone could give him or her away. What wash cloth or bottle contains the solution to salve the hurt or cause the pain to go away?

A physical wound, left unattended, becomes infected. The resulting swelling, redness, and tenderness, cause the entire body to react, to compensate and to protect. Emotional wounds need the same care and attention as a physical wound. If they are not diagnosed properly and dealt with effectively, emotional infections can be the result. Once infected, those wounds create a poison that can literally **transform the personality**

Max Lucado graphically writes: “Resentment is the cocaine of the emotions. It causes our blood to pump and our energy level to rise. But, also like cocaine, it demands increasingly large and more frequent dosages. There is a dangerous point at which anger ceases to be an emotion and becomes a driving force. A person bent on revenge moves unknowingly further and further away from being able to forgive, for to be without the anger is to be without a source of energy.”

Scripture describes a form of anger that is tenacious and corrosive creating a carcinoma of the spirit.

Slide: Hebrews 12:15

Slide: Hebrews 12:15 emphasized

Slide: What Do You know About Roots?

1. Roots are hidden. They are out of sight, beneath the surface.
2. Roots are buried, yet very much alive.
3. Roots, generally, are twisted and gnarled

4. Roots are firmly entrenched, resisting removal and change.
5. Roots grow and feed on the soil in which they are planted.
6. Roots strengthen and support the entire tree.
7. Fruits are largely determined by the roots.

If this agrarian analogy holds true regarding bitterness, then it describes an anger that is alive, can grow in strength, resists removal and change, feeds on the very thing in which it is planted, can remain hidden and out of sight, and supports something clearly visible, that is above where everyone can see it. Moreover, the writer goes on to say that the root “springs up”, resulting in troubling not only the person it is in, but many are defiled as a result. This is a root that has disturbing implications. It is not content to confine itself solely to the one who nourishes it, but has poisonous ramifications to other relationships.

* * *

We all know how a physical wound left unattended can become infected. The resulting swelling, redness, and tenderness impacts the entire body as it tries to compensate for the injury and protect the wound from further pain.

In the same way, our emotional wounds must be properly diagnosed and receive appropriate care and attention. Otherwise they become susceptible to an emotional infection that can go deeper than anger, that poisons the spirit and can literally transform the personality—an emotional gangrene that takes on a life of its own. This malady has been called by a number of different names: institutionalized anger, harbored hurt, corrosive anger, tenacious anger, carcinoma of the spirit, acid of the soul, or calcified resentment.

Perhaps the most common name for it is *bitterness*.

Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. 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 12:14–15

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.

—Ephesians 4:31 (KJV)

Bitterness, according to Hebrews 12:15 and Ephesians 4:31, is a root that supports and supplies a particular type of fruit tree. However, unlike an apple or cherry tree, the bitterness tree produces fruit that is toxic and destructive. One of its fruits is known by the biblical term, *wrath*—a fierce indignation against perceived injustice—which grows toward its ultimate outward expression in an explosive eruption of new *anger*.

This excessive anger produces a harvest of *clamor*—yelling, crying, and screaming—and *abusive speech*. The bitterness tree’s toxic outgrowth can culminate in a crop of menacing *malice*—a heart-permeating intent to do or cause harm. In its most extreme form, malice turned inward can lead to suicide; and malice turned outward can lead to murder.

To merely treat the visible, above-ground fruit may be ineffective. Buried beneath the surface lies the gnarled and twisted root of bitterness, that ravenous emotional infection deep within the human heart, slowly consuming its host from the inside.

Harboring bitterness results in physical, relational, emotional, and spiritual consequences in everyday life. If you suspect bitterness in your heart, there is good news! God has graciously provided the means for rooting out and eradicating bitterness from your life.

Characteristics of a Bitter Person

A bitter person...

- Lashes out caustically, hurting those who love them most.
- Wields barbed and cutting words as weapons, keeping others at a distance.
- Speaks in a hostile and suspicious manner, maintaining an illusion of safety and control.
- Criticizes others, diverting attention away from their own faults.
- Disrespects others, giving precedence to their own needs.
- Is ungrateful, minimizing their own neediness and vulnerability.
- Displays hair-trigger retrieval of past injuries from memory.
- Rehearses the past over and over, keeping it as fresh as yesterday.
- Twists the motives and intentions of others who try to help.
- Resists change, preferring familiar hurting to risky healing.
- Exhibits indifference and numbness toward the pain they inflict on others.

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Personal Note to Pastor's

After 25 years of counseling people I've noticed three stages of Bitterness:

1. **Reactive Stage**—1-2 years. Where people are temporarily bitter but eventually let it go.
2. **Resistant Stage**—3-6 years. The hurt was deep and it lingers for years. Difficult to root out but not impossible.
3. **Rigid Stage**—6 plus years. This is where bitterness becomes a way of life. They don't just have an emotional infection, **the infection now has them**. Illus: Gangarene—now the infection has taken over.

--Jim

Reasons Why People Hold on to Bitterness

Many people derive emotional benefits from holding on to past hurts and injustices. It gives them a sense of justification, power and control. They have a "right" to be angry. Releasing that *right* is not the easiest thing to do. Others are perfectly content to remain in their situation. Still others are afraid to make any move to change. Why? One reason is that "a known Hell is better than an unknown Heaven." Another reason is that to admit

they need to change says that they are the ones with the problem; and that is directly opposed to their thinking.

But the costs are high. *“Of the Seven Deadly Sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last tooth—some morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back—in many ways is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. **The skeleton at the feast is you.**”*

--Fredrick Buechner
The Servant

Transgenerational bitterness? Arabs and Jews, Hutu's and Tutsi's in Africa. The root continues to grow. Political solutions may only be attempts at pruning.

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

—Ephesians 4:32

Examine the larger context of Ephesians 4:20–32 to see the bigger picture of inner transformation. What else do you learn about the practical process of “taking off” destructive attitudes like bitterness?

Read several of the episodes in 1 Samuel 15–31 about the ongoing conflict between King Saul and the king-to-be David. (We suggest readings from chapters 15, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 26, 28, or 31.) What evidence do you see that King Saul allowed bitterness to grow inside himself? What were the consequences in his life and the lives of others? What opportunities for emotional healing did God provide? How might the course of Saul's life have turned out differently? In contrast, how did David deal with the deep pain within him? Why didn't his pain turn to bitterness?

What more can you learn about bitterness from Colossians 3:19; James 13:14; Acts 8:21; Romans 3:14?

How is bitterness different from anger?

A bitter person must have some reason for hanging onto bitterness. What might be the perceived payoff or advantage?

List a few of the negative physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual consequences of holding on to your bitterness. (Consider your responses in question 5 above.)

Physical	Emotional	Relational	Spiritual

The Point of Healing

When you recognize that the disadvantages of bitterness far outweigh the perceived advantages, and you understand how destructive the poison of bitterness is—that’s when you are ready to release it to God in prayer.

It slowly sets, like a permanent plaster cast, perhaps protecting the wearer from further pain but ultimately holding him rigid in frozen animation. His feelings and responses have turned to concrete, and, like concrete, they are all mixed up and firmly set. Bitterness is a paralysis.

—David Augsburger, in *The New Freedom of Forgiveness*

God, the Divine Pharmacist, has handed you a prescription bottle labeled “Ephesians 4:32.” What are the specific instructions He has written as your unique, personalized prescription, to begin your healing?

God wants you to live free from bitterness. He is faithful to help you follow His will, His Road to Forgiveness.

The Problem of Bitterness

Text: II Kings 2:19-22

Intro: English literature abounds with stories of bitterness and resentment as the drama of deep human struggle that touches a responsive chord in the hearts of its readers. Captain Ahab in Herman Melville’s classic, **Moby Dick**, portrays a man who is driven by harbored hurt and bitterness—all because of a wound inflicted on him by a white whale that took his leg.

Herman Melville writes that the wound of bitterness didn’t occur at the time he lost his leg. “Yet, when by this collision forced to turn home, and for long months of days and weeks, Ahab and anguish lay stretched together in one hammock...then it was, that his torn body and gashed soul bled into one another.” Nekkukkem 1922 pg, 230)

Ahab is a man who is consumed by bitterness. When Starbuck, the mate logically presents the case the whale is a dumb brute and that to be enraged by that is blasphemous, Ahab replies: “I see in him outrageous strength with inscrutable malice sinewing it. That

inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate...I will wreak that hate upon him. Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. (pg. 204)

Melville touches on a truth here—ultimately bitterness is against the scales of justice that are in the hand of God. Bitterness, ultimately, is not waging war against a whale, but against God.

As Max Lucado says in his book *Grace for the Moment*, “X-ray the world of the vengeful and behold the tumor of bitterness: black, menacing, malignant. Carcinoma of the spirit. Its fatal fibers creep around the edge of the heart and ravage it. Yesterday you can’t alter, but your reaction to yesterday you can. The past you cannot change, but your response to the past you can.” Pg. 190 J Countryman division of Thomas Nelson Inc. © 2000

A malignant tumor: Divorce can cause that; church splits can cause that, blended families issues can cause wounds, an unfounded accusation, slander, personal loss or a promise that was never fulfilled, can create an internal concentration camp where walls of pride and resentment rise.

Movie Examples of Bitterness: *Count of Monte Cristo*, *Moby Dick*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Ben Hur*, *Amadeus*, *Gladiator*, and any Clint Eastwood movie ☺

Elisha and the Problem of Bitterness **T.S. Rendal has an excellent book on Elisha**

Background:

Jericho, in Jesus day was called “The City of Perfume” because of the fragrance from the date palms. Perhaps it was that way years before—we don’t know for sure.

What we do know is that Elisha is presented with a **PROBLEM**.

The water is bitter.

James 3:11 “Does a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?”

People can present themselves in the best of light but bitterness is deep within.

- I. The Men were **HONEST**: --They gave a factual statement of the situation as it existed.
 - A. The waters were naught: meaning “to spoil” –the ground barren: meaning “to miscarry.” All the facts were brought into the light.
 - B. The possibilities are here, the prospects are here, the earth could bring forth plentifully and this could be a paradise...**BUT**
 - C. Are you trying to be fruitful? Are you embittered by something that has happened? You may have all the outward signs of success but inwardly it’s a different story?
 - D. Can you be honest—the first step to releasing bitterness

- II. The Men were **HUMBLE**: If they were like most men, they had tried numbers of things. They were at the end of their own resources. They came to Elisha. We need help—**THEY WERE HELPLESS**, to change their

situation. Perhaps they said, “We’ve tried other things, but nothing’s worked.”

A **Honesty** and **Helplessness** and **Humility** are the three things that God responds to. What are you carrying that you are sick and tired of? Are you really that strong? That’s why the problem is still there. You’re still carrying it because you haven’t stepped through the door that says honesty, helplessness and humility, which caused them to seek HELP.

- III. The Solution: “Bring me a new cruse and put salt therein.”
- A. A new approach: A new cruse (an earthen pot, a bottle)
Some don’t want a new cruse—which I maintain is The Word of God—approach the problem from the spiritual standpoint. You could find a bottle or pot in any kitchen. He wanted something new. They might have tried other things—this had to be new.
1. **Psychological Approach?** Does Psychology have the answer for bitterness? No. Reason? Psychology only stops with the mind, the thoughts. God’s word goes deeper—so does bitterness.
 - a. “The **heart is deceitful** above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?” Jer. 17:9 It didn’t say the mind.
 - b. “For from within, **out of the HEART of men** proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders...etc.”
 - c. Mark 12:30 “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God **with all thy heart**, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind and with all they strength, this is the first commandment.”
 - d. Jesus was saying there is a deeper source that helps form thoughts—the heart.
- B. **SALT: A new antidote.** Portions of the Word of God that are applicable and relevant to the problem at hand. Takes discernment and knowing what aspect of the Word is relevant to that wound.
Interesting thought: Salt in a wound. Tell me what that conjures up for you? Will you let the Word touch the wound?
- C. Elisha went to THE SOURCE: The spring. Again, I maintain , it’s the heart that needs to be touched.
- D. Personal struggle with Bitterness—matter of the heart.
- E. Assumed a prerogative that belonged to God.

* * *

Alternate quotes

I imagine that one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once the hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with pain.

—James Baldwin

*Bitterness imprisons life; love releases it.
Bitterness paralyzes life; love empowers it.
Bitterness sickens life; love heals it.
Bitterness blinds life; love anoints its eyes.*

—Harry Emerson Fosdick

Hatred is like burning down your own house to get rid of a rat.

—Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969)

Anger is a weed; hate is the tree.

—Augustine of Hippo

Hatred is the greatest unilateral passion. It comes from you alone.

—Warren Goldberg

Bitterness—Definitions

Hatred is pain accompanied by the idea of an external cause.

—Baruch Spinoza

Hatred is an eternity withdrawn from love.

—Ludwig Boerne

Hatred is a prolonged form of suicide.

—Douglas V. Steere

Hatred is life's fitful fever.

—Anonymous

Bitterness Distorts Our Thinking

Hatred is blind as well as love.

—Sir Thomas Fuller (1608-1661)

Folks never understand the folks they hate.

—James Russell Lowell, *The Biglow Papers*

*Like an unchecked cancer, hate corrodes the personality and eats away its vital unity.
Hate destroys a man's sense of values and his objectivity. It causes him to describe the
beautiful as ugly and the ugly as beautiful, and to confuse the true with the false and the
false with the true.*

—Martin Luther King, Jr, *Strength in Love*

Bitterness—Its Cost

Bitterness is like a cancer. It eats upon the host.

—Author unknown

It is cheaper to pardon than to resent. Forgiveness saves the expense of anger, the cost of hatred.

—Hannah More (1745-1833)

(Alternate wording, from Nelson's: *A Christian will find it cheaper to pardon than to resent. Forgiveness saves the expense of anger, the cost of hatred, the waste of spirits.*)

Hatred is self-punishment.

—Hosea Ballou (1771-1852)

Nothing on earth consumes a man more quickly than resentment.

—Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

Hate does not build a house, it dissolves.

—African Proverb (Ovambo)

Bitterness—Enemies' Victory, Our Defeat

I shall allow no man to belittle my soul by making me hate him.

—Booker T. Washington

Hatred is our spiritual defeat and our likeness to what we hate.

—George W. Russell

Bitterness Is Our Own Choice

There can be poison in the cup of sorrow, but only if we put it there ourselves.

—Hannah Hurnard (1905-1990)

Anger—Controlled & Uncontrolled

Anger dies quickly with a good man.

—English Proverb

Kill your anger while it is small.

—Slovakian Proverb

Heat not a furnace for your foe so hot

That it do singe yourself.

—William Shakespeare, *Henry VIII*

THE DUNGEON OF DESPAIR

There are dungeons beneath the castles of despair.

—Charles Spurgeon

The Three Trojan Horses of Pain:

Depression: Emotionally trying to “adjust” to change in our lives. Relational, vocational, personal, financial—almost any major change can involve a re-adjustment of our emotional richter scale. We try to cope with broken dreams, loss, injustice—it’s devastating.

Bitterness Tree: Here we are not wrestling, we are “fighting” the loss. We have emotional novacaine in our system. We may want revenge, we want justice, we want others to hurt, we want...(fill in the blank)

Dungeon: Struggling with anger—we are “bronzing” the loss. **internalizing the loss.**

Illustration: The World’s Worst Prison

The Spanish called it the Isle of the Pelicans. It’s more commonly known by the name of Alcatraz—one of the most escape-proof prisons in the world. From 1933 to 1963 26 men tried to escape—only 5 succeeded. High walls, double-lock doors, machine guns in the hands of the guards—formidable.

In Dartmoor, England, just a few miles south of Devonshire stands a prison built originally for French prisoners. Later for English convicts. One one has successfully escaped. Built in the middle of an extensive swamp, filled with morasses, mud and quicksand and known for its heavy fogs that can settle down in a matter of minutes. It is known as the world’s toughest prison.

The worst prison in the world is not in England, not is it located on Pelican Island. It is the prison we can create outself with an unforgiving spirit. Anger for bricks, self-pity for mortar, a man can take the trowel of pride and live in his own dungeon.

Who are the jailors? The tormentors in this self-made prison? High blood pressure, ulcers, insomnia. The diet? Tylenol, exceedrin, and Maalox. The prisoners? Husbands, wifves, parents, teens, friends.

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover the prisoner was you.

—Author unknown

When you blame others, you give up your power to change.

—Anonymous

There is no torment like the inner torment of an unforgiving spirit. It refuses to be soothed, it refused to be healed, it refuses to forget.

—Charles Swindoll

Pastor: This explanation is in the Bible Study

Anger is one of a wide range of normal, God-given emotions. But it's an emotional state that God intends only as a short-term stopover, not a long-term residence. If you experience anger, but refuse to release it, you'll eventually discover yourself trapped in...The Dungeon of Despair.

Anger has power—the power to free and the power to imprison. Short-term anger, expressed in a measured way, can release pain and lead to constructive resolution. But long-term anger, even if it doesn't putrefy into bitterness, can become a dungeon with walls of your own making. Then you are contained within self-imposed delusions, convinced that your options have been reduced to two—revenge or endless wallowing.

So much has been taken away that you feel you have the right to be angry...and to stay that way. This creates a sense of control; you experience power in not forgiving. To the one who hurt you, and maybe to the cruel world at large, you say, *I am not your victim, you are **my** victim.*

Anger, cherished and hoarded, is a cold and lonely prison, a dead end street, a place of self-pity. It's a perpetual spin cycle, going round and round and round the same images and arguments and complaints, tumbling them and exploring every angle until they're more tiringly familiar than the insides of your eyelids. This extended focus on "poor me" may feel like self-care, seeming to strengthen and empower you, but this is counterfeit power; the negative energy of resentful self-pity will emotionally drain you.

If you find yourself in the Dungeon, there is a message of hope: Your sentence can end whenever you wish. Life exists on the outside. You will laugh and sing again, but you must first choose to move through the resentment and create a better post-injustice existence. Releasing the right to be angry is not easy. Some never do. They're perfectly content to remain in the Dungeon. Thus they become emotional slaves to someone else's injustice, sacrificing self-determination, granting power over their lives to someone else's wrongful actions.

Now is the time to decide: Walk out of the Dungeon and move on with your life. Talk to the jailor. He holds the key and can open the door.

The jailor is you.

Mental Messages We Play Over and Over Again in the Dungeon

- ✓ This isn't fair!
- ✓ Will they ever be held accountable?
- ✓ The truth will never be known.
- ✓ If only...
- ✓ Why didn't I...?
- ✓ How can I hurt them back?

Cease from anger and forsake wrath; do not fret; it leads only to evildoing.

—Psalm 37:8

Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

—James 1:19–20

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. “But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

—Romans 12:17–21

According to Romans 12:17–21, revenge belongs to God. Read this passage. What might your actions be saying about God if you pursue vengeance?

Background: Regarding “heap burning coals on his head” (Romans 12:20): In *Strange Scriptures That Perplex the Western Mind*, Barbara M. Bowen says that in Bible times people carried almost everything on their heads with relative ease. “In many homes the only fire they have is kept in a brazier which they use for simple cooking as well as for warmth. If it should go out, some member of the family will take the brazier to a neighbor’s house to borrow fire. If the neighbor is a generous woman, she will heap the brazier full of coals” (pages 31–32).

Pray, then, in this way: “...forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors....” For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

—Jesus in Matthew 6:9, 12, 14–15

I Samuel 24. How did David respond when he had opportunity to seek revenge? What was Saul’s response?

Psalms 37 and 73 are two of the best Bible passages for people who are deeply troubled by injustice in the world. Read one or both of these. What new perspective do you gain on injustice? In your own practical terms, what do these teachings exhort you to do? Why is this a good idea?

Remember, as you extend forgiveness,
you are not saying that the one who hurt you was right,
but rather that God is Just and that what He will do is right.

* * *

Alternate quotes:

There is no passion in the human heart that promises so much and pays so little as revenge.

—Josh Billings

Having resentment is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die.

—Malachy McCourt

Of the Seven Deadly Sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back—in many ways is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.

—Frederick Buechner

Life lived without forgiveness becomes a prison.

—William Arthur Ward (1812–1882)

When anger blinds the eyes, truth disappears.

—Danish Proverb

It is easier to swallow angry words than to have to eat them.

—Anonymous

If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow.

—Chinese Proverb

Your temper is something you never get rid of by losing it.

—Anonymous

By bearing old wrongs you provoke new ones.

—Publilius Syrus (1st Century BC)

Anger is an essential part of the outfit of every honest man.

—James Russell Lowell

Anger dies quickly with a good man.

—English Proverb

Kill your anger while it is small.

—Slovakian Proverb

Heat not a furnace for your foe so hot

That it do singe yourself.

—William Shakespeare, *Henry VIII*

Without forgiveness life is governed...by an endless cycle of resentment and retaliation.

—Robert Assaglioli

Self-pity is a death that has no resurrection, a sinkhole from which no rescuing hand can drag you because you have *chosen* to sink.

—Elizabeth Elliot, emphasis hers

Revenge could steal a man's life until there is nothing left but emptiness.

—Louis L'Amour

Any man can seek revenge; it takes a king or prince to grant a pardon.

—Arthur J. Rehrat

No revenge is more honorable than one not taken.

—Spanish Proverb

Part III

Moving from the Past to the Future

Part I of The Road to Forgiveness focused heavily on your past. You looked at three sequential steps: identifying the injury, calculating the loss, and owning your burden.

Part II, which you have just completed, addressed three common emotional detours that can hinder your progress on the road—Depression, Bitterness or the Dungeon of Despair. You might experience these during any part of your timeline—past, present or future. They are important issues related to loss that can significantly impact your life.

Now, in Part III, we resume with the next sequential steps of your journey. If you've successfully gone so far as to own your burden you're probably eager to get rid of the weight.

Mourning your loss is where this starts. And it's here that our focus on the past transitions to a focus on the future.

With that attitude of anticipation, you will face some key concepts about how your loss has shaped your life And you will come to understand what forgiveness is and what it is not

Sorrow is an invitation to go to God.

—Antonin Sertillanges

Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forward.

—Søren Kierkegaard

Past: Our cradle, not our prison, and there is danger as well as appeal in its glamour. The past is for inspiration, not imitation; for continuation, not repetition.

—Israel Zangwill

As we practice the work of forgiveness we discover more and more that forgiveness and healing are one.

—Agnes Sanford

* * *

Alternate quotes:

Pain past is pleasure.

—English Proverb

Tomorrow hopes we have learned something from yesterday.

—John Wayne

Most of us do not like to look inside ourselves for the same reason we don't like to open a letter than has bad news.

—Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen (1895-1979)

It is not only the most difficult thing to know oneself, but the most inconvenient, too.

—Josh Billings

MOURN YOUR LOSS

Sorrow is a sacred thing.

— William Cowper (1731-1800)

You have to deal with the fact that your life is your life.

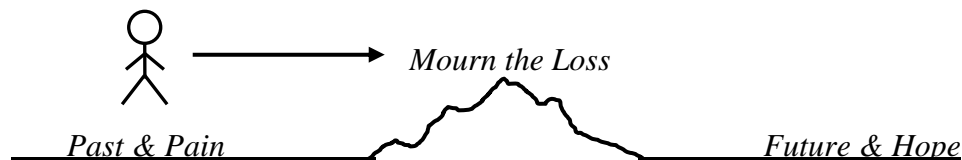
—Alex Hailey

Pastor: This explanation is in the Bible Study

When you've been hurt—especially when you've been wounded deeply—emotional vulnerability may take you by surprise. A few tears leak out before you can catch them. But in our culture, what naturally comes next is unfamiliar territory for many of us. It is as if we're taught to circumvent pain wherever possible. However, God designed us to sort out our pain and proceed *through* it by means of mourning—a natural and healthy process. In many parts of the world, that's exactly what the injured person does.

From where we've been thus far, mourning may appear as a mountain, looming ahead. The route may look cold, desolate, and arduous. We are weary of the load, tired of the pain, and we'd rather deal with it by denying it. But the pain is still there. We limp.

You can't get rid of your past pain and loss by ignoring it—only by mourning it. And when you muster your courage and proceed forward over the mountain, you discover that the experience is relieving. Yes, the going can be rough. You may sustain your share of bruises and sore muscles along the way. It's work—emotional work. But it's productive work. And once you've made your way up into the snowy passes, the rugged path, which appeared from a distance to be cold and desolate, begins to prove itself strengthening, restoring, refreshing. You smell fleeting hints of spring and catch glimpses of sunlight breaking through.



Mourning is coming to a place of emotional and personal acceptance of your circumstances and making the decision to move through them. Mourning enables the individual to move from the past and its pain to hope and a future.

Mourning is an encounter with the truth. It is not whining, which is nothing more than bogging down in self-pity. Mourning is pausing to feel the loss so that you can accept it. Mourning requires the “revisiting of the past, re-working of the injury and

rebuilding of the loss through reframing and reinterpreting its meanings” (David Augsburger).

Mourning is where emotion and reality converge in acceptance. I accept the loss.

* * *

Great Illustration!

“Tap Out”

In the world of Mixed Martial Arts fighting, a fighter who no longer wishes to continue fighting can “tap out.” This signals to his opponent that he is conceding. The referee then stops the fight. The fighter who tapped out loses the contest.

In the emotional world, when you cease fighting and emotionally “tap out”, you open the door to win.

* * *

Some have used the words “grieving” and “mourning” interchangeably. *Grieving* is the very natural emotional response of sadness which accompanies loss. It is the mind’s and heart’s attempt to assimilate what has happened. It usually occurs instinctually.

Mourning, in contrast, is the **intentional process of accepting the loss**. Seldom do people mourn immediately following a loss; rather, some time later they reach a point of intentional resolution to accept reality and, in doing so, mourn.

Whatever the loss, we “receive” it by making a conscious, deliberate effort to recognize its reality (acknowledgment) and concede the lasting void that comes with it (acceptance). This acceptance includes awareness that life will not be the same as it was before the loss.

—Alan Cole Jr., *Good Mourning*, page 49

A number of the psalms in the Old Testament are devoted to mourning—songs of deep sorrow. Songs that define the loss in great detail, exploring its dimensions, pushing out to its borders and even past them, often using exaggerated language in an effort to verbalize emotions that can never be adequately captured in mere words. Part of your mourning process might involve similar types of expression. You might write your own song of mourning, paint your own portrait of pain, blog your broken dreams, or dance to your personal dirge of dejection. Whatever form it might take, mourning your loss fosters within you a freedom to move forward, because truth is indeed liberating.

And in all, prayer is your soothing balm. Your God has never left you, and when you turn to Him in mourning, you remind yourself of His healing presence. Mourning in God’s company allows the Serenity Prayer to be woven into the fabric of your daily thinking and feeling:

*God, give us grace to accept with serenity
The things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things
Which should be changed,
And the wisdom to distinguish
The one from the other.
Living one day at a time,*

*Enjoying one moment at a time,
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,
Taking, as Jesus did,
This sinful world as it is,
Not as I would have it,
Trusting that You will make all things right,
If I surrender to Your will,
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,
And supremely happy with You forever in the next.
Amen.
—Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971)*

What is Mourning?

- ✓ Mourning is taking possession of the loss, rather than allowing the loss to possess you.
- ✓ Mourning is “letting go of what you cannot have in order to make room in your heart for what you can have” (John Townsend, *Hiding From Love*, page 100).
- ✓ Mourning is pausing to feel the loss, so you can accept it.
- ✓ Mourning is the turning point where you choose to move *through* your pain and your past and begin to advance into your future and your hope.

[Jesus] knelt down and began to pray, saying, “Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.”

—Luke 22:41–42

Background: Mourning is coming to a place of emotional and personal acceptance of your situation and circumstances and making the decision to move through them. Most commonly, you and I mourn *after* the event—the *historical fact* of the loss is behind us, but our *full emotional experience* and true acceptance of it still lies ahead.

Jesus, at Gethsemane, mourned before the event, in anticipation of impending loss. Gethsemane was all about surrender and profound emotional acceptance of a horrific event. **Jesus accepted the cup.** “This cup” in Luke 22:42 referred to the torturous suffering and death that Jesus was about to experience.

[Jesus] withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, saying, “Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.” Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.

—Luke 22:41–44

When He prays, “not My will, but Yours be done,” He seems to both disagree (*My will is*

different from Yours) and agree (*I choose Your will over Mine*) with God the Father. Describe the mourning model Jesus provides us through His inner struggle and His final decision.

JEWISH PSALMS OF MOURNING

What more can you learn about healthy and appropriate mourning from Psalm 88, as well as the psalms you didn't read from among Psalms 22, 55, 69, and 102?

The following **excerpts** from Amy Carmichael's poem

“In Acceptance Lieth Peace.”

He said, “I will forget the dying faces;
The empty places—
They shall be filled again;
O voices mourning deep within me, cease.”
*Vain, vain the word; vain, vain:
Not in forgetting lieth peace.*

He said, “I will submit; I am defeated;
God hath depleted
My life of its rich gain.
O futile murmurings; why will ye not cease?”
*Vain, vain the word; vain, vain:
Not in submission lieth peace.*

He said, “I will accept the breaking sorrow
Which God to-morrow
Will to His son explain.”
Then did the turmoil deep within him cease.
*Not vain the word, not vain;
For in acceptance lieth peace.*

Remember, “Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning.”

—Psalm 30:5 (NLT)

* * *

Alternate quotes:

If I ever wonder about the appropriate “spiritual” response to pain and suffering, I can note how Jesus responded to his own: with fear and trembling, with loud cries and tears.

—Philip Yancy (see Hebrews 5:7-9)

Do not conceal your sadness from us under a pretended gaiety! You please as much by your sorrow as by your enchanting smile.

—Gerard Labrunie (1808-1855)

He who sings drives away sorrow.

—Italian Proverb

When you give vent to your feelings, your anger leaves you.

—Yiddish Proverb

DECIDE YOUR IDENTITY

He has ruined my past. I'm beginning to toy with the idea of forgiveness so that I don't allow him to destroy my future as well.

—Lynn Shriner

Note to Pastors: This explanation is in the Bible Study

The nature of trauma is that it changes you forever. It does not need to *damage* you forever, but you will be different. Embedded in loss and tragedy are the seeds of change—new relationships, new values, and a new perspective on many things in life. And with God's healing and guidance, these can all become influences that change your sense of identity—your idea of who you are and what you can do—for the better. Out of pain can come something valuable, good, eternal.

Perhaps the hurt you've experienced has caused you to become more compassionate. Maybe you more readily identify with other hurting people and innately know what to say and do to help.

Personal trauma may have caused you to develop a whole new value system—a system that values people and relationships more than status or possessions. Following a loss, old, unhealthy friendships may seem shallow and purposeless; new, better friendships may seem deeper and more meaningful.

On the other hand, you have the choice also to let trauma change your sense of identity for the worse. You can define yourself by your wound, rather than by the lessons learned from it. Your life can orbit around your loss, rather than mourning the loss and moving on in renewed strength.

Out of your injury, you can choose an identity that is more optimistic or more pessimistic, more cautious or willing to take more risks, more self-centered or more other-centered. You can decide to remain under the power and control of the one who hurt you, living the rest of your life in remote submission to them, letting them continue to rob you of joy and purpose. You can allow the traumatic event to be the confining, defining moment of your life.

It is important that you take time to contemplate which identity you will choose—who you are becoming and where you want to go. How has your loss changed you? And how will you and God, together, use this painful event to deepen and expand your knowledge and understanding, enabling you to create something new for your future?

[Forgiveness] requires us to consider who we are independent of what has been done to us. Forgiveness requires an act of imagination because it invites us to consider a future that is not merely a reaction to the past.

—Gary W. Hawk

Questions to Ponder in Deciding Your Identity

- Do I want to be defined by my injury alone, or by God?
- Will I let the actions of others keep on robbing me of my potential?
- How has this painful event changed me for the worse? For the better? Simply changed me, neither better nor worse?
- Where do I want to go with my life? Is this direction different since I was hurt? Better, worse, or just different?
- What new values have I now integrated into my life? Are these values that I want to keep and cultivate further? Are they values I want to adjust or correct?
- What is my outlook on life and the world around me—my personal “life philosophy”?
- What positive lessons can I learn from my experience?
- How can I implement those lessons in my future? How can I weave this experience as a strengthening and beautifying strand throughout the fabric of my life?
- Have I hurt others in the hurting and healing process? What might my true identity require me to do in those relationships?

Several times throughout Joseph’s life, he found himself standing at an identity crossroads. He came to the first crossroads when he had been sold into slavery by his brothers. Struggling desperately with a decision, he walked toward Egypt, bound as fresh human cargo in a chain of slaves belonging to the Ishmaelite traders.

On the one hand, he could choose an injury-centered identity: orphan, outcast, reject. Foreigners used to be the occasional strangers that his father would entertain, but now Joseph was the foreigner. He might think of himself simply as a slave, someone else’s property. All of these, and many more labels, could have become Joseph’s who-I-am for all of his remaining days, if he were simply to accept that decision. It certainly must have seemed tempting—the easy way out.

But instead, at some point during those early months or years, he decided on a different identity. He declared within himself, *I am someone whom God can still use. I can still do something important.*

And so it was on this foundation, this chosen identity, that Joseph rose in status and responsibility to take charge of his master, Potiphar’s, entire estate.

The past is a guidepost, not a hitching post.

—L. Thomas Holdcroft

Mark Twain once defined forgiveness as “the fragrance the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it.”

Alternate quotes:

Pain and suffering produce a fork in the road. It is not possible to remain unchanged.

—Tim Hansel

The past is never completely lost, however extensive the devastation. Your sorrows are the bricks and mortar of a magnificent temple. What you are today and what you will be tomorrow are because of what you have been.

—Gordon Wright

The past is the past. Nothing can alter the facts. What has happened has happened forever. But the meaning can be changed. That is forgiveness. Forgiveness restores the present, heals for the future, and releases us from the past.

—David Augsburger

While it is true that we are not what happened to us, we almost certainly are what we make of what happened to us.

—Gary W. Hawk

THE PROFILE OF TRUE FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is a creative act that changes us from being prisoners of the past to liberated people at peace with our memories.

—Unknown

What Forgiveness Is Not...(In Bible Study)

Forgiveness is not amnesia. “Forgive and forget” is a nice cliché, but it doesn’t work. An African proverb says, “The axe forgets, the tree remembers.” We are not designed to forget.

Like the Etch-A-Sketch toys, forgiveness [is commonly thought to involve] a shaking of the slate, removing all trace that the offense ever occurred. It is perhaps this idea that leads to most of the opposition to forgiveness. Memories are powerful tools, for better or worse, and one cannot simply forget an event. To forget is to minimize, trivialize, dismiss, and ignore. People may forget anniversaries, but they do not forget pain. To require that forgetfulness accompanies forgiveness is to request the impossible and place an impossible burden on the forgiver.

—Rebekah Farquhar

Forgiveness is not synonymous with trust. You may wonder, “If I choose to forgive,

must I automatically return to trusting the one who hurt me?” No. Forgiveness and trust are two separate issues. You can forgive someone, but trust has to be rebuilt.

If we are bound to forgive an enemy, we are not bound to trust him.

—English Proverb

Forgiveness is not releasing the one who hurt you from responsibility. Forgiveness is not “looking the other way when a wrong is done. It does not make light of a wrong. It is no bit of pious pretending that evil is not really evil. Forgiveness is not merely politeness, tact or diplomacy. Nor is it just forgetting” (David Augsburger).

What Forgiveness Is...

Forgiveness is rare, difficult, costly, and substitutional. James Buswell succinctly defines *substitutional* when he states, “All forgiveness, human and divine, is in the very nature of the case vicarious, substitutional, and this is one of the most valuable views my mind has ever entertained. No one ever really forgives another, except he bears the penalty of the other’s sin against him” (cited in David Augsburger).

Illustration:

To picture this concept, imagine that you have been hurt. Write the word “hurt” on a chalkboard. When someone asks you to forgive them for the hurt that they caused, and you choose to forgive, you can erase the word “hurt” from the chalkboard. But where did the “hurt” go? Did it just go away? Vanish? No, it’s on the eraser.

Whenever you choose to forgive, you are saying to the one who hurt you: “*I am willing to erase the debt from your ledger and bear the consequences of what has happened to me. I will never bring up the issue again.*” Calvary is a perfect example of this kind of forgiveness. You have been forgiven, but Christ bore the consequences of what He chose to release you from. That is why forgiveness is substitutionary. **Are you willing to forgive in that way?**

Extending forgiveness may open the door for you to experience emotions that you haven’t felt in some time. Perhaps you will experience empathy, compassion, acceptance for others, and possibly even a change of heart towards the person who offended you.

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

—Colossians 3:13 (NIV)

You may recall the hurt, but you will not relive it! No constant reviewing, no rehashing of the old hurt, no going back to sit on the old gravestones where past grievances lie buried. True, the hornet of memory may fly again, but forgiveness has drawn its sting. The curse is gone. The memory is powerless to arouse or

anger. The past is the past. Nothing can alter the facts. What has happened has happened forever. But the meaning can be changed. That is forgiveness.

—David Augsburger

“Forgive as the Lord forgave you” Colossians 3:13 (NIV).

[The LORD] has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

—Psalm 103:10–12

Psalm 103:10–12

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.

—Ephesians 1:7–8

Read Ephesians 1:7–8.

How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

—Psalm 32:1–2

Background: A review of the original Hebrew language in Psalm 32:1–2 provides the following meanings for three key words:

- Forgive: “To lift and carry away”
- Covered: “Concealed out of sight”
- Impute: “To put to one’s account”

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

—Ephesians 4:32–5:2

The key to forgiving others is to quit focusing on what they did to you and start focusing on what God did for you.

—Max Lucado, *In The Grip of Grace*

Note to Pastors: The whole concept of forgiving yourself is controversial. Some say “there is no Scripture verse that says we should forgive ourselves”—they are correct. Others say it is “implied.” Perhaps so. The concept is that of moving on, not

beating yourself up. Here is an interesting quote that may shed some light:

[A person's self-forgiveness] may involve trying to reconcile who they feel they are with what they did, or the damage they caused.

—Gary W. Hawk

Some people learn to forgive others, but they struggle to forgive themselves. If that's you, perhaps the following true story, told by Jim Velez, will inspire in you a new perspective.

Forgiving Yourself?

Driving on a dark night in a strange town, I received a traffic ticket for making a left-hand turn. I placed the ticket in my wallet and drove 150 miles home.

Two months passed and I began to think it strange that I had not received a mailed notice to appear at court. I extracted the long yellow carbon copy from my wallet, turned it over, and for the first time read the back. To my dismay, the court date had come and gone. I had missed it.

I asked the local sheriff what I should do. He responded, "Let me see if there is a warrant out for your arrest."

"What!"

Fortunately, the sheriff discovered that no such warrant existed, but he suggested that I drive back to the town to see if I could obtain another court date.

Three and a half hours later, I arrived at the courthouse and explained the situation to the lady behind the desk. She took down some information and left the counter. Returning, she stated that she couldn't find the original ticket.

I replied, "That's okay, I have the carbon right here with the numbers on it and the officer's signature."

"I don't think you understand," she said. "If I can't find the original, you never committed the offense."

And with that, she dismissed the case entirely. On the journey home, my eyes filled with tears as I reflected on this experience. I had been carrying around the carbon copy that reminded me of an offense, but the original was gone. What a beautiful picture of the gift of God's forgiveness! You and I may carry the carbon for our offense, but God says that the original is gone...buried in the deepest sea, removed as far as the east is from the west. Case dismissed!

* * *

The concept of forgiving yourself is to *let it go* and to *move on*. We don't literally forget our past, but we can move on without allowing the past to slow us down...when we choose to embrace God's full and final forgiveness, accept the absolute absence of the original, and acknowledge our authoritative acquittal by the Almighty Adjudicator.

* * *

Alternate quotes

Forgiveness is the willingness to release another person from his debt to us, for hurts that may have been caused, to clear the record, promising never to bring the matter up again.

—Les Carter, *Putting the Past Behind*

Forgiveness is the answer to the child's dream of a miracle by which what is broken is made whole again, what is soiled is again made clean.

—Dag Hammarskjöld

Forgiveness ought to be like a cancelled note, torn in two and burned up, so that it can never be shown against the man.

—Henry Ward Beecher

No matter how great a sorrow may be, God has already suffered it.

—Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-c. 1327)

Forgiveness does not equal forgetting. It is about healing the memory of the harm, not erasing it.

—Ken Hart

You must choose to forgive whoever has wronged you. Forgiveness is not an emotion, it is a decision of the will.

—Erwin W. Lutzer

Part IV

Choice Ahead

Intro: Simon Wiesenthal:

Note to Pastors: This is a tremendous illustration. Really illustrates the complexity of forgiveness.

Simon Wiesenthal tell another sort of story we must hear at all costs; this story of his own terrible crisis of forgiveness in a concentration camp forces us to tremble a little as he asks again whether forgiving is really fair. Wiesenthal was the very opposite of vengeful Shylock smacking his lips over the pound of flesh that was coming to him. He was a decent person, an architect by profession, caught in the Nazi claws, hoping for no more than to survive the holocaust, and hardly daring to hope for that much.

We find him one afternoon in a Polish concentration camp. Wiesenthal had been assigned that day to clean rubbish out of a hospital that the Germans had improvised for wounded soldiers carried in from the Eastern Front. A nurse walked over to him, out of nowhere, took his arm, ordered him to come with her, and led him upstairs, along a row of stinking wounded, to the side of a bed where a young soldier, his head wrapped in yellow, pus-stained bandages was dying. He was maybe twenty-two, an SS Trooper.

The soldier, whose name was Karl, reached out and grabbed Wiesenthal's hand, clamped it as if he feared Wiesenthal's hand, clamped it as if he feared Wiesenthal would run away. He told Wiesenthal that he had to speak to a Jew. He had to confess the terrible things that he had done so that he could be forgiven. Or he could not die in peace.

What had he done? He was fighting in a Russian village where a few hundred Jewish people had been rounded up. His group was ordered to plant full cans of gasoline in a certain house. Then they marched about two hundred people into the house, crammed them in until they could hardly move. Next they threw grenades through the windows to set the house on fire. The soldiers were ordered to shoot anyone who tried to jump out of a window.

The young soldier recalled, "Behind the window of the second floor, I saw a man with a small child in his arms. His clothing was alight. By his side stood a woman, doubtless the mother of the child. With his free hand the man covered the child's eyes—then he jumped into the street. Seconds later the mother followed. We shot...Oh, God...I shall never forget it—it haunts me."

The young man paused and then said, "I know that what I have told you is terrible. I have longed to talk about it to a Jew and beg forgiveness from him. I know that what I am asking is almost too much, but without your answer I cannot die in peace."

Silence! The sun was high in heaven. God was somewhere. But here, two strangers were all by themselves caught in the crisis of forgiveness. A member of the superior race begged to be forgiven by a member of the condemned race.

Wiesenthal tells us what he did. "I stood up, and looked in his direction, at his folded hands. At last I made up my mind and without a word I left the room." The German went to God unforgiven by man.

Weisenthal survived the concentration camp. But he could not forget the SS trooper. He wondered, troubled, for a long time whether he should have forgiven the soldier. He told the story in his book, *The Sunflower*, and ended it with the awful question for every reader: “What would you have done?”

Thirty-two distinguished people wrote their answers to Wiesenthal. Most of them echoed Josek, a fellow prisoner, who said to Wiesenthal:

You would have had no right to forgive him in the name of people who has not authorized you to do so. What people have done to you, yourself, you can, if you like, forgive and forget. That is your own affair. But it would have been a terrible sin to burden your conscience with other people’s suffering.

A few writers came out with it: The SS trooper did not deserve forgiveness. Philosopher Herbert Marcuse said what one suspects was on the minds of most people:

One cannot and should not go around happily killing and torturing and then, when the moment has come, simply ask, and receive forgiveness.

But no one else put the case against forgiving with the passion of Novelist Cynthia Ozick:

Often we are asked to think this way: vengeance brutalizes, forgiveness refines. But the opposite can be true. The rabbis said, “Whoever is merciful to the cruel will end by being indifferent to the innocent.” Forgiveness can brutalize...The face of forgiveness is mild, but how stony to the slaughtered...Let the SS man die unshriven. Let him go to Hell.

* * *

A choice awaits you as you approach a three-way junction in the journey. All three roads lead to the completion of the forgiveness process, but each by a different route. If you take full advantage of the freeing, life-giving power of forgiveness in your varied and on-going relationships, you’ll eventually become familiar with all three paths.

Choice #1: If you have hurt someone and desire to make amends by *asking forgiveness*, Lesson 11 guides you along that path to a place of genuine humility and constructive remorse. You’ll learn a scriptural way to ask forgiveness, and you’ll learn what not to say when asking for forgiveness.

Choice #2: If a person has hurt you, you might not be able to go to that person; they may be deceased or unwilling to talk. Or perhaps you consider it unwise to approach them. Then allow Lesson 12 to lead you down the path of *releasing the injustice alone*. Along this route you will learn that extending forgiveness, in any situation, is completely up to you, whether or not you

ever hear the one who hurt you admit responsibility for your injury.

Choice #3: If a person has hurt you, you may choose to go to them to tell them how you were hurt by what they did. This is the road less traveled, the road by which you *extend and initiate the opportunity for forgiveness in person.*

Which path will you take?

Forgiveness is man's deepest need and highest achievement.

—Horace Bushnell (1802–1876)

He that cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he must pass himself; for every man has need to be forgiven.

—Thomas Fuller

Forgiveness is the remission of sins. For it is by this that what has been lost, and was found, is saved from being lost again.

—Augustine of Hippo

I ought, therefore I can.

—Immanuel Kant (1724–1804)

Better that my enemy should see good in me than I should see evil in him.

—Yiddish Proverb

*These things are beautiful beyond belief;
The pleasant weakness that comes after pain,
The radiant greenness that comes after rain,
The deepened faith that follows after grief,
And awakening to love again.*

—Anonymous

Write injuries in sand, kindness in marble.

—French Proverb

To be social is to be forgiving.

—Robert Frost

He who forgives ends the quarrel.

—African Proverb

Forgiving our enemies has the same refreshing effect upon our souls as it does to confess our sins.

—Josh Billings

Humanity is never so beautiful as when praying for forgiveness or when forgiving another.

—Johann Paul Friedrich Richter (1763–1825)

We are most like beasts when we kill, most like men when we judge, most like God when we forgive.

—Author unknown

Forgiveness is the final form of love.

—Reinhold Niebuhr

HOW TO ASK FOR FORGIVENESS

Perhaps you have become more aware, not only of your need to forgive others, but also of the pain you may have caused the lives of other people. We all hurt others. We're all human.

How will you take initiative to mend those relationships?

A man should never be ashamed to own he has been wrong, which is but saying, in other words, that he is wiser today than he was yesterday.

—Alexander Pope (1688–1744)

If you were deeply hurt by another person, and that person were to toss a nonchalant “Sorry” in your general direction, you wouldn’t consider that an adequate apology. And yet we all remember those times in our childhood when well-meaning parents or teachers instructed us to issue apologies that were inclined to be equally insincere: “Just say you’re sorry. Go ahead. Say it! Say you are sorry!”

We are designed for relationships. And in an imperfect world, we hurt each other by the things we say and do. Some offenses may seem small, some large. But for the welfare of our relationships, we should never think it’s enough to sweep offenses under the carpet with a magic phrase. We owe ourselves and the person we’ve hurt the consideration of an appropriate apology.

Merely saying “I apologize” or “I’m sorry” does not address the emotional pain that an offended person feels. When we limit the interaction to a two-word declaration, we’re trying to mend a relational rift with an open-and-shut, one-way conversation.

When you ask another person’s forgiveness, three critical components are necessary: *acknowledgement*, *ownership*, and *release*. These components touch the whole person—the intellect, emotion, and will of the injured party.

* * *

1. Acknowledgement: I know I hurt you when...INTELLECT
2. Ownership: I was wrong.....EMOTION
3. Release: Will you forgive?"WILL

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: “I Know I Hurt You When...”

Here, you’re telling the injured person exactly what you did, and you’re admitting that your actions did them harm. Be specific. If you wish to heal an extended history of hurts with someone, make a list entitled, “I know I hurt you when...” Some items may go back a long way. Your goal is to acknowledge the hurt you brought into their life.

Acknowledgement will engage their intellect by bringing to mind the event or events that caused their pain.

OWNERSHIP: “I Was Wrong.”

Ownership means you take full responsibility for what you did. “I was wrong.” Not, “I was wrong, but you were wrong, too,” or, “I was wrong, but let me tell you why I did it.” Justifying, minimizing, and rationalizing are all attempts to bypass your ownership of fault, taking you *away* from your goal of relational restoration, rather than toward it.

You may argue, “Well I was 70 percent wrong, but they were 30 percent wrong!” Take ownership of *your* part and don’t worry about their part. You cannot change other people; you can only take responsibility for yourself. “I was wrong.” Period.

Why is ownership so important? If you will not honestly judge your offending actions as wrong, you may hinder the possibility of lasting change in yourself and in your relationships. And your denial will certainly impact others’ ability to trust you in the future. Even saying, “I know I shouldn’t have...” falls short of full ownership. The only way you can demonstrate ownership for your actions is to say, “I was wrong.”

By taking ownership you help the injured person respond emotionally. Why is this important? It is possible that at the time of the injury the offended person tried to guard his heart from pain by separating his or her feelings from the event. Given this condition, any forgiveness granted might be nothing more than an intellectual gesture, rather than the heartfelt gift that is true forgiveness. When you, the offender, acknowledge your actions and take ownership, it helps the injured person reconnect emotions with the painful event so that he or she can forgive with feeling, not just with words.

“If you can’t feel it, you can’t heal it.”

RELEASE: “Will You Forgive Me?”

How you ask the offended party for forgiveness is important. Do not say, “Forgive me” or “You need to forgive me.” This isn’t a time to issue commands. They have a legitimate claim against you for an unpaid debt, and control of the debt’s disposition is completely in their hands. You are asking them to erase the debt from your ledger: “Will you forgive me?”

The will of the offended individual now comes into play. He or she has the opportunity to respond, “I forgive you,” or to withhold forgiveness. It’s their choice.

Resolve ahead of time not to resort to relentless begging (an attempt to manipulate the other person into premature “forgiveness”) or lashing out (punishing them for not giving you what you have no right to demand), if the offended person chooses not to grant forgiveness.

Be prepared also to allow—or even offer—the other person time to consider your request. Your acknowledgement and ownership may have triggered a flood of overwhelming emotion, making it difficult for them to grant meaningful forgiveness in the moment. If they respond, “I need a little time to process what you’ve said. I’ll get back to you,” take it as a good sign—they want to make this an authentic transaction. Just as you are discovering the scarcity of shortcuts along The Road to Forgiveness, so others need time to make the same journey. If they don’t follow through and get back to you within a reasonable time, you might tactfully, humbly approach them again.

A fault confessed is a new virtue added to a man.

—James S. Knowles (1784–1862)

Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

—Jesus in Matthew 7:3–5

Matthew 7:1–5. According to Jesus, why will we be less effective in confronting injustices done to us if we won't acknowledge the wrongs we have done to others?

Genesis 3: 8-13

And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, "Where are you?" [God didn't lose him in the garden—it's like saying, "What happened?" My mother use to do this but she would put her finger under my chin and lift my head up to look her in the eye!]

"I was afraid, I was naked, I hid"—Talked about the consequences of what he did but **NOT** what he did. **NO ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

God then went to ownership:

"Have you eaten of the tree whereof I commanded you that you should not eat?" (implied answer: Yes or no?) "The woman you gave me..." **NO OWNERSHIP TAKEN**, instead, blame shifting, guilt-dumping etc.

Acknowledgement and Ownership with David?

In Psalm 32:1–5, David describes what it was like after he hid and covered his sin against Bathsheba and her husband. What were the repercussions—including physical consequences—of his avoidance of responsibility? If you were to ask David which he would prefer—hidden guilt or open confession—he'd clearly choose the latter. But what reasons would he give for this preference?

Read David's Psalm 51, written after he committed adultery with Bathsheba (see 2 Samuel 11–12) and murdered her husband. Write down a few words and phrases that David uses to acknowledge and take ownership of his sin.

Read Luke 15. How did the **prodigal son** express acknowledgement and ownership for his hurtful actions? What was the son's attitude, and why was it appropriate?

Did the Thief on the Cross express Acknowledgment and Ownership?

If we confess[**acknowledgement**: to say the same thing about our sin that God does] *our sins*[oooh, now your getting personal—**ownership** here], *He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

—1 John 1:9

“When you **acknowledge** and take **ownership** of any fault, in any situation, what does 1 John 1:9 guarantee?”

Why don't we acknowledge and take ownership? (**PRIDE**_

A stiff apology is a second insult.

—G.K. Chesterton

If you are in the habit of simply saying “I’m sorry” or “I apologize,” now is the time to practice asking for forgiveness in a new way.

How to Ask for Forgiveness

- a. “I know I hurt you when...” (Be specific.)
- b. “I was wrong.” (Make sure you are willing to take responsibility.)
- c. “Will you forgive me?”

A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person. As long as I am by myself in the confession of my sins everything remains in the dark, but in the presence of a brother the sin has to be brought into the light.

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer (see also John 3:19–21)

* * *

Alternate quotes:

Admission of wrongdoing is not an admission of weakness, but a sign of strength.

—Author unknown

While anyone can admit to themselves that they were wrong, the true test is admission to someone else.

—Author unknown

RELEASING THE INJUSTICE ALONE

Forgiveness is letting go of another person's throat.

—William Paul Young (The Shack)

Note to Pastor's: This explanation is in the Bible Study:

Extending forgiveness is sometimes a very complex issue. How do you forgive someone who is no longer living? Or who refuses to talk to you? What if they make light of what happened or change the topic every time you bring up the offense? Sometimes it's even unsafe or unwise to go to the offender because their response might re-victimize you. What can you do?

These and other circumstances may *complicate* the forgiveness process, but they don't have to *thwart* it. Forgiveness, with God's help, is within your reach, under your control. However, sometimes you may have to release the injustice alone.

Freedom through forgiveness cannot be achieved by processing your losses merely at a cognitive level. There will never be a sufficient explanation to intellectually answer your "why" questions. "Why" questions are usually rooted in emotional pain.

When it comes to releasing the injustice alone, you are faced with a choice—an exercise of your will. *The choice to release your right to exact and execute your own brand of justice.* This is the only response that can eventually satisfy your "whys."

What happens to your anger and desire for vindication? Do these disappear immediately? Maybe, for some people. But most often these fade over time, because your act of the will has removed the fuel that kept these emotional drives alive and dominant. You're likely to *feel* more and more forgiving as you daily reaffirm and sustain your *decision* to release the injustice. But if you choose to focus on the injustice committed against you, then anger and vengeful feelings are able to thrive.

Your will is now at a crossroads. You can choose to release the injustice or hold on to it. As Neil Anderson says, "Forgiveness is a choice, a crisis of the will."

Some hurts and losses are just too large to handle by yourself. The pain overwhelms you, the injustice runs deep. That's when your lasting decision to release the injustice can only succeed with divine empowerment. *Defer the right of vindication to God.* Choose to trust Him to set all accounts right, if not in this life, in the next. And frequently go to Him to prolong your resolve to trust Him, to heal you more each day, to transform your inner self from chaos to contentment.

* * *

How did Joseph forgive?

Genesis 45:5-7 When I am able to see **GOD'S PLAN** in my **LOCATION** "**God sent me...**"

Genesis 45:8 When I am able to **SENSE** God’s hand in my **CIRCUMSTANCES**
“God made me”

When I am able to **ACCEPT** both my circumstances and location as good, even when there has been evil in the process.

* * *

My life is in the hands of any fool who makes me lose my temper.

—Joseph Hunter

A wise man will make haste to forgive, because he knows the true value of time, and will not suffer it to pass away in unnecessary pain.

—Samuel Johnson

Unused truth becomes as useless as an unused muscle.

– A.W. Tozer, *That Incredible Christian*.

Between age seventeen and age thirty-seven—a full two decades—Joseph’s old relationships were severed, and his life was totally altered.

And yet, apart from any interaction with his brothers, Joseph succeeded in releasing the terrible injustice to God. As we’ve already seen in Lesson 4, Joseph even named his firstborn son Manasseh, which means “causing to forget,” because, in his own words, “God has made me forget all my trouble and my father’s household” (Genesis 41:51). Now, by the very fact that he mentioned them, we know that Joseph didn’t literally forget his brothers or the deep wound they caused. Rather, as some have translated the name Manasseh, God had “taken the sting out of the wound.”

We gain a glimpse into Joseph’s mindset in Genesis 45:7–8; he placed his focus, not on himself, but on God’s plan and purpose: “God sent me...and He has made me...”

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

—Romans 5:8

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.... We love, because He first loved us.

—1 John 4:10, 19

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

—1 John 4:11

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and

whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either.... Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.... But love your enemies, and do good...and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

—Jesus in Luke 6:27–29, 31–32, 35–36

When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. But Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they do.”

—Luke 23:33–34

In Luke 23:34, how did Jesus live up to His own teaching on forgiveness?

Surrender your right to get even. Leave that with God. Lay down your demands that the offender change or pay for the past, that he prove himself first and that he guarantee the future.

—David Augsburg

* * *

Alternate quotes:

You must choose to forgive whoever has wronged you. Forgiveness is not an emotion, it is a decision of the will.

—Erwin W. Lutzer

No matter how long you nurse a grudge, it won't get better.

—Anonymous

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Never cease loving a person and never give up hope for him, for even the Prodigal Son who had fallen most low could still be saved. The bitterest enemy and also he who was your friend could again be your friend; love that has grown cold can kindle again.

—Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855)

Illustration about pride:

In the summer of 1986, two ships collided in the Black Sea off the coast of Russia. Hundreds of passengers died as they were hurled into the icy waters below. News of the disaster was further darkened when an investigation revealed the cause of the accident. It wasn't a technology problem like radar malfunction--or even thick fog. The cause was human stubbornness. Each captain was aware of the other ship's presence nearby. Both could have steered clear, but according to news reports, neither captain wanted to give way to the other. Each was too proud to yield first. By the time they came to their senses, it was too late.

[Closer Walk, December, 1991.](#)

WHAT DOES PRIDE SOUND LIKE
Why should I have to go to them?
They did something wrong also?
I wasn't the only one they hurt???
If they call me first then I will talk to them?

PRIDE is the destruction of relationships
PRIDE is the barrier to reconciliation
And I remind you that God is opposed to the proud.

Note to Pastors: This is an awesome quote! -Jim

If...the interpersonal bridge (reconciliation) is to have any structural integrity; if it can be suspended across deep and abysmal injuries; if it is to be sound enough to bear the weight of persons traveling to the other side once more, then forgiveness must be more than a social lubricant, a survival technique, a relational strategy, a memory fatigue, an individual escape, a dismissal of hurt or anger or a ritual of denial.

—David Augsburger in *Helping People Forgive*

*The truth is, forgiving someone and holding firm boundaries go hand in hand.
Forgiveness must include built-in protections that prevent further mistreatment.*
—June Hunt in *How to Forgive... When You Don't Feel Like It*

*All who strive for reconciliation seek to listen rather than to convince, to understand
rather than to impose themselves.*
—Brother Roger

There are times when a person hurts you without realizing it. When that person lacks such awareness, how can the relationship be repaired? It can't, unless you give them the opportunity to know what they did and how it impacted your life.

There are other times when a person hurts you and *is* aware of the offense. Maybe they'd like to mend things, but they don't know how. Another possibility is that pride may keep them from admitting they did anything wrong. Or perhaps they don't think it was that important, so they expect you to simply dismiss it.

In any of these cases, you have the opportunity to take the road less travelled, to go to the person who hurt you. Prayerfully choose a setting and time in which that individual is most likely to be receptive. Go to them and say, "*I was hurt when...*"

If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back.
—Jesus in Matthew 18:15 (NLT)

Your opening move requires courage. The possible outcomes are multifold because you have no control over the offender's response. In the best cases, the other person will be sensitive to your pain, will place value on the relationship, and will ask forgiveness so that the relationship can be repaired. On the other hand, you could hear rationalizing, minimizing or justifying, which might leave you feeling empty inside. So be prepared to accept either outcome.

You cannot control another person's choices; however, you can be obedient to Scripture and create the opportunity to forgive another. Remember, even if the other person refuses to do his or her part, you have been responsible in doing what you can do. The alternative route always remains open: You can return to the solo path of "Releasing the Injustice Alone" (Lesson 12).

No matter what the situation, always go into the initial conversation prepared, not only to speak, but also to listen. You might learn something that radically changes your perception of the whole situation. Even though you were hurt, it doesn't necessarily mean that the other person actually did anything wrong. Miscommunications and misunderstandings abound. We all experience some pain that is nobody's fault, although it's both parties' responsibility to work on repairing the damage.

THE BRIDGE OF RECONCILIATION

The Difference Between Forgiveness and Reconciliation

- ✓ *Forgiveness* can take place with only one person; *reconciliation* requires the involvement of at least two persons.
- ✓ *Forgiveness* is directed one way; *reconciliation* is reciprocal, occurring two ways.
- ✓ *Forgiveness* is a decision to release the person who harmed you; *reconciliation* is the effort to rejoin the person who harmed you.
- ✓ *Forgiveness* involves a change in thinking about the offender; *reconciliation* involves a change in behavior by the offender.
- ✓ *Forgiveness* is a free gift to the one who has broken trust; *reconciliation* is a restored relationship based on restored trust.
- ✓ *Forgiveness* is extended even if it is never earned; *reconciliation* is offered to the offended because it has been earned.
- ✓ *Forgiveness* is unconditional regardless of a lack of repentance; *reconciliation* is conditional based on repentance.

--June Hunt How To Forgive...When You Don't Feel Like It
(Used by Permission)

Note to Pastors: This explanation is in the Bible Study

Now, let's assume that someone has genuinely offended you. You've granted them forgiveness—maybe on your own, maybe with their cooperation. You've chosen to release the injustice. Everything's back to normal, right? Reconciliation accomplished. Life can go on as it did before.

If only it were that simple.

Forgiveness is one thing—reconciliation is entirely another. Now we must consider the separate issue of *trust*. People often confuse forgiveness with trust. Forgiveness can be granted, trust has to be rebuilt. Sometimes both parties' hearts, histories, and circumstances allow trust to grow and blossom, and the Bridge of Reconciliation can be reconstructed.

But at other times so much damage has been done to the relationship that the Bridge cannot—maybe *should* not—be rebuilt. A profound betrayal of trust may prevent restoration of the relationship. Ever.

For example: when a child has been molested or abused by an adult, the damage can be so severe and the abuse of trust so profound that to try to rebuild the bridge of reconciliation and restore the relationship is practically impossible and often unwise.

When rebuilding is possible, it requires something from both sides. Forgiveness is a solo; reconciliation is a duet. The offending individual must admit his or her wrong, recognize the hurt he or she caused you, take personal ownership of their behavior, and declare their commitment to change.

Rebuilding the Bridge requires honesty, transparency, accountability, openness, and sometimes restitution. If both parties are actively involved and deeply committed to restoring the relationship, then there is hope.

Reconciliation takes work, but is possible. Husbands and wives can rebuild. Adult children can reconcile with their parents. Former friends can reconnect. And every

instance of bridge-building is a glorious reflection of the God who miraculously reconciles us to Himself. That which was once lost is found. That which was ruined is repaired. Ugliness and hostility have been transformed into beauty and unity.

Another relationship has been rescued.

Teaching Point:

Even though Joseph had already forgiven his brothers on his own, why didn't he reveal his identity earlier than he did? What was his purpose in seemingly playing games with them?

Note to Pastors

Chuck Swindoll is insightful:

He says, Joseph wanted to reconcile with them but their guilt needed to be brought to the surface. It had been buried for years. Once they said, "this is because of what we did to Joseph..." he knew that they were ready for reconciliation.

Joseph had the opportunity to travel two forgiveness routes—he released the injustice alone, yet when his brothers came to Egypt, he also took the road less travelled in hopes of reconciling. When he saw their hearts of compassion and heard their confession, among themselves, that they had wronged Joseph (acknowledgement and ownership), he knew the time had arrived to reveal himself.

Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

—Jesus in Matthew 5:23–24

When [the prodigal son] came to his senses, he said... "I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.'"

So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found." And they began to celebrate.

Note to Pastors:

The prodigal wanted fine clothes...he came back with rags...put a robe on him
The prodigal wanted wealth...had nothing...father said, put a ring on his finger
The prodigal wanted to walk in fine places...barefoot...put shoes on his feet
The prodigal wanted to eat good food...came back starving...kill the fatted calf

EVERYTHING THE PRODIGAL EVER WANTED, THE FATHER ALREADY HAD

Cute Illustration: Sunday School teacher told the story of the Prodigal and wanted to go on to talk about the angry older brother. She said “The prodigal son returned, but someone wasn’t very happy about that...can you guess who that was?” The child responded: “The fatted calf!”

Read Philemon. Philemon had reason to be very angry. His slave, Onesimus, had stolen from him and then run away. In Rome, he met Paul and became a believer. The book of Philemon was a letter Paul sent with Onesimus, who was returning home to Philemon. The master had the legal right to exact revenge. In verse 17, how does Paul encourage Philemon to welcome his returning slave? What words, attitudes, and actions might Philemon have used?

Alternate quotes:

It may be good to forgive but not safe to reconcile.

—Gary W. Hawk

Nothing is preferable to reconciliation.

—Irish Proverb

Reconciliation is not weakness or cowardice. It demands courage, nobility, generosity, sometimes heroism, an overcoming of oneself rather than of one’s adversary.

—Pope Paul VI (1897–1978)

If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man’s life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility.

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882)

Recognizing what we have done in the past is a recognition of ourselves. By conducting a dialogue with our past, we are searching how to go forward.

—Kiyoko Takeda

Moving Forward

You may have withdrawn from others and lost a sense of community. Isolation is a normal byproduct of hurt and pain. Hence the journey may have been a lonely one for you. But now you have an opportunity to reconnect with others. You have stories to tell, and lessons learned. So do the rest of us. And it’s in the honest sharing of our stories of

pain and our various journeys to forgiveness that we learn we've never truly been alone in our individual experience. We draw strength in our numbers, discovering others with similar stories, who have walked the same paths.

As you experience healing, you are likely to discover that your wounds, while never good things in themselves, can miraculously *be used* for good. Where once you saw only liability and loss, you'll begin to see amazing opportunities. Pain opens your eyes to others and increases your sensitivity to the losses *they* have experienced. One of God's purposes in providing emotional healing is to enable you to share with others. Your experience trains and equips you to be a source of comfort and encouragement to a fellow traveler. And when *you* get to serve as a healing agent for someone else, it opens up a whole new level of fulfillment in your life. You tap into the joy that God feels when He brings healing to us.

The entire journey on The Road to Forgiveness is about hurt and healing. Yes, we have been hurt in relationships, but it's also in relationships—safe, nourishing | relationships—that we will experience healing.