

The Forgiveness Journal



CAROLYN SCOTT

From Forgiveness to Healing

PART 1

The Forgiveness Journal



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[DESIGNED4VICTORY.COM](https://designed4victory.com)

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CAROLYN SCOTT

Carolyn began her active walk with Jesus at 16 years old, received her Bachelor's Degree in Education from Villanova University and a Master's Degree in Theology and Counseling from Westminster Seminary. She worked many years in teen ministry, and then shifted her career focus to her other passion: health & fitness. She was a certified personal trainer, massage therapist and nutrition coach for over 10 years

She has been serving on worship teams as a singer and bass player since 1999 and she co-led a *Celebrate Recovery* group at her church for 4 years. In 2016, she co-founded The Philadelphia Gospel Movement, and sat 4 years on its board. At the time of this book's publication, she has also co-founded The *Flying Monkeys Project* (flyingmonkeysproject.org) is assisting with the rebuilding of the *Philadelphia Council of Clergy*, and consults with non profit

and church leaders across Philadelphia with *One City One Love* and *Jesus Week*. There, she exercises her passion for the collective Church of Philadelphia, and for Leadership Development.

Carolyn's coaching and teaching ministry is called "Designed for Victory". Here, she brings together all of her collective skills, knowledge, and compassion to help people understand who they are in Christ, and how to become skilled warriors in the Spiritual Battle within this physical/material life.

Carolyn is no stranger to struggle: In college, she began a 10 year battle with bulimia, but overcame it with the love of Jesus, the help of a professional counselor, and the support of her family & friends. Her marriage was burdened with her husband's medical trauma and ensuing poverty. Though divorced, she remains friends with her ex, and is very happily mother to the 3 great loves of her life.

Carol's published writing can be found on Amazon.com, Designed4Victory.com, or Patreon.com/D4V.

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HOW TO READ THIS BOOK – DO NOT SKIP THIS

This tool is designed to take you through a journey of true forgiveness and healing. But here are a few notes to get you prepared for the journey so that you'll have maximum success.

1. I recommend buying a notebook or journal to dedicate to your forgiveness process.
2. This work can bring up a lot of baggage that you may want to take to a counselor, therapist, or trusted Christian friend.
3. My larger book will be called From Forgiveness to Healing and is divided into 3 parts.

PART 1: The Forgiveness Journal (what you are now reading)

PART 2: From Forgiveness to Healing

PART 3: Forgiveness in Spiritual Warfare

***The Forgiveness Journal* will be forever FREE because I think it is that important.**

Please inform others to visit Designed4Victory.com to download their FREE PDF download, or listen to the Audio Book podcast, or buy a copy on Amazon.com.

THE END FROM THE BEGINNING

Because I believe forgiveness is profoundly important to every one of us, I'm going to give you the *end*, right here at the *beginning*. This "Forgiveness Journal" was written to lead you through a specific process, and I'm choosing to share it with you up front (and again later on) because you might be ready to start using it *today*.

With the help of the Holy Spirit, some readers may immediately grasp the following worksheet and begin using it. But to be honest, most people probably will not,

What follows isn't just a how-to guide for using a forgiveness worksheet. This book is designed to walk you through the *what*, the *why*, and the *how* of forgiveness. My hope is that it will stir something in you - something that not only helps you desire to forgive, but actually *empowers* you to do it. And in doing so, you'll grow, you'll share Christ's love more freely, and you'll witness the beautiful, often miraculous, ripple effects that true forgiveness can bring.

Ultimately, forgiveness is as simple as a prayer. You CAN OBEY Jesus and forgive your offender because the most essential act of forgiveness is to basically say, "God, do not count this particular sin against this person. Please forgive them. Now, please help me to forgive them genuinely from my core, and please help me to heal." Anybody can do that for any violation at any time and you have obeyed Jesus!

It sounds crazy and you might not accept that as truth yet, but that's it.

... Then comes the healing process.

So with that, here is the worksheet you can begin using today (if it makes sense to you). Basically, the worksheet is designed to walk you through the process that I unwrap through the chapters of this book. The worksheet helps you to uncover the real core issue of the offense so you can do business with God - both on behalf of your offender, and for your own healing process.

THE FORGIVENESS JOURNAL – WORKSHEET

1. Who do you need to forgive?

2. What did they do (or not do) ... or, What are they doing (or not doing)?

3. What do you believe they have robbed from you?

4. How has their offense affected you?

5. Why does this hurt? / What pain did this cause?

6. What do you think your offender needs **to do** (apologize? Pay you back?), **or endure** (go to jail, go through the same pain they caused you?) **to ‘make it right’**?

MOST SIMPLE PRAYER OF FORGIVENESS

Heavenly Father, please forgive _____ for _____. I release my claim in your courts against him/her.

And please bless _____ and draw him/her close to you. I don't deserve your mercy, nor does _____. But as your child, I'm asking for it on their behalf. Thank you for your Love. Please help me heal. Amen.

WARNING: This Book Is Going To Make You Angry

If you read this book and engage in the process, there will, most likely, come a point where you will get angry. I don't know where that will be for you, but it will come. So I want to warn you before it happens, so that when it does, you will not quit. I want to encourage and challenge you to press through the pain point(s) and to keep going even though you're confused and mad and frustrated as heck. I have the utmost confidence that if you press through, and don't give up, your anger, confusion and frustration will give way to satisfaction, healing, and dare I say... Joy.

Selfishly, I want you to 'persevere to the end' so that out of ignorance, you do not spat off on social media or anywhere else about how horrible, wrong, and heretical I am. You see, Jesus has said some terribly difficult things that many teachers gloss over. And in doing so, they rob you of the real depth and glory of whatever subject matter they're glossing over. But I will not do that. Instead of telling you what you want to hear - instead of saying easy things - I am going to be brutally honest. I will do my very, very best to do so with kindness and compassion, but some medicine is bitter to taste even when it is mixed with "a spoonful of sugar".

So that is what you can expect: I am kind and compassionate. I realize this subject matter is quite possibly the most painful you'll ever wrestle with. I know your heart has the potential to break into a thousand jagged pieces. I know that to study Jesus's words about forgiveness (and the consequences of UNforgiveness) may feel like He's telling you to rip your intestines right out of your body and sling them across a field of thistles! But please believe me when I say that His words on forgiveness are LOVING and EMPOWERING - not cruel and unusual punishment. Many times, Jesus speaks like a brain surgeon would talk with another brain surgeon ... except that he's talking to people who have zero medical knowledge. So, no wonder He can be confusing! And, when He says hard things, it is from the perspective of the one who heals us - not our peer. He is the great healer. He designed your body, your mind, your very being! So, if He says to do something, then we can trust it is the best possible thing to do!

So...

WARNING:

YOU WILL BECOME ANGRY AT SOME POINT WHILE PROGRESSING THROUGH THIS BOOK!

But please do not quit

Do not rant and rage about me, the messenger.

And realize that you are not embarking on this journey alone: Holy Spirit is with all Christ followers and will hold you up as you work. You are not alone.

You

Are

Not

Alone.

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FORGIVENESS IS EASIER THAN YOU THINK

Let me clarify: Forgiveness is easier than you think... but healing can be extraordinarily difficult. I've yet to meet a single person who *feels* like they can forgive while they still *feel* the pain or negative emotions towards their offender. But for forgiveness to become uncomplicated, and dare I even say easy, we must untangle forgiveness from emotions and from healing.

Forgiveness is not dependent on you feeling peace over the situation, or having any nice feelings towards your offender. You see, the forgiveness that Jesus commands is the same kind as the writing off of a financial debt that someone owes you. You take the hit. It hurts. You lay down your claim for repayment against the offender. It hurts. However, forgiveness has been accomplished.

Forgiveness is this: to ask God to not hold the harmful act(s) of your offender against them. THIS IS THE COMMAND OF CHRIST. You're telling God - this person may have many other sins that you'll hold them accountable for, but THIS sin, THIS one against ME - I release. Do not hold THIS sin against them. We are commanded to forgive. We're not commanded to feel good or reconcile or even heal. But if you do want to feel better, heal, or even reconcile, forgiveness is not only commanded, it is the essential first step. You can not heal without first forgiving. Let me say that again:

You can not heal without first forgiving.

The act of asking God to remove this sin from your offender's book of sins is all you have to do to begin your path of healing. I know this hurts. I know it can be so insanely hard to ask God to forgive someone for something horrible. But I want this for you, because it is the only way that you can truly heal. I will say this with total confidence, based on the study of the whole council of the scriptures from Genesis to Revelation and many holy documents outside of that, and much study on psychological health : if you obey Christ and forgive in this most basic form, you can begin to heal. If you do not forgive, you can spend a million dollars in therapy and you will not truly heal. It is impossible.

And remember, when you forgive - no matter how you feel about it - when you forgive, you strike a blow against the demonic forces in the other person's life, AND you strike a blow against the demonic forces in yours! That may sound normal to some readers, but others may say "do demons really even exist?" Well, we will get into that soon. But according to the Bible, angels and demons exist and are still at war. The goal of God's enemies is to keep humans from knowing Him. And for those of us who do know him, their goal is to separate us from Him as much as possible, impede our growth, and diminish our effectiveness as ambassadors of Christ's Kingdom.

Let me say that again: The goal of God's enemies is to keep humans from knowing Him. And for those of us who do know him, their goal is 3-fold:

- To separate us from God as much as possible
- To impede our growth
- To diminish our effectiveness as ambassadors of Christ's Kingdom.

So, when you forgive, no matter how painful it is to do so, be encouraged!!!! Be encouraged because you have engaged in spiritual warfare to an extent far more than you realize. You are a warrior!! You are a Navy Seal warrior in Christ when you forgive! I get so terrifically excited about this!! But let's take this one step at a time.

PRAYER

Jesus, forgiver of my sins, thank you for loving me even though I'm struggling to forgive. Please send your Holy Spirit to help me love those who've harmed me enough to pray for them. Help me to lay down my hurt and broken heart at your feet. Jesus you are the only one who can heal my hurt. Even the person who harmed me cannot do that. So I turn to you for power. Give me the strength to pray for my enemies. Give me Your insight so that I will pray effectively for their good. Help me not to be snarky. Help me to pray for their well being, and that they will love You and engage in their own healing with You, especially because I know that people who have been hurt, harm others out of their place of hurt, or "hurt people, hurt people". Right now, I know that my offenders needs You. Please help them in what they're dealing with. Help them to turn to you and depend on you. Thank you for your eternal love. Amen.

GOD BLESS YOU!

May you experience miracle after miracle as you embrace forgiving!

CHAPTER 1

DESIRE & CONFUSION

We say we want it ... we need it ... we want to give it ... especially as Christians because we (probably) know that we are *commanded* to DO it.

But if you're like me, true forgiveness has been hard for you ... confusing ... maybe even frustrating. You may want to forgive but not know what it even really means. You may want to forgive but the hurt is so deep you wonder if you ever can. You may *know* that you need to forgive, but not a single fiber in your body agrees. You are angry, you're hurt, and you feel justified in retaining that anger and hurt because, what was done to you was just too big of a violation.

Well I have wonderful news for you! Jesus has **COMMANDED** you to forgive!

Now that may *not* sound like good news. It may sound like a terrible idea! It may sound downright cruel. But here's why I say it is wonderful. When Jesus commands something, that means that it is absolutely possible; it means that it is a **GOOD** thing, not a harmful thing. **AND**, if He commands something, then we have the assurance - the absolute and confirmed promise that the Holy Spirit will empower us to do it, if we ask and work with Him to obey. And **THAT** is wonderful news!

You are not sent out on your own strength to accomplish this incredibly overwhelming task of forgiveness. Rather, you set out on this quest, hand in hand with Holy Spirit. You are given the power, wisdom and endurance of Holy Spirit, as long as you continue walking with Him, abiding with Him, humbly asking for all you need from Him to accomplish this task. You are **NOT ALONE!**

So after my own decade long quest to truly understand forgiveness, and after I experienced a miracle in this area of my life, I realized that I've never once heard anyone preach (or write) on forgiveness in a way that helped me actually forgive the person who hurt me the most (so far) in my life. The sermons and books abounded, but none of them covered what it was that I **REALLY** needed to understand to get the job done.

I am now convinced - absolutely convinced - that Forgiveness is not just good. **Forgiveness is a weapon of spiritual warfare. And in fact, it is a weapon the likes of an atom bomb.**

So I am writing this short (but intense) book because now that Holy Spirit has taken me through this journey, I believe I'm being commissioned to share the process with the family of Christ - with you.

SETTING EXPECTATIONS

Forgiving the deepest wounds of our lives is no easy task. So before I give you the **HOW**, there is going to be a lot of **WHY**. And, that **Why** is going to set you up for a successful execution of the **How**. You see, as we peel back the layers of our misunderstandings around forgiveness, and then actually begin to define it correctly and understand what it is and what it accomplishes, then we will become eager to actually do the (sometimes) hard work of forgiving. So don't stop reading. Don't get anxious and jump ahead. Learning to truly forgive **WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE!!!** But something so intense deserves a little time and effort. So please, pray. Do not start this book and then discard it. Get through it and watch God work!! I'm **SO** excited for you!! So with that, I say, again, with Paul, "*May The God Of All Peace* soon crush Satan under your feet". Rom 16:20

CONTROLLING THE OUTCOME

Humans have a built in protection mechanism of attempting to control the outcomes of things. Some of us experience this more intensely than others, but it is not just the people you think are 'controlling' that do it. **YOU** do it! Every time you make a plan - whether it is for your day, your drive, your business, or your future goals and dreams - this is attempting to control the outcome. Practicing a conversation you need to have with your boss or spouse or friend is an attempt to attain a desired outcome. And drilling down even further, we do this subconsciously, all ... the ... time.

I recently had a little temper tantrum with Jesus that ended like this:

"Will you trust me?"

"No God! No! I do not trust you! (Cry cry cry) I want this but I fear you may ask me to _____ fill in the blank _____ (the details don't matter - the point is that I feared the outcome because I wanted something God may or may not have for me, and it was being ripped away at the time). He asked again,

"Will you trust Me?"

"UGH FINE! If you want total surrender, take me now before I change my mind" and with hands lifted to the sky in the middle of a parking lot, I stood crying and surrendering this thing in my life I'd clutched onto so hard and handed it over to

God - Because, HIS PLAN will blow MY Plans out of the water. Now, He puts passions and desires in our personality. I'm not saying abandon who you are designed to be. But laying all your desires on the altar, is the most fulfilling move you can ever make. And like one singer said, "There's no waste at the altar"!

So what I did, was stop attempting to control the outcome. And it has been SO FREEING.

Why do I bring this up? Because part of the resistance to forgiveness is the feeling that you're no longer in control. As long as you hold on to that bitterness, anger, resentment, or hurt, you're essentially saying "I'm in charge here." You're holding on. That is YOUR choice. And you're choosing to not let go UNTIL that person apologizes or is punished or whatever it is you're wanting from or for them. This is YOU trying to control the outcome.

So how do you shift? How do you give up attempting to control the outcome?

Well, it may be a swift decision, or it may be a process. My journals reveal that coming to this point was actually a process that started months before, as I was making shifts that led to this moment. Your process will be as unique as you, but here's something anyone can do: Ask God to show you, help you, empower you. Ask the generous God of all creation - the source of life, the source of love, the source of all knowledge and wisdom, who holds the past and the future, who holds YOU - ask Him to guide you in a process of surrender. You are surrendering something. In THIS particular context of forgiveness, you're surrendering your right to persecute your offender in the courts of heaven, and surrendering your perceived right to be angry, bitter, etc. And, you are surrendering the outcome as you entrust it to God. The person may repent, they may not. They may live a happy life while you struggle. They may see you in heaven or refuse the love of God. But none of that is YOUR concern! YOU get to leave them and their offense behind... like a brick tossed out of your backpack. And YOU become freer.

YOU

Become

Freer!

This may sound like poppycock at this point, but I want to plant the seed early so that when you get stuck, you might remember to come back here and surrender again ... and again. Hand your heart, mind, desires, hopes, fears, and dreams, one by one, into the hand of Jesus - the safest place they could ever be.

MY STORY

Now a little background. My biggest areas of study are health and theology. And, this workbook came about in the context of writing a much larger book on how to approach our own health journey in the context of a relationship with Christ. You see, I've come to believe a few things about forgiveness and how it relates to our human health.

- First, that we cannot be truly spiritually and psychologically healthy until we learn how to forgive, and actually begin practicing forgiveness.
- Secondly, bitterness, anger, resentment and all the negative emotions associated with unforgiveness actually have negative physical repercussions in our bodies. This is scientifically verifiable - not just theory!
- Thirdly, I believe that to talk about Spiritual Warfare without understanding forgiveness is like a knife to a gun fight. You can do battle, but with a handicap. And unfortunately, I've yet to find a sermon or a Christian book that satisfies my frustrations on the matter, or actually helped me all the way through the forgiveness process.

I'm an extremely forgiving person ... to anyone who apologizes. It's bizarre, and may be somewhat related to my genetic ADHD, but I find it hard to hold on to a grudge if someone apologizes. And, when I forgive, I literally forget (which is why it may be more ADHD than grace, if I'm being honest). I've had people come up to me and apologize multiple times for the same offense and I'm like, "Seriously - I forgot all about it until you brought it up again. We're good!" However, there are also people who hurt me deeply and *never apologized, never admitted wrong, and quite possibly never will*. My ability to forgive *them* is a different story.

There are 3 in particular, whose offenses were defining for me, and affected me at the core. One person is so far in the past I really don't care. I roll my eyes and just make fun of what a mean and miserable person she was and probably still is. That's not forgiveness though; that's just blowing it off and being happy that she's probably still miserable.

The second person harmed me a great deal, over a long period of years, in a very manipulative manner. By the time I figured it out, a lot of damage had been done. When I confronted this person, no apology was offered. Instead, this person

flipped the script, blamed me for all sorts of irrelevant things (gaslighting) and made sure that I was ostracized by our shared community.

The third person was in a position of authority, grossly misjudged me, and stood in between me and a ministry job. When I figured out how I had been misjudged and brought it to this person's attention, this person shrugged it off, blew off my request for a meeting, and to this day is the biggest "church hurt" that I've carried.

Finally, there was a long period of my life that I felt God abandoned me. So much grief and stress and unanswered prayers. So many years I feel were wasted. It was a complicated time involving my ex-husband's near death chronic ailment, our toxic relationship, his sins and shortcomings, my sins and shortcomings, and if I'm totally honest, I had to learn to forgive my ex, my self, and GOD.

I'll come back to my stories later, but for now, know that I've struggled hard with forgiveness. I've wanted to forgive but couldn't even *think* about person 2 or 3 without feeling like a dagger was jabbing my heart and a rock would drop into my gut. And, these offenses were not even the grossly damaging kind that come from physical or sexual violence, or childhood atrocities. I can only imagine the pain that comes with such things. But, since I knew I *needed* to forgive, I set out on a multi year quest to learn how to do so. Hopefully what I learned will help you to do so as well.

And now, as I am finally finished writing *The Forgiveness Journal* and am taking a group of people through the material, I'll add this note, that I've just this year, been faced with an extremely difficult offense to forgive. I cannot share details on this one, but the offense resulted in a year of financial chaos and tremendous fear that I would not be able to provide for my children - which was terrifying as a single mom, on a strict budget already living paycheck to paycheck.

How ironic that as I began to take people through this material for the first time, the enemy hit me so hard. And there I was, having to put into practice the very thing I was teaching others that I thought I had mastered. It was not easy to forgive - but I did. At this point, I did not reconcile - that is a separate act and decision (which we will discuss in a few pages), but I DID forgive. And, I still pray for this person's salvation. To God Be The Glory! And by the end of this book, you will have the tools to do likewise!

Finally, through my journey to understand forgiveness, it has become my personal conviction that forgiveness is one of the most powerful Spiritual WEAPONS in all existence. Forgiveness is the ultimate act of sacrificial love. Forgiveness is the way in which we can most imitate Jesus, our Savior. Forgiveness DESTROYS demonic strongholds in our lives, *and* in the lives of others! I cannot stress enough how tremendous a weapon forgiveness is in spiritual warfare. But before we get to all that, there are some misconceptions about forgiveness that need to be addressed. We need to clear out the old misunderstandings in order to make a clean space that's ready to receive the new correct ones!

Before we continue, take a moment to answer a few questions. This IS, after all, a forgiveness *journal*. It is designed to take you through a journey, and that journey will include questions for you to work through as you go. These are not chapter summaries. These are personal questions. They have no right or wrong answer ... because they are *personal* questions. Do not answer them as you think you *ought*. Rather, answer them honestly or else you're just wasting your time. I suggest you get a notebook or journal JUST FOR THIS PROCESS. Don't mix it in with another journal. Keep an entirely separate journal/notebook for your forgiveness journey.

JOURNAL:

- ◆ When we talk about forgiving someone you haven't forgiven, and don't want to forgive ... or maybe you do want to forgive them but just can't seem to do so ... who comes to mind? There IS at least one person. Quite possibly, there is a list of people you could think up here. I highly suggest you do so, and here's how.
 - In your workbook or journal, write down 1 to 3 names per page, leaving a chunk of space under each name for the work you'll be doing later in this book. For the bigger or more hurtful violations, use 1 name per page. If you have a list of small infractions to forgive, you can put up to 3 names per page. But don't shortchange yourself of space. You're going to be using this journal to do work under each person.
 - Include minor offenses, or ones long ago buried under your memory. Like, I might include the boys who called me ugly in 7th grade. Even though it doesn't hurt anymore, that DID contribute negatively to how I interact with the world, and still has ripple effects today - even though I can talk about it and laugh about it now, and it doesn't hurt anymore, forgiving them will be a power move for both myself, for them, and in the supernatural reality.
 - Include 'the big ones' that still hurt. Again, you're not doing anything with it yet, but you will, eventually. So get them all on your list.

- ◆ Ask Holy Spirit to guide you to think about ONE of them with whom you can begin to practice the tenants of this book as you go through it. It may be a small infraction, or a massive violation. But see who comes to mind. Write that person or group.
- ◆ If it is not too traumatic to do so, under each name in your journal, write out how you were violated. Be specific as possible. If it was a 1 time offense, write what you can. If it was a long term offense, write as many details as possible. **NOTE:** *if you have been raped or otherwise sexually violated, if you have experienced a horrific trauma of some kind, and you have OTHER people on your list besides your sexual / traumatic offender(s), I HIGHLY RECOMMEND to start with one of those other people. And, if you have not done so already, please seek professional help when you start working on forgiving that traumatic offender.*
- ◆ After you go through the forgiveness process with an easy offender, repeat the process with multiple people and work your way to the trauma. Again, you may also want to consider formal counseling to help you through your trauma processing. And, for severe trauma that is consuming (ie PTSD from war, rape, childhood severe abuse, medical trauma, etc) there are 'alternative' therapies that help tremendously. For information on my position on these therapies, please visit Designed4Victory.com, my website.

Finally, let's pray

Heavenly Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit,

Thank you for your love and abiding presence! Thank you for designing me as a human - worthy of love and respect because of my design! I am the crown of Your creation, the apple of Your eye! You are abounding in Love and I am your beloved. Thank you!

Please help me as I enter this journey of forgiveness. Please fill me with Your love, wisdom, and power so that I can depend on You and obey You! You are the great healer, and I believe You will heal the wounds inflicted upon me by other people. You are the great artist, who can take broken glass and stones and shards of metal and make it into something absolutely astonishing! I believe you can do this in my life and in this situation. Help my unbelief! Help me to forgive those who, at this moment, I cannot even *desire* to forgive. And, I pray that as You empower me to forgive, that I would experience a new level of intimacy with You, and a greater understanding of who You are, and who **I** am as your beloved. Please enter into my situation. I give you permission. All of this for Your glory, my good, and the good of those I am forgiving, and the good of all those who will hear the testimony of Your greatness from my lips. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT FORGIVENESS IS NOT

I think that one of the problems with forgiving, is that most people really have no idea what forgiveness actually is. We may desperately want to forgive someone, but find it utterly impossible to let go of the hurt of the offense(s). And, we have questions, like, “Does forgiveness mean that we must become friends with the offender?”, “Does it mean we let them off the hook?”, “Does it mean we’re not to report a crime?” “Does it mean we’re enabling them or being a doormat or being weak?”

So let’s start by eliminating some misconceptions about forgiveness. A long time ago I found a graphic that said “What forgiveness is not”. I found it incredibly helpful because I thought most of the things it mentioned were encompassed within forgiveness. I’ve also added a number of items to the list since then.

FORGIVENESS IS NOT FORGETTING, NOR PRETENDING IT DIDN’T HAPPEN: It did happen and we need to retain the lesson learned without holding onto the pain.

FORGIVENESS IS NOT EXCUSING: We excuse a person who is not to blame (ie their behavior was accidental or inconsequential), and forgive one who has committed a wrong.

FORGIVENESS IS NOT GIVING PERMISSION TO CONTINUE HURTFUL BEHAVIORS: nor is it condoning the behavior in the past or in the future (ie - you are not required to be a doormat, or a perpetual victim).

FORGIVENESS DOES NOT ALWAYS ELIMINATE PUNISHMENT: In situations where a crime has occurred (including domestic violence, theft between family members, etc) crimes need to be reported, whether it be for your own protection/ restitution, for the protection of others, for the good of the offender (hopefully punishment will evoke repentance), or many other good reasons. But even if punishment is executed, forgiveness can still be given. AND should be done BEFORE the punishment is given because as we will discuss, forgiveness is independent of punishment, and **punishment can NOT be the prerequisite of forgiveness, or forgiveness is no longer forgiveness!** This is probably the most complicated concept tangled with forgiveness but we *will* untangle it.

FORGIVENESS DOES NOT ALWAYS ELIMINATE CONSEQUENCES: Consequences are not the same as punishment. Punishment is imposed on a person by another. But consequences are the natural results of an action. For example, if a dog tries to fly out of an apartment building, the outcome isn’t punishment! The broken bones or death, are consequences of the dog’s folly. No one needs to *punish* the dog; the consequences teach the lesson.

In the Psalms, David mourned the fact that some consequences don’t arrive until the next life. And you may never see consequences for the person who harmed you. But life is a complex, interconnected web, and whether seen or unseen, consequences always come to the one who caused the harm.

FORGIVENESS IS NOT RECONCILIATION: We have a separate decision about whether to reconcile or maintain our distance with the person we have forgiven

FORGIVENESS IS NOT HEALING: It is the first step to healing, and healing can NOT truly occur without forgiveness, but you can (and must) forgive *in order* to truly heal.

FORGIVENESS IS NOT A FEELING: You can forgive without feeling good about it, and you can forgive and still feel pain, anger, resentment, grief, etc. Releasing negative feelings is a part of the healing process that comes AFTER forgiving.

I want to emphasize this one. I think that most often, people don’t think they can forgive because they don’t FEEL like they’ve forgiven. We may think that we will feel some sort of relief when we have “successfully forgiven” or forgiven “from the heart”. But I promise you this: you can absolutely obey Jesus and FORGIVE someone even if you don’t FEEL good about it. It’s like a monetary debt. You can legally forgive a debt, even if you are mad that you are doing so. Now, as true as that may be, the GOAL is to also have healing which will result in a ‘feeling’ of some sort, be it relief, peace, desire for restored relationship, compassion, etc. But the ACT of forgiving is an ACT that can be done whether or not you FEEL like it. But we’ll get to all that soon.

Does anything in that list relieve you?

Often, people cannot forgive because they think forgiveness is something that it is not. So think about someone who has harmed you, towards whom you still feel anger, or bitterness, or resentment, or hurt.

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In your journal, choose someone for whom you can answer the following questions.

- ◆ “Forgiveness is not forgetting or pretending it didn't happen” How were you hurt by this person/group?
- ◆ “Forgiveness is not Excusing”. How does the distinction between excusing and forgiving (above) help you to begin re-framing your approach towards this person and this issue?
- ◆ Forgiveness doesn't allow more hurtful behavior: Is the harmful behavior ongoing? Do you feel guilty for *their* bad actions towards you? Do you feel like forgiveness means you can't walk away from the relationship? Write out how you feel vs what the statement above is giving you permission to do. How can this concept help you to reframe how you engage with or disengage with the person?
- ◆ Does it bring you some peace to know that a decision to FORGIVE is a separate action from RECONCILING?
- ◆ Does it help you to know that forgiveness and healing are separate but related tasks?
- ◆ Does it help you to know that forgiveness can be executed whether or not you feel good about it?

CHAPTER 3

WHAT FORGIVENESS IS ... SORTA

I wish I could give you a definition of forgiveness such that you would then just be able to have an Ah-Ha moment where the concept 'clicks', and you're able to start forgiving and be done with the matter. But if that were possible, you would have looked up that definition already, applied it, and be done with any unforgiveness in you. So although I am going to satisfy your itch by talking a little about what forgiveness actually is, the majority of this book will take you through a very personalized *process* to get to a place where you are actually able to forgive as Christ would have us to.

Though I cannot stand when people use the dictionary to make a case, I think its important to take a quick gander at the definitions of forgiveness that we find 'out there'. So, I did a google search on "what is forgiveness". And, believe it or not, there is SO much written on forgiveness! It is hard to find a religion that does not talk about forgiveness, and there is even scientific research on forgiveness. But what I discovered that was truly interesting, is that each religion approaches forgiveness slightly differently, and the scientific conclusions are also different than the religions. There is definitely some overlap between all of them, but in the end, though fascinating to study, nothing I read helped me to actually forgive! However, if I did not have Christ's way of forgiveness (that we will be focused on in this book) then to be honest, the protocol developed by the scientific method of studying the matter at the International Forgiveness Institute, would provide the most help.

"THE SCIENCE OF FORGIVENESS"

The Science of forgiveness, primarily comes from about 20 years of research from the International Forgiveness Institute. They've put thousands of people through their studies and have developed a 20 step process that has been empirically shown to work, that is summarized in 4 phases.

- **Uncovering Phase:** Individuals recognize their emotional pain from an unjust injury, often feeling anger or hatred. Confronting these emotions can be distressing, but acknowledging them is a crucial step toward healing.
- **Decision Phase:** The person realizes that dwelling on the injury causes more suffering and begins to consider forgiveness as a healing strategy. While full forgiveness isn't achieved yet, they commit to exploring it and letting go of thoughts of revenge.
- **Work Phase:** Active work on forgiveness begins, involving a shift in perspective about the injurer, seeking to understand their background and circumstances. This phase focuses on empathy and compassion, accepting the pain without condoning the offense, and may include acts of goodwill toward the injurer, though reconciliation isn't mandatory.
- **The individual experiences emotional relief and finds meaning in their suffering**, leading to greater compassion for themselves and others. This newfound purpose often fosters a desire to contribute positively to their community, illustrating the healing nature of forgiveness.

This is a scientific prescription for how to forgive *and experience the positive effects of forgiveness (which are actually 2 separate things, biblically)*. And if you have ever successfully forgiven someone that wasn't all that easy to do, you may recognize that your process actually looked somewhat similar to this, even though it wasn't a plan that you intentionally followed. And, though this model will help many people to forgive within the human experience and heal to a great extent, our forgiveness through Christ is far more simple AND also far more powerful because it has effects in both the earthly and spiritual dimensions.

So let's clarify a little further, what forgiveness is not, and what it is. Because, as we peel back the misconceptions, we will discover a simple (ie. It may be difficult but it is not complicated) path. In the previous chapter about what forgiveness is not, there were distinct things that are separate from forgiveness that we sometimes bundle with forgiveness. When we un-bundle them, we can focus on forgiveness itself. But not only are there things we've misunderstood as aspects of forgiveness that are not, there are actually also a few things very similar to forgiveness, but that are slightly different. So, understanding that can help us to decide which is right for each of our circumstances.

According to Merriam -Webster, there are 3 synonyms for forgiveness that are similar but distinctly different. They are to Excuse, to Condone, and to Pardon. (What follows in italics are the definitions provided by Merriam-Webster. Non-italics are my comments).

EXCUSE may refer to specific acts especially in social or conventional situations . Ex: “Please excuse an interruption”. Often the term implies extenuating circumstances. Ex: “injustice excuses strong responses”. Here, what you’re “excusing” is something that was done accidentally or by an innocent, or for a very good reason that can be ‘excused’.

CONDONE implies that one overlooks behavior (such as dishonesty or violence) that involves a serious breach of a moral, ethical, or legal code. Ex: “he is too quick to condone his friend's faults”. Ex: “she told him all—told him the truth word by word, without attempting to shield herself or condone her error”. Note: To Condone is actually a negative relative of forgiveness. It is to entirely overlook or ignore harmful or sinful behavior. We definitely are not supporting this, and God NEVER does this!

PARDON implies that one remits a penalty due for an admitted or established offense. In other words, someone is found guilty (legally or among peers) and then given the mercy of no punishment, or an end to an existing, ongoing punishment. Ex: “after 6 months in jail, the governor pardoned him, and he was released”. This is the closest relative to Forgiveness, and actually could be considered a form of forgiveness.

However, ,

FORGIVE implies that one gives up all claim to compensation, resentment, or vengeance (punishment).

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◆ DOES THE PERSON YOU NEED TO FORGIVE FALL UNDER THE EXCUSE, CONDONE, OR PARDON CATEGORIES? If you’d like, Go to your existing list and simply mark which each person on there needs - forgiveness, pardon, Excusing ... Condoning is not an option. We do not approve of, nor ignore sin. But you may realize that you have different approaches for each person, depending on the offense. They may all be in need of straight up forgiveness, but at least you can apply this concept and see what you discover.

CHAPTER 4

FORGIVENESS IS...

Forgiveness is actually a legal term. Think about the phrase “to forgive a debt”. What happens if you are forgiven a debt? Did the debt happen? Yes. Do you owe money to the person who lent it to you? Yes. But if the lender forgives the debt, then you are legally released from paying it back. Let’s apply this concept to non-monetary offenses.

FORGIVENESS IS A LEGAL TRANSACTION

You have probably heard that holding a grudge, remaining bitter, and being angry doesn’t harm the person who violated you, rather, it brings continued harm to yourself. Yet, we don’t know how to let go of the demand in our heart and mind that says, “You OWE me! If nothing else, you owe me an apology! You owe me the decency of admitting you did something wrong and asking me to forgive you. You owe me at least that much.” But alas, that person never asks. They never even acknowledge (confess) that they did anything wrong. They never acknowledge your pain. Or perhaps they did, and you still feel hurt and resentment. You said that you forgave them, but on the inside, you still *feel* resentment or pain or confusion.

The reason we feel this need for pay-back, or justice (a balancing of the scales), is because Forgiveness is actually a legal transaction. Essentially, To forgive is to eliminate a debt. Think of it in terms of money. If someone borrows \$1,000 but then refuses to pay it back, you can either take them to court and put them in jail (punishment) or have it ruled that they must pay you back (recompense), or, you can *forgive* the debt - write it off. ***Forgiveness is a legal release of their obligation to pay you back.***

How do we apply this principle to non-monetary offenses? Well, when someone harms you, they steal something from you. They may steal something physical like possessions or virginity or health, ... or they may steal something less tangible like reputation, friends, opportunity, time, or feelings of safety. Whether the person physically harmed you, questioned your integrity, or merely cut you off in traffic ... whether the situation is small or grotesquely life altering, they robbed you of something and you’ve become angry, resentful, or bitter. Or... you have very real pain and you don’t know how to heal.

Wherever the offense lands on the spectrum of harm, *ultimately, the offender has stolen something from you, and therefore you feel that the person owes you something.* You may feel that the person owes jail time, or deserves to experience equal humiliation to what they did to you, or they deserve to be exposed to the world (instead of getting away with it), or at least they owe you the decency of acknowledging how they’ve harmed you and they owe you an apology.

Now here is something to note: in God’s economy, they actually DO owe you! Any violation from one human to another, is one that requires justice. God is a God of justice. He does not overlook offenses. Many “Laws” in the Hebrew Scriptures / Christian Old Testament deal with justice ... balancing the scales ... “an eye for an eye”. These laws are both for prevention of sin, and for the good of *victims* of sin. So yes, if you have been violated, God demands justice. Why? Because He loves you. We can actually take comfort in that.

There are ways in which justice is accomplished both in this world and in the spiritual realms. In Romans 12:19, Paul quotes Deut 32:35 saying “ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.” **You see, our judgement, revenge, or justice will always be flawed. But God’s is perfect. We can release our SELVES from the need to take revenge because God has promised to AVENGE His Children!! GOD will bring perfect justice on your behalf.** And here’s the thing - God knows what justice looks like. You do not. YOU do not know what your offender needs, other than repentance. But what is more important than repenting to YOU is that the person repents of ALL their sin to God. But put that in your back pocket for later. For now, just know that vengeance is God’s alone “Vengeance is MINE, says the Lord”.

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What Do You Feel They Owe You?

Now pause and ask yourself: What do I feel this person would need to do, or endure, in order to “pay me back” for what they did? Another way to put it: What would make me feel better or more at peace?

For some, it might be justice through the courts. For others, it might be something extreme, or it may be as simple as an apology. Whatever it is, write it down. Be completely honest. This is between you and God—no one else will read or judge it. Honesty is essential, because until you identify the disease you suffer, you cannot truly begin to heal.

This step can even be surprisingly cathartic. Let me give you a few examples (and to be clear—none of these came from the women I thanked earlier in this book).

- I was friends with a kind and hard working man whose ex-wife was a conceited, lazy piece of work who had an affair and while he was away for 3 days on a job, she emptied their bank account and their home, and immediately slapped him with child support order despite earning twice his salary. All he wanted was for her to return half of the money and drop child support unless his income ever equaled hers.
- A woman admitted she fantasized about her rapist being violated in the same way he had hurt her; so he could feel the pain, shame, and worthlessness he had inflicted on her.

And honestly, I've heard gruesome fantasies, and I understand why. When someone has violated you in such a way that it altered your very development and caused unimaginable pain, your sense of "what they deserve" may feel equally immense. In human terms, they actually probably *deserve* everything you imagine.

But as Christ-followers, we are still called to forgive. That's why it's so important to be brutally honest at this stage. Whether you're longing for a heartfelt apology or sometimes catch yourself daydreaming about their downfall, put it on paper. You may later need to confess your anger before God—but for now, **honesty is the first step toward freedom.**

So revisit your list of names. Next to each, write down what you truly think they would need to do, or experience, for you to feel "paid back."

And now, reflect on this: God Himself promises to avenge His children. How does that truth sit with you? Does it bring relief? Do you doubt it? Does it stir frustration because *you* want to be the one to take vengeance? Does it make you feel deeply loved—that your Father takes up your cause?

Take time to journal honestly about these questions. **God's promise of justice is not meant to minimize your pain, it's meant to set you free.** We will address this at length in the next chapter.

FORGIVENESS IS RELEASE

Whatever it is that you believe your offender needs to endure as "payback" for what they did to you, this is what you need to release.

Note: Remember our list of "What Forgiveness is Not." I'm NOT referring to things which need to be reported to the police. If you've been raped or beaten or robbed, for example, legal action should be taken (in my opinion) especially rape or any kind of domestic abuse!!! But forgiveness can still be offered. The decision to forgive *personally*, is a different decision than whether or not to press charges in our legal system. That's where forgiveness is probably the most confusing. But in short, forgiveness is not the elimination of consequences. But in every case, each of us needs to deal with our own bitterness, resentment and anger towards the offender, no matter whether the offense is minor or life altering. And by the end of this book, you should have tools to help you navigate even this most complicated kind of forgiveness.

FORGIVENESS IS HEALTHY

Forgiveness is good for you. It is a healthy choice. Forgiving is actually better for your physical health than bitterness or anger. And, in your own strength you may have the ability to forgive someone to a certain extent. People do it all the time. And, many religions, philosophies, and psychologies teach forgiveness. However, as Christians we need to recognize that there is more to forgiveness than just coming to a place of internal peace over a matter, and 'letting go of an offense'. To give TRUE forgiveness that actually has legal standing in the spiritual realms, we need the power of Jesus. But we'll talk about *that* soon, in the HOW of forgiveness.

But, I think that it is relevant to mention the Health of forgiveness again here, in the WHAT of forgiveness, because it is such a positive result in our own lives. If we harbor bitterness or resentment, if we hold on to anger, this does not serve you! It does NOTHING to right the wrongs of the past. It does NOTHING to address or accomplish justice. And all the while, it just increases the harm done TO YOU ... but this time at your own hand. What that person did to you was their sin. What YOU are doing to you is your own injustice. The ulcer you give yourself, the sleeplessness, the spikes in cortisol (stress hormones) that damage your body, all these things and so much more, are results of unforgiveness. So that person harmed you in one way, then your unforgiveness continues to harm you in more ways.

Now, working through genuine hurts that come from true violations is not easy work. I'm not sayin you can just "name it and claim it", but the path you are on IS a path of healing. So, if you have already identified one or more of the people you need to forgive - out of obedience to God and/or for your own good, you may not yet WANT to forgive. So, let's take a moment to pray into that. Note that the blanks in the prayer are spots for you to fill in the details of your own situation and feelings.

Heavenly Father, thank you for forgiving MY rebellious heart on the basis of what Jesus accomplished on my behalf. Thank you Jesus for the sacrifice you made, not only to conquer Satan and all demonic powers and make a way of salvation, but also to make a way for relationship between humans and Heavenly Father ... between ME and Heavenly Father! Thank You Holy Spirit that you will "never leave me nor forsake me, you are with me wherever I go" to guide and comfort and empower.

God, I have no desire to forgive _____ for _____. I am so terribly hurt. I feel like _____. I wish that _____. Please forgive me for any misguided wishes for harm towards this person. And please HELP me to WANT to forgive. Because at this moment I don't even want to, but I know I need to.

Please take this prayer as a mustard seed of faith, and do what only you can do from there. Thank you! You've promised to give me what I ask for in Jesus name. I believe that what I am asking for now is in alignment with your good and wonderful will for my life. I believe that You CAN turn 'what the enemy intended for evil' in to good ... my good and the good of those who will hear my testimony of Your great power and love. I pray all this, hand in hand with Jesus, Amen.

FORGIVENESS IS A GIFT OF SACRIFICE

Forgiveness is not free. Though it is free to the person being forgiven, it comes at a great cost to the person *doing* the forgiving. Forgiveness wipes out a debt for one person, which means the other person absorbs the loss. This is why it can be so hard. It's like adding insult to injury! Not only did this person harm you, but now YOU have to forgive - YOU have 'be the better person' and it *feels* like you're letting them off the hook! That can be offensive, infuriating, and even more hurtful if we think that this is what God requires of us! But God does not just require it of us. He first GIVES it to us. Your salvation *and* God's forgiveness are free to you, but they came by way of an excruciating sacrifice of Jesus. Trust me: it is so much more than 'letting someone off the hook'. But it IS a gift that requires a sacrifice on the part of the forgiver.

FORGIVENESS IS AN ACT OF LOVE

When Jesus hung on the cross, He declared, "Father, forgive them." He set the ultimate example for us in His final breaths. Innocent, He was beaten, tortured, and killed. Christ Himself forgives his murderers, and He asks The Heavenly Father to forgive his murderers as well. This is a gruesome thing to say, but imagine your own child, while being tortured to death, asking you in his or her dying breath, "Mom - Dad - forgive them." Not only does Jesus forgive, His Heavenly Father who was also in tremendous pain, watching His Son be tortured and killed, also chooses to forgive. God had every right to hold that sin against all those people. But Jesus and the Father both forgave the most gruesome offense possible! Christ forgave His own murderers, and Heavenly Father forgave the murderers of His Son. As a parent, I won't claim that I could do that. But that's what our Heavenly Father did and still does. For those of us who claim Christ as our Savior, Heavenly Father forgives us, in spite of the pain each one of us causes Him from the sins we commit throughout our lives.

CHAPTER 5

FORGIVENESS SATISFIES JUSTICE

I will discuss this at length in part 3 of “From Forgiveness to Healing: Forgiveness in Spiritual Warfare”. But one of the mental-emotional problems we have about forgiveness, is an internal sense that if we forgive, justice is not accomplished, or justice is violated. The concept of justice is essentially connected to our concepts of forgiveness. So I must address it.

WHAT IS JUSTICE?

The details of Justice, and even its concept, varies from culture to culture and from age to age. But God’s concept of Justice transcends cultures. In God’s economy, Justice is that everything is working *as it was designed*. If we all just did that, sin and pain would disappear as a natural consequence. But alas, we’re born into a world completely out of alignment, to broken parents, in broken societies, with bodies doomed to die. So, God provided “The Law & The Prophets” as “a Sin management system” (Fr. Stephen DeYoung). All of the “laws” God has for humanity are not arbitrary, they’re for our own good. And, more specifically, they are instructions on **how to live as we were designed, in the midst of this broken world.**

Biblical Justice is about restoring order, or balance. In other words, Justice is to bring things into alignment - to bring things into the state in which they were designed to exist. It is when we are living according to our design that ‘all is right’. Justice is for a dog is to run and an eagle to fly. If a dog attempts to fly, he is doing something he was not designed to do, and will suffer the consequences - which is a terribly sad result for the dog AND the dog-owner who *loves* the dog!

Essentially, that is a picture of sins. Sins are when someone is doing something that he or she is not designed to do as a human, “made in God’s image”, which basically means that even if you believe that God created by the process of evolution, Humans are still designed intentionally, not accidentally, by God in such a way that we can have a relationship with God that animals and trees cannot, AND, so that we can be his stewards over all of His other creation. The problem is that Sin has mangled us and we live in an era of death and life commingled on the same planet. It is the job of those of us who are alive, to spread the LOVE-LIFE-LIGHT of God because this is what pushes back the darkness!

HOW IS JUSTICE ACCOMPLISHED?

Sadly, I think that our culture’s concept of justice is saturated in punishment. But justice can be accomplished (both in earthly society and in God’s economy) in a number of ways!

CONSEQUENCES:

Consequences are not Punishments, they are consequences; Just as a dog falling to his death while trying to fly out of a tree is not a punishment but a consequence. As we attempt to live life our own way outside of God’s beautiful design for us, we suffer the consequences. As other people live outside of their design, we may suffer consequences of THEIR sins. It is not about God being a jerk. And, it is not about God punishing us. It is about the ‘natural laws’ of our design. It’s like the laws of nature, like gravity.

Try all you may to change it, you are beholden to the law of gravity. We’re much better off learning to live with gravity than trying to fight it. Even though humanity has found ways to fly (hang gliding, air planes, etc) we are still interacting intelligently with the law of gravity. There is a dynamic way in which we can interact with it! But all in all, it still exists, and it still sets the rules, and our successful flight is still abiding by the rules - just in an advanced manner.

DISCIPLINE

Discipline (not self disciplines) CAN be a form of punishment, but I’d like to make a crucial distinction between the two. Frankly, it seems that *punishment* is a last resort in God’s economy. But *discipline* comes much more frequently. You see, Discipline is always for the good of BOTH the victim and the offender. For the victim, discipline (like consequences) is a way of balancing the scales. The victim’s pain is recognized and someone takes action on their behalf against their offender. Discipline is good for the offender, because its *purpose* is to lead them to Repentance, Restoration, Rehabilitation, Healing, and ultimately, Salvation.

PUNISHMENT

For some reason we humans love to just jump straight to the most vile way to manage sin and execute justice. The very long story short is that punishment is (or perhaps, *should* be) a last resort. When consequences and discipline do not evoke change (repentance) in a person, punishment may be required. Used correctly, punishment is for one or both of the following purposes:

1. **Mercy to the victims:** There are times in history when evil is so vile and pervasive that God steps in to 'execute judgement' early - before the final judgement - in order to provide mercy to the oppressed peoples. For example, God destroyed Sodom and Gomorra because the people were so vile, and were spreading so much pain and evil, that as a mercy to the neighboring nations, He destroyed the oppressors. "...we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it." ~ Genesis 19:13

In our courts, it is mercy to victims to have perpetrators removed from society so they can no longer commit crimes (and hopefully become rehabilitated to live better when they do get out). Although I have much to say about the privatized prisons in the United States. It is a vile industry set up for profit not rehabilitation.

2. **Prevention:** the fact that someone will be punished for a crime/sin keeps people in line who might otherwise sin more than they already do. This is what laws are for - in countries, communities, families ... and in God's order. Punishment attached to a sin or crime is a means by which sins/crime can be reduced as a whole.

The problem is that punishment is the easiest to execute because it is basic. Unlike Discipline, punishment requires no wisdom, no depth of thought about how to best engage with the offender for a purpose beyond keeping order in a community (be it the community of a home, city, or nation). And, it can be used when the offender does not otherwise experience consequences (in this life) for their violations.

A deeper problem is that punishment knows no mercy. Nor is it really supposed to because it is supposed to be a last resort, not a first instinct. And, in our human, imperfect and often very self serving human experience, punishment is the breeding ground for *unwarranted* cruelty & hostility. Any Christian who is in a punishment profession (warden, prison guard, etc) must make it their deep intention to commit each day to God so that they can obey Christ's instruction, "in your anger do not sin". (And don't get me started on America's need for prison reform - but that is for another day).

So all in all, we could think of these 3 like this: Consequences are natural results of our misconduct/sins/crimes (ie the dog that falls to his death while trying to fly out of a tree). Discipline is imposed consequences (by one's self for growth "self discipline" or by an authority). And the goal of discipline is always for the good of the sinner - repentance, reconciliation, healing, and salvation. And Punishment is for when consequences and discipline make no difference to the offender and we throw up our hands and say, 'ok. You backed me into a corner and now I have to punish you. I hope you realize your sin/crime and change your ways (which is repentance) but if not, the punishment will continue, or be repeated when you do the offense again.

And to be clear, I believe God treats punishment as a last resort, especially because it seems, (and I am still investigating this, but it seems) that God's punishment results in death (like Sodom and Gomorra). Everything prior to death is discipline *with the goal* that the person being disciplined will "come to his/her senses" and repent. And, even the eternal destiny for people who never place their allegiance with Jesus (are not "saved") is a consequence of their own choice to reject the Kingship of Jesus before they finish this life. In a sense, that isn't punishment, it is consequence¹.

SALVATION

God Rescues! Salvation is to enter into His Kingdom as citizens, and into His Family as His children! And when we do, He begins to transform us from the inside out. There is nothing in this world that excites my heart more than to watch people evolve in Christ. Some traditions call this Sanctification, others call it Theosis.

You are designed to be a reflection of God. And what's so cool is that how YOU reflect God will overlap with all believers in some ways, and be utterly unique to you in others. YOU have been given your own set of aptitudes and talents, preferences, things that excite your heart, and personality. Your particular design is unique within your human design. And both are BEAUTIFUL - but deeply corrupted. So our 'salvation' is the start of our personal evolution in Christ, to become the person HE DESIGNED YOU TO BE! And experience Him in the precious, intimate, beautiful, unique way that He wants to engage with YOU - His beloved child.

Many times we hear a message of punishment: Salvation is your escape from punishment ... "hell".

But I'd like to challenge you to re-read the scriptures and think about this: Punishment IS all over the scriptures, but Punishment is not for punishment's sake. Punishment is not that of a judge and jury. It is of a loving Father who 'DESIRES

¹ And for those who ask 'what about people who have never heard about Jesus?' - Well, we are not told what happens in that situation. There are MANY theories - not just "eternity in 'hell'". But that is a subject for it's own book. But even then, without Jesus telling us, we just don't know and therefore each Christ follower should make it our personal 'mission' to share the love of Jesus with everyone we encounter, and look for opportunities to share the REASON we have for that love - which is the salvation we have through Christ's work.

ALL MEN TO BE SAVED'. Every human has a purpose that they will never actualize outside of the family of God. Let me repeat that: **Every human has a purpose that they will never actualize outside of the family of God.** Every person has a beautiful design that others and we ourselves cut and scrape and stab and mutilate until we are looking far more like the demonic than God.

BUT GOD!

God's heart is to redeem and restore! He restores the Image of Himself that you and I and the person who harmed you, have all been chipping away at or outright mutilating. But He does not do it in spite of us, He does this in *partnership* with us. We must do our part to grow. And, we must do our part to build His kingdom. Your part might be to worship as you clean toilets, it may be to share your faith to one of your coworkers, it may be to rejoice in suffering, or feed the homeless, or preach to thousands from a stage, or grow gardens - restoring and blessing the land! All of us have things to do to restore God's beauty both as image bearers and stewards.

Did I go off track? No. Salvation is not a mere moment in time when we take the oath of citizenship and enter into God's Kingdom through faith and repentance. It is all that comes after as well. It is a process. We are saved and working out our salvation (Philippians 2:13). That remnant of God's image is still in all of us. As we work with Him to grow, that image is restored more and more. And THAT satisfies justice! I could ramble about this all day, but if you ponder it for a moment, I think Holy Spirit will show you what I'm talking about.

Think about an abandoned, dilapidated old church building sitting in ruin. Then, a contractor purchases it for a dollar and renovates it for a congregation that has outgrown its little storefront. The renovation is a process. The deed belongs to the contractor the day He purchases it. But the foundation is good. The blueprints are complete. The renovations begin with strategic demo. Then removal of old, moldy, broken things to make room for the new. Then the frame-out, exterior walls, plumbing, interior framing, electrical, drywall, ceilings ... and eventually the finishes - flooring, fixtures, countertops, carpet, pews ... you get the point. Justice is the restoration of God's image in mankind! That is the goal! So Salvation is, without any punishment at all, a means of justice for every single human and all of humanity.

FORGIVENESS!!

This may seem out of order, since Salvation is the ULTIMATE. But we as humans cannot make anyone give their lives to Christ. If you manipulate that, someone else can undo it. But as humans, we CAN choose to Forgive. To FORGIVE a crime or an offense is ONE OPTION for how to satisfy Justice! As humans we hate this one. It doesn't 'feel right' to us. But I thoroughly believe (and you are free to disagree) that Forgiveness is God's favorite way to satisfy Justice. *How* or *Why* God chooses to forgive, is up to Him. And, when He forgives, justice is satisfied. And God GIVES forgiveness as PART of His 'Salvation package'. Forgiveness is not the totality of salvation, but rather it is a benefit of our salvation. And as His ambassadors, we are commanded to forgive, and empowered to do so by His spirit.

So, I'm going to repeat this again:

When God Forgives,

JUSTICE

IS

SATISFIED...

PERIOD.

Discipline and Punishment are other OPTIONS, but *neither is mandatory for Justice to be 'satisfied' or accomplished.* Let me say that again: DISCIPLINE AND PUNISHMENT ARE OPTIONS FOR DEALING WITH SINS, BUT NEITHER IS MANDATORY! And Neither is the preferred way.

Now, in God's infrastructure, we can find 2 ways a person can receive forgiveness from Him (there may be more, but these are clearly revealed in the scripture) and we see both of them at the cross from Jesus Himself.

TWO KINDS OF FORGIVENESS FROM THE CROSS

FORGIVENESS OUTSIDE OF THE CONTEXT OF SALVATION

I believe that someone can be forgiven of particular sins, but not saved from the authority or rule of Sin and Death. This kind of forgiveness is legal in the strictest terms. It occurs in 2 contexts:

1. When forgiveness is not asked for
2. When forgiveness IS asked for but not in the salvation context.

We see Jesus give this kind of forgiveness to his prosecutors and murderers when He says, "Father Forgive them for they know not what they're doing". Forgiveness of this sort is what we offer all the time. We cannot make someone repent before God and place their allegiance with Jesus. However, we can still forgive them of particular sins they've committed against us. This kind of forgiveness actually provides an avenue toward repentance and salvation by removing a road block on someone's path in the Spiritual realms, and by eliminating an offense from someone's record book that Satan could otherwise use against them. But, this leads us to the spiritual warfare of it all. I plan on releasing sections and chapters on this topic on my blog, and eventually I'll address it concisely in "From Forgiveness To Healing, Part 3: Forgiveness in Spiritual Warfare".

FORGIVENESS IN THE CONTEXT OF SALVATION

It is interesting to note that Jesus offered 2 KINDS of forgiveness whilst on the cross: He forgave the criminal next to him when the criminal asked for it. He also asked Heavenly Father to forgive a whole lot of people (his murderers) who did NOT ask for it. What's the difference? The one kind was attached to "Salvation" or Eternal Life with God. This kind of forgiveness comes to those who repent, which is asking for forgiveness and pledging their allegiance to Jesus. That's what the criminal on the cross next to Jesus did. He asked Jesus to remember him - ie take pity on him - when he said, "We indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom." Here, we see what I think is the purest picture of salvation ... and salvation always INCLUDES forgiveness. The criminal says, "we indeed have been condemned justly." He recognizes Jesus's innocence. But what 'saves' him is that he recognized the KINGSHIP of Jesus, and asks the King to remember him when He acquires His throne. That IS the ESSENTIAL of salvation - recognizing and submitting our selves to Jesus the King.

Now, you may say "nowhere did this guy ask for forgiveness from his sins. He didn't pray the sinners prayer. I don't get it." Well, I probably need to say something that will make some people mad or confused. Asking for forgiveness from God is not what saves you. Praying the sinners prayer does not save you. Recognizing the reality of the truth that Jesus Christ is not just a historical figure, but the Savior of mankind and all of creation, is not what saves you!

So how is someone 'born again' / rescued / 'saved'?

We are saved by pledging allegiance to the King.

This requires all the things: recognizing our need for a savior and a desire to no longer be a slave to this world's ways and powers, then recognizing Jesus as King, and repenting: which is ditching the old kingdom for the new one. Repentance is not just saying "I'm sorry" or asking for forgiveness. That is certainly one aspect of it. But what repentance actually is, is leaving the one thing in exchange for another. "Repentance unto salvation" is leaving the Kingdom of Darkness to become a citizen of the Kingdom of Light. It's leaving the "old man" behind and becoming someone "new" in Jesus ... or restored in Jesus - which is restored to who you were designed to be!!

But back to the point. This criminal acknowledged his sins, acknowledged Jesus as the Innocent Martyr King, and recognized that Jesus would rule in the next life (and Jews at that time debated whether or not there even was a resurrection at all - so this criminal saw the truth!). And then the criminal asked to be a citizen of Jesus' Kingdom - and Jesus said YES!

Now if that criminal had not been crucified, but repented like that, then he would be responsible to live his life as a Christ follower ... a citizen of heaven living temporarily on earth... and he would enter the process of Sanctification/Theosis (personal growth and evolution into becoming more and more like Jesus in our character, desires, thoughts, actions, etc).

So *all* of that to say - Salvation includes forgiveness as a benefit, but forgiveness is not the sum total of our Salvation.

FORGIVENESS IN THE CONTEXT OF SALVATION - A DEEPER DIVE

At this point, you may be eager to get to the actual 'forgiveness journal' - the "how" of it all. And, you may be tempted to skip this as 'irrelevant' to the process. But I believe that it is relevant to insert here because it will give you a little more 'gas in the tank' to help you with your process. If some of it does not resonate, don't get twisted up - just take what helps and keep moving.

CITIZENSHIP: FORGIVENESS IS INCLUDED IN THE "SALVATION CITIZENSHIP PACKAGE"

I am convinced that when we pledge our allegiance to Jesus (or "get saved") we do receive God's forgiveness, but that is only *part* of the "Salvation Package" (as I call it). So what is this thing that Christians call Salvation, if it is not just being forgiven by God? Long story short, what we now call "salvation" is much more holistic than "Jesus took the punishment I deserve".

- **Freedom from Slavery to Sin is different than Jesus taking the punishment we deserve for our sins:** From Adam & Eve until Jesus, this world became custody of Satan and the fallen angels ("demons") - who are terribly vile slave masters. The scriptures explain that humanity is literally under the law of slavery. That is why moralism or 'being a good person' does us no good - it just makes someone a good slave. That is essentially the problem with every religion (including some errant Christianity). We think we can 'earn' something - a better reincarnation, becoming one with the universe, entering Nirvanah, or pleasing a god (even Jesus) enough to earn our eternal status with him/them. But moralism is an attempt to solve the wrong problem! Salvation is not about placating God, or meeting His requirements! Its about becoming a free citizen of His kingdom instead of a slave to the one you were born into. **So, how can a slave become a free person?**

1. A free person purchases the slave and sets him free
2. A free person kills the other slaveowner and sets the slaves free
3. The laws are changed to make slavery illegal.
4. A slave can attempt to escape but that rarely worked, and only did if there was a plan in place and people to help, like with the Underground Railroad in the United States.

Jesus chose to live and die as a human IN ORDER to enter the underworld, conquer the demonic powers of "Sin and Death" and thus 1.) legally abolish slavery in the Spiritual realms, and 2.) to give every slave (ie every human) the opportunity to choose citizenship in Jesus's kingdom. This is repentance - to choose Jesus and His ways instead of living as if this life is all there is, or there is some other way. .

- **Citizenship:** God doesn't just set us free from slavery and then say, "ok good luck! Hope you crush this freedom thing!" No, He is so much more generous! God gives Citizenship to all who ask by acknowledging Jesus as King and trading in our citizenship of Earth for Citizenship in Heaven. So now, everyone has a choice: to remain citizens of earth, or to become citizens of Heaven.

This is why "being a good person" doesn't 'earn' someone the right to enter heaven in the next life. If you want to become a citizen of any country, you must acknowledge its government or king, and submit yourself to that authority. That is exactly what Jesus said we must do to become Citizens of Heaven: Believe (that the King is Jesus) and Repent (switch your loyalty and citizenship). But of course, once you're a citizen of a country, you abide by its laws. THAT is the WORK of our faith.

To reject this offer of citizenship is to choose eternity away from God instead of with Him. Jesus entered Hades, and offered freedom to every human who had ever lived and died before He did. Anyone who pledged their allegiance to Him was rescued and resurrected to live with Him in eternity as we too will! So whenever anyone asked "well what about all those who lived before Jesus - 'its not fair' that they didn't know the way of salvation. Well, he entered the underworld to conquer demonic forces and let those who'd lived on earth before Him, know of the opportunity to repent and live with Him. We may think it's nuts that anyone would reject him in the afterlife, but we are each free-will agents who can choose to follow Him or not.

- **Adoption:** But wait! There's more! God doesn't stop there. With citizenship comes Adoption into the Royal family of God, making us "coheirs with Christ". This is why we call each other brothers and sisters. This is why we can call God "Father". Not only are we freed, not only can we become citizens, but when we do, we are invited into *intimacy* with God - as His very own sons and daughters - beloved beyond measure. This is a truly unique element to biblical

Christianity. I could be wrong, but I have not seen this offered in any religion outside of Christianity. It's not what makes it true, but it is quite beautiful to recognize.

CITIZENSHIP AND ADOPTION COME WITH AN ARRAY OF BENEFITS & RESPONSIBILITIES, INCLUDING:

- **New Life:** In Jesus, our souls are brought to life, and we are thus capable of having a relationship *with* God instead of just knowing *about* Him. From that point forward we are to cultivate that life and walk forward in our relationship with God
- **Forgiveness of Our Sins:** God forgives anyone who pledges themselves to Jesus, His Son, the King. But this does not eliminate anyone's responsibility to ask other humans for forgiveness as well!
- **Healing and Growth:** Christians call this Theosis (becoming like God) or Sanctification. As we do the relational work of "abiding with Jesus" we will become more and more sensitive to His Spirit and voice. We do not need to worry about moralism because being close to Jesus changes us from the inside out. Its like being around good influencers instead of a deadbeats. As we draw near to our God, we evolve as humans to become more like Him. For we are, in fact, *designed* to be like Him! Genesis 1 says we are designed in His image. So our journey of one who has been rescued, freed and adopted, is one of healing and growth, no matter what word you assign to it. But here's the deal - we must be active participants in this process. We cannot just become citizens then continue living the way we did when we were citizens of another country. Our new kingdom has new ways. And what is truly wonderful, is that just like Jesus took a few loaves and fishes and multiplied it to feed thousands of people, so also He infuses His power into your work - multiplying its effectiveness ... as long as you are doing the work in partnership with Him - whether that work is of personal growth or working outwardly in the world.
- **Purpose:** speaking of partnership, your citizenship and adoption give your life profound purpose. This is one of the great philosophical questions and internal drivers for most people. We all desire to have meaning in this life. Some find it through service (public servant, counseling, teachers, nurses, non profit work, etc). Some find it in family. Some in career. But ultimately, people come to their middle age or later life years and we commonly hear, "I want to leave a legacy". This could be an inheritance for their children, a book, a podcast, a foundation, or so much service that people will remember them long after they're gone. But this is still lacking - because it is finite. In God's Kingdom, we can finally find true purpose. I want to present 3 ways in which this is available for us as Christ followers:
 - You cannot take money, possessions, prestige, titles, or anything else with you into the next life ... EXCEPT people! By loving people and sharing the message of Freedom through Jesus, you can make eternal impact in someone's life! What an incredible privilege we have! Whether sharing your faith with a friend, preaching the gospel from a stage, or simply performing acts of kindness "for the least of these" - this is all legacy. This is love. This is eternal impact.
 - Skills for Jesus - you have been given aptitudes, and through your life you develop skill sets. You can use them to grow wealth or power or fame... or you can use them to benefit God's Kingdom. God's kingdom on earth needs Accountants, Construction workers, Teachers, Office workers, janitors, waitresses, counselors, presidents, uber drivers, musicians, artists ... whatever your passions, aptitudes, and skills - they can be utilized by 'The Church' for God's Kingdom. You may begin praying for the people you work with, a construction worker might volunteer with Habitat for Humanity, a waitress might assist with an outreach event at her church, a teacher can love their students by praying for them, showing them discipline wrapped in kindness, or leave a bible in their top drawer so kids who are Christians or curious can ask about it (teachers are allowed to share their faith if asked). You have something that God's Kingdom on earth needs. He gave it to you - use it for Him! This gives you eternal impact!
 - Your relationship with God, itself, is purpose. The Westminster confession of faith asks the question, "What is the chief end (purpose) of man(kind)"? The answer they provide is "To glorify God and Enjoy Him forever.". John Piper modifies this to say "to glorify God BY enjoying Him forever". And I agree with the case he made. What a beautiful purpose for life - to get to know our loving creator more and more! If you do nothing else, that will be enough! But if you focus on this, He will inevitably put a desire in your heart to use your skills for His kingdom and/or share your faith with those who are still lost in the darkness.

What a wonderful life we have! Even in the midst of suffering, we have a creator who designed us with intention, and who wants to KNOW us! Every human has a purpose - but they will never know what it is outside of a life lived with Jesus.

- **Authority:** As an “Ambassador” of Jesus Christ, you carry His power. And, though our ‘good deeds’ or ‘good works’ will never earn our Salvation (for who can earn being rescued), the more pure your life becomes in Christ, the more authority you will have in the spiritual realms. But I will give a warning here:
 - Power is God’s to give, not yours to demand.
 - The more authority you desire, the more purity will be required. There are dozens of examples of this in our lives. For example, if you want a job at the White House you’re going to have to have far deeper background checks than if you are a cashier at McDonalds.
 - The More authority you have, the more responsibility you hold. Don’t expect the authority if you can’t handle the responsibility.
 - Power is God’s to give, not yours to demand. (Yes - repeated that - because it is that important!)
- **Assignments, and Power:** Assignments and the power to carry them out. Whether the Holy Spirit points your eyes at a person on the sidewalk that you can be kind to, or to a job where you share His love in the workplace, or if He calls you to full time vocational ministry, each assignment has a purpose, and He will always empower you to execute what He assigns to you. But it is YOUR responsibility to do the work. He won’t do it for you.
- **Authority to Forgive Sins:** This may not sound very exciting, but when Jesus forgave sins, the religious leaders (and most everyone else) were flabbergasted and called Him a heretic because “Only God has the authority to forgive sins”. What the Pharisees were referring to was forgiving sins that were not committed against the forgiver. There were protocols of repentance and restoration for humans violating other humans. But Jesus forgave the sins of people he’d never met nor violated. He was forgiving them in the way that only God can, and that is why He was called a heretic. But, one thing I will discuss at length in my next book is the fact that forgiveness is a weapon of spiritual warfare. And, I’ll argue that it is the most powerful weapon in all of Spiritual warfare - the likes of an Atom bomb.

FORGIVENESS REQUIRES MORE THAN WE CAN MUSTER

Quite often, we will not have the ability to forgive as Christ commands us to forgive. So how can God command us to do something that we are not able to do? Well, on our own strength we cannot do it. But, the beauty of God giving us a command that we cannot accomplish by ourselves, is that we must depend on Jesus & His Holy Spirit to give us what we need to obey the command! So let me repeat this: Forgiveness, real Christlike forgiveness, is NOT something you can do on your own! **You MUST depend on the Holy Spirit to empower you to forgive! Forgiveness is the ultimate way in which we reflect God, and can only be *completely* accomplished in partnership with God!**

This is good news!

In fact, its amazing news! All that frustration you feel when you know you should forgive, but can’t seem to; or the dagger you feel in your stomach when you try to forgive but the pain of the offense still resides in you ... it’s ok (sort of) because it just goes to show that you cannot do this on your own. So do not pile guilt on yourself for not being able to forgive as you ought. **Instead, reject the guilt and go to God with your desire to forgive. When you go to Him, bringing your desire to forgive, it will PLEASE Him to help you through your process to do so.**

Perhaps take a moment to pray about this now.

Heavenly Father, Jesus, & Holy Spirit,

Help me to leave the fate of the person who violated me in Your hands, and trust that justice will be accomplished. Thank you that the hurts in my life matter to You! Thank you that you have forgiven me of all that I have done to violate your creations, be it the planet, other people, or myself. Thank you that You can heal my wounded heart, and teach me how to move forward. Please help me to look to YOU for healing, and not depend on some form of perceived justice that I have made up in my own mind. Please also give me wisdom about how to proceed in my actions towards this person. Should I reach out? Should I walk away? Is there legal action I need to take? Whatever I do, help me to do it depending on Your guidance, Your strength, Your love. I need Your wisdom, Lord. I pray this for Your glory, my good, and the good of all those who will hear the testimony of your greatness, Amen

THE ULTIMATE EXAMPLE OF FORGIVENESS UNDESERVED

I'd like to give you one more example - the ULTIMATE example that shows us that all we are required to do in order to obey God in the act of forgiveness, is to say, "God, do not hold this sin against them. I release my claim for this sin.". That's what Christ did at the cross. He said, "Lord, forgive them for they know not what they do."

Did he feel good?

No. He was hanging on a cross.

He was bleeding out his hands and feet... and head... and back!

There was a crown of thorns.

He'd been whipped with glass and leather.

He was suffocating to death.

And in the midst of his greatest pain, he said, "Lord, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing"

And do you think His pain was just physical, and not emotional?

Oh heck no! He was alone! He had three people there to support Him : his mother, John and one of the Mary's. The rest of the people there were mocking Him or actively killing Him. He was abandoned. He was betrayed. And, though He is God, Jesus was fully human, and it's reasonable to suspect that His emotions were in the trash at that moment!

He did not feel good physically, emotionally, or psychologically. He was grappling with the fact that His Father was letting him hang on the cross. He said, "Father, why have You forsaken Me? Daddy". So this man was not, even though he was God, he was not in emotional freedom. He was a man who was in physical pain, psychological pain, and emotional pain.

But in that moment, he obeyed God the Father by saying, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they're doing." That's it! So, if you can muster just that one sentence, "God, forgive them - I am releasing them from the sins they have committed against me" then you have obeyed! The end. You can walk away right now, and you've obeyed! And consider this: Jesus prayed for those who were killing him. One of those who were directly involved with his death was Saul of Tarsus who we know as Apostle Paul, who wrote half the new testament. As a devout and ranking Pharisee, he was engaged with Jesus's murder. Then Paul proceeded to murder Christians in his misguided zeal for God. I cannot imagine Paul's grief over all of this. But Jesus prayed for him on the cross! I believe that in doing so, Jesus removed great hurdles to Paul (and others) becoming His children. Forgiveness sets up pathways for miracles.

As for healing, there's more - You can stay in your pain if you want. But, it's not good for you. It's not what God wants for you! And frankly, it would be disobedient for you to just stay and *wallow* in your pain. God wants healing for you! So, there are more steps to be taken to heal, but at its core, when you forgive, you have obeyed, even if you feel like crap.

CHAPTER 6

MY STORY PART DEUX

There are some things God showed me on my forgiveness journey that I think can be very helpful for you too. So, one day, as I was praying about the situation, I felt as if Jesus was saying, “Carol, it’s safe for you to let go of these violations. *You may drop them into My hands.*”

I pictured myself with Jesus, trying to hand over the hurt, but alas, I could not.

FORGIVING A PERSON WHO IS NOT A CHRIST FOLLOWER

So, He continued, ‘IF this person is NOT my child, then this person will be judged for the actions against you and all of his/her other sins as well. I am The Perfect Judge and I promise to judge this person on your behalf. *Justice WILL be executed. You WILL be vindicated. I will do this because you are my daughter, and I LOVE YOU.* However, I’m asking you to forgive them - for your own good, and yes, for theirs” (sidetone: at the time, I did not understand what that meant, but what really resonated to me in that situation was the word *vindication*. I’d been so misjudged, and vindication was a core issue for me - and I didn’t even realize it until I ‘heard’ the word during prayer. It may be something different for you, but if you engage with Holy Spirit about your situation, I’m sure He’ll show you what YOU need to understand too).

I actually shuddered to think of this person facing God’s judgement, and I felt led to pray for this person’s salvation, because though they claimed to be a Christian, I was not sure if they were or not.

FORGIVING A CHRIST FOLLOWER

Then, I sensed God saying, “IF, however, this person has placed his/her faith in Me, then they are my child and their life is ‘hid in Christ with God’ (Colossians 3:3). So, if you have a grudge you’re holding on to, then you hold it against ME. Look at my pierced hands and feet. *It is finished.* If you have a problem with this person, then you need to take it up with Me!”

In this moment, what I saw in my mind’s eye was this person being protected by Jesus, just as I am protected by Him. Jesus stood between me and this person, like a body guard. I realized that the same blood that protects and purifies me, also protects and purifies this person. So I replied, “Nope. We’re good. Jesus, I’ve got no beef with You!”

And, it was suddenly done. I was suddenly able to ‘let it go’.

Now, years later, I also realize this: perhaps this is the most important aspect of forgiveness: if you do not forgive, you will be held accountable for your *unforgiveness*. Even if you are “willing to forgive IF they just say they’re sorry or even if they just acknowledge they did something wrong”. And yes, you could make a case for that because repentance is the only ‘condition’ for salvation. So if we are copying God’s method then that would be correct. But you and I are not God. We are His children and He is in us, but we are not Him. And, we are commanded to forgive. No qualifiers. Just ... Forgive.

It is not an option.

It is a command.

THE FINAL STEP TO FREEDOM!

I hear this question ALL the time: How can I know when I’ve truly forgiven someone, “from the heart”?

The answer God gave me is: When you can pray for them.

Bonus - When you can pray for them without resentment, then you are well on your way to healing.

When I was in my process of figuring out forgiveness, and had the ah-ha moments I just explained, I thought I had forgiven this person. I didn’t think I had anger left in my heart. I still hurt from time to time when this person’s actions were clearly bent against me. However, all I had to do was pray and release it into God’s hands and move on. I could forgive even if the hurt took time to heal.

But then I realized I still had another step to go.

A great prayer warrior that I met, also knew this person who harmed me. When we realized we had this mutual connection, the prayer warrior told me that he prayed for this person nearly every day. When he said this (quite casually as a matter of fact), within a second, I went from surprised, to confused, to angry, to a different kind of confused. In my mind I thought “why would you pray for this person?” I had never prayed for this person outside of the context of my hurt. I never prayed for this person’s health or well being or success or relationship with Christ. And, I realized that not only had I never prayed for this person’s well being before, I was mad that someone else was doing so!

This instinctive response within me revealed that I had not completely forgiven this person yet! So, I realized I needed to start praying for this person. NOT praying for their harm, or even that they'd realize that they'd wronged me, or that they'd say sorry or send me a gift or something. No, I needed to start praying for their well being no matter how they treated me, good, bad, or indifferent.

But this task was harder than you'd think. It was almost *physically* painful for me to pray for the person who had done me wrong for so long. But, with this prayer warrior, I was finally able to ask God for the grace and strength to pray for this person. Yes. The first step was asking God to help me take the first step! It was that hard! Then, I was able to choke out a little prayer like, "please keep this person safe and help them to grow closer to you. Amen". It's so bizarre to me now - but I can still FEEL the angsty dagger in my chest when I remember that experience. My body remembers how hard it was to forgive that person.

However, I began asking God to change MY heart towards this person so that I could pray for them. I asked that I'd have the strength to pray, the desire to pray, the wisdom to pray. I asked that God would put love or at least compassion in my heart ... and increase it. Eventually I was actually able to start praying for this person, sincerely and with fervor.

IN PRAYING FOR THE PERSON WHO HARMED ME, I WAS EVENTUALLY HEALED!!!

Eventually, this person's negative actions didn't even offend me anymore. I'd just roll my eyes and let it go. And, if you've ever struggled with hurt or bitterness, then if you're honest, you'll know that a transformation like that is a little miracle. It may not be perfect, but it was a massive step in the right direction. And, about 6 months later, I had an encounter with this person that was, in fact, miraculous. We sat and talked for hours - sincerely like friends. This person never apologized because I think this person didn't see what they did as wrong in the first place (its complicated) and I did not feel the need to bring it up... ever. It is forgiven! But this encounter was the first genuinely loving encounter we'd had in years. That person's subtle abuse had gone on for years, but from this encounter onward the manipulation and abuse has entirely disappeared.

I promise you: that is a miracle. It was like all the bad blood between us just suddenly evaporated - it simply did not exist anymore, and it has been over 10 years since then and we are very close to this day. It would not have happened had I not first learned to forgive this person. If you knew the details of this story, you would agree.

Now I need to note that this is not always the case. For example, another person harmed me so badly financially, that a year later the consequences of that have still not resolved. I forgave this person, and after a couple months allowed them back into my life ... only to be swindled again. I have now allowed *that* friendship to die ... at least for now. I forgave, but to reconcile would further harm me and my family, and I simply do not have the bandwidth right now to even try. I still pray for this person's salvation and well being, because I forgave them! But I cannot allow them to do further harm to me. So I had to just walk away from that... and they must have known subconsciously that they were in the wrong, because they reached out once but when I did not reply, they disappeared ... until they had a little ammunition to throw at me. I received an extremely hateful text and I did not reply. The communications have stayed mute since then. I just want to tell you this story in order to show you real life examples of how forgiveness and reconciliation are separate matters.

Now, a few pages back, we already prayed a prayer that included this concept, but I want to challenge you to do more than that initial, basic prayer. Try praying the following until you can genuinely pray for the person who harmed you.

Jesus, forgiver of my sins, thank You for loving me even though I'm struggling to forgive. Please send Your Holy Spirit to help me love _____ enough to pray for them. Help me to lay down my hurt and broken heart at your feet. Jesus You are the only one who can heal my hurt. Even the person who harmed me cannot do that. So I turn to You, for healing and for strength. Give me the strength to pray for _____. Give me Your insight so that I will pray effectively for _____'s good. Help me not to be snarky. Help me to pray for _____'s well being, and that _____ will love You and engage in their own healing with You. Right now, I know that _____ needs _____. Please help them in this situation. Help them to turn to You and depend on You. Thank You for Your eternal love. Amen.

We have more to discuss, but if you pray that struggling little prayer - you have obeyed Jesus! You have given legal forgiveness, and done so 'from the heart'. How do I know? Because you asked god to forgive your enemy, and thus you prayed for their well being. You obeyed!

Are you healed? Probably not yet, unless you were practicing with a super minor infraction that didn't hurt that much in the first place. But either way, you obeyed Jesus and forgave someone. And THAT counts!

If you wanted, you could stop here. Just wash, rinse, repeat, with every offender from your past and moving forward. But there's more. So enjoy the win (even if it hurt) and let's keep going.

FREEDOM BY TRUSTING GOD'S JUSTICE

But there's a little more. In my prayer, Holy Spirit continued, "*You are now FREE to love this person by My power. You don't have to accept this person's abuse. You may separate yourself from this person's presence. But, you are empowered by my Holy Spirit in your life to take actions of love, mercy and grace towards this person regardless of the response offered back to you. You can love this person with my love. Leave the judgement ...or ... the cleansing of sin, up to Me.*"

This brought incredible freedom. I felt bad for this person that they'd spend eternity separated from God in misery if they were not His child, and I prayed for this person's salvation. And, I knew that if this person was actually a Christ follower, as they claimed to be, then the harm this person had done to me was placed onto Christ. Thus, any anger, resentment, and bitterness I had, needed to be nailed onto the cross as well.

It saddens me that our culture has turned Heavenly Father into 'the mean God' and Jesus is 'the nice God'. The mind of God is one for Father, Son and Spirit. Justice is not Judgement. Justice is making things as they are designed to be. Judgement is discernment. Condemnation is what our culture most often means when they use the word Judgement. So let me say it this way:

God's JUSTICE will DISCERN what is right and good for you, and also for your offender, and your forgiveness removes God's condemnation of that person for this particular offense. So YOU are safe to trust God's Justice. He's got you. He will never leave you nor forsake you. You are more precious to Him than a nursing child is to its mother. (Isaiah 49:15-16) and He rejoices over YOU with singing! (*can you even begin to imagine Jesus Himself singing over you? His voice must be more beautiful than a thousand perfect voices in harmony all at once. Oh Jesus! Your love is so beautiful. How can we stand in your midst without weeping for joy? You are so kind and good and beautiful. I could say it a million times and it would not be enough Jesus you are so beautiful!*) Zephaniah 3:4 - *The Lord your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with singing.*"

Then He gave me this vision, and I'd like to share it as a tool that you can use as well.

I saw the person I needed to forgive

I pictured their offense(s) against me as a dagger dripping with my blood

I saw myself walking to the cross where Jesus hung.

I placed the dagger beneath him at the foot of the cross

I watched the blood from his feet drip on to the dagger.

And I sensed him declaring "it is finished"

Selah.

I then looked down to realize that I was still bleeding where the dagger had stabbed me.

He asked 'where do you feel the physical pain? (*Whether or not the offense was physical, many people can 'feel' something when they consider the offense. It could be a "rock in my stomach" or "a dagger in my heart" perhaps your neck or low back become tight or you find yourself clenching your jaw. Wherever you FEEL the pain or discomfort when you think of your offender, that is a place your body is physically holding the emotional pain. For me, in this case, it felt like a giant stone was pushing against my lower ribcage (sternum).)*)

Then I Looked up at where the cross was ... now there is a brilliant light.

Christ stands at the center - beautiful - radiating light, and dressed in white.

I asked Him, "please heal me where the dagger stabbed me"

And I felt His healing hands of love.

There, I began to release my pain into HIS care. ...

Do you see what happened? God showed me that *He's* handling it. He *is* just. Justice is ALWAYS accomplished when victims entrust the situation over to Him. Victims are always vindicated (in this life or the next). YOU are not overlooked or forgotten. You are a beloved Child of God. And even though you've expunged this person's sin against you from God's 'record book', the DAMAGE done by that sin TO YOU is NOT forgotten by your Heavenly Father. Yes, that person will not have to be punished for that sin, but that does NOT mean that YOU have to live in pain over it. Your Heavenly Father SEES you and LOVES you and He is the GREAT HEALER. And that is what I pray we accomplish together in this process.

I know it may feel like "you're letting your offender off the hook". But in all reality, you're actually letting your *self* off the hook! By forgiving the other person, you are:

- Obeying Jesus
- Eliminating the sin of UNforgiveness for your self
- Fighting a spiritual battle on behalf of your self and your offender
- Setting your self up to be healed. By forgiving, you're letting your *self* off the hook from staying in pain, frustration, and disobedience! You're freeing your *self* to begin healing.

CONSEQUENCES VS PUNISHMENT

When we forgive, we eliminate 2 things: punishment and demonic legal access. I will explain.

1. Punishment and Consequences are 2 different things. We touched on this before, but in short, if a dog jumps off the roof in an attempt to fly (which would be sin because the dog is violating its design as a dog), the consequences could range from injury to death. This is not punishment, it's just consequences. Now, if the dog climbs out a window and the owner sees it on the roof before it jumps, then the owner might run out after the dog and punish the dog for getting on the roof. The goal of this punishment is not to be mean to the dog. It's not anger that the owner was inconvenienced and had to get on the roof. The punishment is for the dog's safety. The goal is to motivate the dog to not hurt itself! Punishment in God's economy is always with the hope of repentance, OR in order to stop horrific oppression and make abuse to come to an end. Punishment can protect victims and can lead the victimizer to repentance. Repentance does not just save the abuser from punishment, but also benefits the victims (present or future) because the evil behavior ends with repentance.
2. Legal Access: Sin gives demons legal access to the sinner. So if someone is harming you, their sin against you opens windows to the enemy to block their access from our loving God. And if you walk in the sin of unforgiveness, you give demonic entities legal access to pick at you too. Until you forgive, you leave a wound open for the enemy to accuse you to you, accuse you to God, and further harm that wound in a myriad of ways. I am not talking about demon possession. Christ followers have the Spirit of Christ, not the spirits of demons. But demons can taunt, tempt, and psychologically torture for sure. So do what YOU can do to block their access to you yourself, first. And also do what you can do to close the windows for others. Your forgiveness protects YOU! You are protecting YOU when you forgive someone else. This idea that forgiveness "lets the victimizer off the hook" is a giant lie! When you forgive someone, you let YOU off the hook! You are taking care of YOU when you forgive! Satan and the demons will do all they can to keep you believing the lie - but the truth is that forgiveness is FREEDOM ... for YOU!

CHRIST'S SACRIFICE IS ENOUGH

Now if your offender is or becomes a Christ follower, then the person's sins (including the ones committed against you) are cleansed by Christ's blood. ***No amount of torture to the person who harmed you, can accomplish MORE than Christ's blood sacrifice has accomplished!!*** Do you feel angry about that? Do you say, "No! That's not fair! That person shouldn't be let off the hook just by asking for Jesus to forgive them! They need to pay for what they've done to me!" Well, be careful and consider your self-centered emotions!

My best friend had the following vision. She imagined herself taking a walk with Heavenly Father and Jesus. My friend has a terrible history of abuse that led to a drug addiction. We laugh at the 'crazy' things she's been through now that she has

been clean and healed for so many years. But her list of offenses was not short nor average. Now, while she was still homeless and addicted, she pictured herself standing in front of God the Father as judge, and Jesus was next to her holding a book of her sins. Jesus said to the Father, "Is there anything in here that my blood is not enough to cover?" Now, at this point she pictured something that is truly ridiculous and dark. She pictured God the Father saying, "Nope - Your blood is not enough for THAT sin there, nor that other sin there, or hmmm ya - that one on page 462 - that one isn't covered by your blood either. Jesus, *Your sacrifice just wasn't enough*"

I feel ghastly just repeating such a terrible picture ... especially the last sentence. That is the hardest sentence I've ever had to write. But that's the point! It is a truly ridiculous and offensive thought to think that ANYthing a human can do is TOO Big and TOO bad to be covered by the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Creator of the Universe, Source of all Life and Love - is HIS BLOOD not enough? Hell no! Seriously! Hell no! He entered hades and conquered the demons who ruled over it by raising back to life and returning to His throne! He preached the offer of salvation to all the millions of humans who had lived and died before He arrived on our timeline so that all could choose life with Him or reject it (and yes, even in Hades those who follow the ways of evil will still reject Christ). Is any sin too big for Jesus' blood to cover?

So, don't be a hypocrite! Did *you* not place *your* sins on the cross? How many grievances against other people have you been forgiven? How many sins that you don't even realize or remember that you committed? Thousands upon thousands! Let go of your demand that payment is made by this person TO YOU, and trust your Savior for your vindication and your healing.

FORGIVING A CHILD MOLESTER

I will add one more example. This is one that I very recently realized was something I needed to address. When I was growing up, one of my parents' closest friends was a child molester. We did not know that, of course. He was a respected in the church, was a local business owner, and had EVERYONE convinced he was a saint. But when he married (I was a teen by that time) he began to beat his wife, he beat her kids (his step children), and then also the kids he had with her. He was taken to court by multiple victims (family and others) and yet somehow was found not guilty. He was so slick and had SO many people fooled. It grieves me to my core to report, but his stepson eventually committed suicide.

Now how do I know that the accusations were true? Two ways. 1. When I was in high school, I came home to find him "spanking" one of my younger brothers brutally - it was no spanking. It was beating. I screamed at him and pushed him away. He was accusing my brother of something *I* did and would not stop til my brother admitted he did it. I was a bit of a 'wild child' and an athlete so he didn't fight me.

Secondly, when I was very young (before 4th grade) he tested the waters with me by 'exposing himself' to me after a shower to see how I reacted. I believe that my ADHD wild child personality saved me from his advances, but I was always uncomfortable around him until I went to college. Of course I never told my parents about his advances until I was in my 40's because I really didn't know better when I was a kid. I kinda thought it was an accident and I didn't know that the 'creepy' feelings I had when he was around were actually me sensing his molester energy.

So, recently I was processing through this and asking God to help me forgive him. On a superficial level I did. But when I thought about how horrific his actions were to others - I found that I did not want to forgive him one bit. I did not want to ask for his salvation - especially because he tarnished the name of Jesus so much, and caused so much terrible, life altering harm to his victims.

But it is not mine to judge. Christ alone is Judge and Jury, for HE alone is King. He alone is eternal. He is the source of all love and all wisdom. So with gritted teeth and clenched fists, I choose to obey my king. It matters not what this person did, in that regard. What matters is MY obedience. So I prayed that he would repent unto salvation, and in His genuine repentance to Jesus, turn and repent to those he harmed. Whether or not they forgive him, my prayer is that he would repent. And in THAT I discovered an irony that helped me find peace in the process.

When we pray for someone's salvation, it is not some 'get out of jail free' card. God does not 'save' someone against their will, nor without their participation. REPENTANCE is mandatory for salvation. Whether repentance comes on a cross side by side with Jesus as one is dying, or whether it is at 8 years old and then perpetually throughout one's life. And, hopefully this gut wrenching example, will make it clear. When I pray for this man's salvation, I am praying for his repentance. And, when someone genuinely repents to God, they must then repent to those they've harmed. This is not just for addicts going through a 12 steps program. This is for every Christian. We must be about the work of ongoing repentance to God and to our fellow humans. So if this man is 'saved' he's not just 'let off the hook.' No! His responsibility will be to confess his sins (instead of continuing to lie that they did not happen) repent to those he harmed, and accept any consequences that may come of this.

This is not letting someone off the hook. God does not forgive us to the harm of others. His love is for every single human. For, as human, every single one of us is made in His likeness. So, although it was crazy painful to pray anything 'good' for him, I obeyed Jesus and *then* was able to pray for his victims as well. It's unpredictable what God will reveal to you when you forgive someone using HIS process. But if you are genuine in your attempt to obey Him, He will join you and help you in the way HE knows YOU need.

BE ENCOURAGED!

The offenses committed against you, God's child, are not overlooked or forgotten. He loves you. Every offense against you will be accounted for, one way or another. In faith, you need to believe Him on this point. And THAT is how you forgive. You are freed to offer forgiveness and let God handle it. You are freed from the burden of unforgiveness, freed from the burden of attempting get that person to do the thing you feel they need to do to make things right, and freed to begin your journey of healing in the safe context of your relationship with Jesus - whether or not that person ever repents, or is punished, or is ordered by a court to pay you recompense etc etc. YOU are FREED!

NOW do you see?

You don't have to enforce justice, because God has got Justice covered one way or another. "Vengeance is MINE says the Lord God Almighty"!

And, as far as that hurt goes, it has not gone un-noticed by your Heavenly Father. All you need to do, is to take that issue or pain to your Heavenly Father who loves you, and ask Him to help you heal. The healing does not come before the forgiveness. God offers you a basis on which to forgive. *Then* you can begin healing and letting go of your anger, bitterness, resentment, frustration, sadness ...

So what about things where legal action should be taken? Let me say loud and clear - if the person who violated you did something illegal, then in some cases, pressing charges is optional. But if it was something horrible, especially if it was a sexual violation or if it involved a child then it is my opinion that it is RIGHT for you to press charges in our legal system - not out of revenge, but to restrain the person from repeating their sin against someone else, AND for the *benefit* of the offender. Many people only realize they can and should repent when they are punished for their crime. Some people will never repent. But others will, when placed in the context of realizing how much damage they did to someone. Did someone steal from you? Is a tenant refusing to vacate your property? Did someone hit your car? Is an ex refusing to pay child support? There are thousands of examples. It is not un-christian to press charges in our legal system, *if they are legitimate*. Personal forgiveness is a separate (though related) matter. And when you forgive, it will make HOW you engage with this person in the legal system very different. You can have compassion or pity for them in their lost state. You can have peace instead of pain, and gentleness instead of venom.

CHAPTER 7

THE HOW OF FORGIVENESS

After learning about the *what is* and the *benefits of forgiveness*, hopefully you are both eager and more capable of doing the *work of forgiveness*. This is where we'll bring everything together. I was tempted to give you this first, then work through it. But I think that by working through it and giving you this as the follow up summary is going to make it redundant and obvious instead of confusing. So in the end, Jesus gives us the "how" of forgiveness, but does so in His style, not the Webster Dictionary style.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES. PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU

True and complete forgiveness is to love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you. This is good news! Much of what we think forgiveness is (as we discussed - reconciliation, healing, etc) is not forgiveness. Those things may be attached to forgiveness, and we may need to give forgiveness in order to get to them, but those things themselves are not required first. Forgiveness is its own thing first. So, I have become convinced that forgiveness is defined by Jesus Himself, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you". This may not yet make sense, but by the end of this section, I am hopeful that it will.

STEP 1. LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

No matter what, we are called to see our offenders as people who need to experience *God's* forgiveness and His love. I believe that the ultimate act of human love, is to go to our Heavenly Father on behalf of someone who has sinned against us, and say, "*I forgive them. Please wipe this offense off their record.*" just as Christ did on the cross on behalf of those who nailed Him there. Forgiveness is to release the person from the debt created by their sin against you, and ask GOD to forgive them as well.

You see, in God's justice system, all offenses are against at least 2 parties, one of which is always God Himself. Whether someone violates the planet, themselves, or another human, all of this is God's artwork, created by God in Love. Think of it this way: if someone were to come into your house and destroy a painting that you had painted, they do harm to both the painting and to you, its creator. If someone harms your son or daughter, they harm both the child and you, the one who loves that child the most. Likewise, every violation (or 'sin') is a violation of the one who was harmed, and the Creator. So even before you, yourself "FEEL" like you've forgiven someone, you CAN perform the WORK of forgiveness by asking God to forgive the person. And, even if that person never comes to know Jesus, God will forgive them of that particular sin against you, because you asked, and YOU are in Christ, and He has given you His Authority to do so! (This should sound familiar now).

Matthew 16:17-19 records when Jesus predicted that He would give authority to Peter and the disciples to act with HIS own authority. Then in Matthew 18:15-18 we find the famous quote where Jesus says, "whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." But this is not about a "name-it-claim-it" theology!! This passage is in the CONTEXT of forgiveness and church discipline (which is never for the purpose of shame or harm, but in the hopes that the church discipline will help the person to repent and return into fellowship with God).

Citizens of Jesus' Kingdom have the AUTHORITY to forgive! Jesus has given it to you. You can only forgive that which has been done to YOU, but you can in fact, forgive. We partner with God in all things, and most especially in forgiveness.

Forgiveness is to release our charges against a person from our own queue, and from God's. You may take someone to court, and the court may put them in jail. You may cut off a relationship. You may guard your heart. But whether rapist, murderer, bully, a parent trapped in addiction, a coworker, a negligent spouse, a rude driver or a cranky store clerk ... ultimately, the act of forgiveness is the act of lifting the person up to our Heavenly Father and saying, "I release them TO you. Lord, forgive them ... no really! Based on the work of Christ on the cross, I release the debt this person owes to me."

This may not sound like good news at first, but actually, it is VERY good news! You see, all the crap that we have entangled with forgiveness - our pain, emotions, hurts, confusions, anger ... all of that can be dealt with separately ... which is quite freeing in the work of forgiveness itself. Forgiveness is relevant to our own healing, but forgiveness is *not dependent* on our healing. In other words, we can forgive first, THEN we are freed up to work with God on our healing. It is empowering. It may not feel empowering yet, but it is.

STEP 2 : PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU

Now, to truly come to a place of genuine forgiveness, we're called to take it 1 step further: We're to not only release the offender from their debt to us before God, we are also commanded to pray for their salvation and/or well being. It may sound something like this,

Heavenly Father, please forgive _____ for _____. I release my claim in your courts against him/her.

And please bless _____ and draw him/her close to you. I don't deserve your mercy, nor does _____. But as your child, I'm asking for it on their behalf. Thank you for your Love. Please help me heal. Amen.

This may not look all that profound, but whether you pray for the driver who just cut you off in traffic or the person who caused you to suffer PTSD from a severe trauma, this simple act IS in fact, deeply profound. And, for those bigger offenses, you'll realize how profound and powerful it is, because this simple, simple prayer is going to feel like the hardest thing you've ever had to do in your entire life. Trust me! I know it first hand!

But before we go any further, I want to give you a win!

So try it! Try praying this simple prayer for someone on your list. You can begin by forgiving a small offense, and work your way up to the big one(s).

JOURNAL

- ◆ Go to your list. Pray that prayer for someone (you can use my words or your own, but if its difficult, use my words). Then take a moment to journal about it under that person's name. Did you feel relief? Resentment? Joy? Communion with Christ? Take a moment. You're fighting a spiritual battle - and WINNING. Even if it hurts, YOU ARE WINNING!

If you're ready to take it 1 step further, here is an expanded prayer:

Heavenly Father, please forgive _____ for _____. I release my claim in your courts against him/her.

Please help me heal.

And please bless _____ and draw him/her close to you. I don't deserve your mercy, nor does _____. But as your child, I'm asking for it on their behalf. Thank you for your Love. Please send your Holy Spirit into their lives so that they can seek forgiveness from YOU - for all the sins they've committed whether they remember the sin they committed against me or not. Lord, do not count this one against them. Forgive them."

Praying this may be horribly difficult, but it is our ultimate calling.

CHAPTER 8

THE FORGIVENESS JOURNAL

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

So far, if you've prayed that God would forgive someone, you've been obedient to Christ. If it was painful to even choke out "God please forgive them," the questions that follow are essential to wrestle through. I cannot emphasize this enough: journal about these questions. If you hate journaling, take them to a therapist. If you don't have the money or time, or don't want to go to therapy, take them to a very trusted friend or mentor.

You may only be able to answer one question per day, or even per week. But for your own good, and the good of those in your life, work through them one way or another.

This is a template you can use over and over. You can find a blank version at the beginning of this book that you can copy freely. Use your notebook or journal and take as much time as you need. Some infractions will be easy to forgive. Others may take a long time. But one thing I know for certain: forgiveness becomes easier the more you practice it. True forgiveness is profound and life changing, yet simple once it is unburdened by everything that is not actually forgiveness.

NOTE: Please offer forgiveness to yourself when offenses feel hardest to release. This is real work. You need God's help to forgive. That is part of why it is so healthy to do this with Him, even if it takes time. If crimes were committed against you, He knows. He understands this is not easy. So do not mix self abuse or self judgment into this process. It is already hard enough. Keep working. Keep asking God to walk with you. Keep moving forward, and watch what happens.

THE FORGIVENESS JOURNAL ... WITH EXPLANATIONS

Who do you need to forgive?

Name one person or group you're working on, not your entire list.

What did they do, or not do?

Or What are they doing, or not doing? Be as detailed as possible.

What do you believe they robbed from you? Examples: time, money, reputation, opportunity, virginity, safety, pleasure, security, something tangible like a car or vase, the love of someone, peace, sanity, a relationship, a job.

How has their offense affected you? This may feel abstract, so think of a physical injury. You tell a doctor, "My knee hurts." They ask, "What does it feel like?" If you keep saying "I don't know, it just hurts," they have little to work with. But if you say, "When my knee stays bent, I can't straighten it. It's stiff, painful, and swollen," now they have useful information. They can ask better questions, run tests, and recommend treatment.

Healing requires details. It helps to consider how the offense has affected you.

Why does this hurt? What pain did this cause?

Do not skip this.

Free-writing can help. Writing opens processes in your brain that often stay locked. If you build the habit of journaling through hard things, you may be surprised by what surfaces. Meditation can also bring insight.

Here's a personal example. A company I did contract work for went bankrupt and never paid my final invoice of over \$10,000. That was three months of my tight budget at the time. At first I wrote: "It hurt because it put me into a financial tailspin. I was a single mom supporting three teens. I became stressed and depressed. My children were affected, which hurt me most." For example, one night I wanted to treat my son to french fries. I checked my credit card and only had \$75 left, with a bill over \$100 coming soon. I stayed home and cried instead.

But that still did not answer why it hurt. So I asked again, and eventually I realized the deeper pain was fear. I feared losing my home. I feared not being able to feed my children. I feared defaulting on bills. This hit a core human fear: survival.

It also created stress and confusion. I became short-tempered. My mind cycled between chaos and depression. It strained my relationship because my partner lost his job soon after. Instead of one of us being strong, we were both down at the same time.

So the offense was an unpaid invoice.

The immediate result was lack of funds.

The pain was fear, stress, depression, chaos, short temper, and relational strain.

Another way to approach this question is simple: identify the pain.

Example: someone cuts you off in traffic. Why does that hurt? Because your safety was at risk, or you were already late. Whether the pain is deep or minor, build the habit of asking, "Why did this hurt?" The faster you can identify it, the better.

Also, you may want to revisit question three. You might realize additional losses. For example: loss of peace in your home, your children's emotional stability, or your own inner peace because of guilt over how you responded.

What do you think your offender needs to do, or endure, to make it right?

Apologize? Pay you back? Go to jail? Experience the same pain?

What do you believe would make you feel better? That belief reveals what justice looks like to you.

We've touched on these before, but these are your six essential questions for difficult forgiveness. There are more questions for healing, and they overlap. In one sense, you can forgive someone simply by praying:

God, I still hurt, I'm still mad, I still have all sorts of stress and emotions concerning this violation. But in obedience, I ask you to forgive this person and don't count this thing they've done to me, against them. Please bring them into your family (if they are not yet) (or) Please help them to draw ever closer to You. *Please Bless Them*. Now that I've forgiven them in the spiritual realms, and disarmed the enemy in my life and in that person's life over this particular violation, Holy Spirit, please bless *me* and help me to heal.

That is the short form: The ultimate, most simple and essential act of forgiveness is to pray a simple prayer basically saying, "God, do not count this particular sin against this person. Please forgive them. Now, please help me to forgive them genuinely from my core, and please help me to heal." Anybody can do that for any violation at any time and you have obeyed Jesus! It sounds crazy and you might not accept that as truth yet, but that's it.

... Then comes the healing process.

HOW TO PRAY FOR YOUR ENEMIES

You're probably sick of me repeating myself about praying for your enemies. But it is intentional. I want you to hear it so many times that you actually remember it, and it becomes part of your subconscious approach to things. In the case of forgiving an enemy/abuser/persecutor, love is to forgive them and to pray for them. So for that purpose, ask yourself the following questions after you have asked God to forgive them :

- **What does this person need** (you may know, or you may have an educated guess or better yet - ask God to lead your thoughts on how to pray for them). Pray that God would bless them with that! Whether it is salvation, or has to do with finances, career, family, health ... a successful surgery, a restored relationship, a safe trip ... whatever you can think of. Pray BLESSINGS over their life!! This is LOVE! (Even if you never see or speak to them again - you can pray for their good!).
- Praying for your offender's good is all that is REQUIRED. However, I hope that you can come to a place of healing where you can actually take it even one step further, where you can both pray for the person's good, and also DO something to share the love of Jesus with them - even though they totally don't deserve it. Whether that is to visit them in prison and share the gospel with them, or mail them a bible or a book ... Or bring them a Starbucks at work (exactly the way you know that they order it), I just want to put it in your head that DOING an act of kindness is an *option* - regardless of how they respond. They may come into the Kingdom of Life by way of your action ... or they may hate you all the more. Who knows. Their response is really not your concern. Your ultimate concern is that YOU do what YOU are commanded to do by your King: Love Your Enemies.
- Bonus: when we do this incredibly difficult task of loving our enemies, we will, as Jesus explains in Matthew 6:20-21, "store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

MEDITATIONS FOR FORGIVENESS THAT LEAD TO RELEASE

IF THIS PERSON IS A CHRISTIAN, VISUALIZE THIS...

You are at the foot of the cross. You have placed the book listing all of your sins at Jesus' feet. God has declared you to be righteous and forgiven as your book is covered by the drops of Jesus' blood. God has now adopted you as His own daughter or son.

Look to your right. There is the person you need to forgive. They too, are laying their book of sins at the feet of Jesus. In that book, there is a line ... perhaps a paragraph or an entire chapter about how they wronged you. God is declaring them righteous and forgiven as their book becomes covered in Jesus' blood. Can you trust God, in His infinite wisdom, with this? Can Jesus' blood shed for that person *be enough*?

Can you gratefully receive forgiveness for your own sins but deny that person the same joy? Look at your Savior! Look at His hands, His feet ... they were pierced for you ... and pierced for your offender. Do not add to *your* book of sins by holding your brother or sister liable for sins now covered by Jesus' blood.

What will you pray here?

IF THIS PERSON IS NOT A CHRISTIAN...

We are called to pray for those who persecute us.

Lord Jesus, have mercy on this person who has done me such harm! Their violation is in no way bigger than the violations You endured while on earth. Yet, on the cross, You asked our Heavenly Father to forgive the people who put you there! Oh Jesus, give me true forgiveness. Please reveal yourself to this person who violated me. They need their sins forgiven as mine were! Please lead them to Yourself in repentance - whether or not they ever repent to me! Please bless this person and guide this person in a new life of righteousness instead of sin. Make their life a testimony of your love!

IF YOU CANNOT YET DO EITHER OF THOSE THINGS, CAN YOU PRAY THIS PRAYER?

Heavenly Father, I am not ready to begin forgiving _____ for _____.

I am hurt and feel _____. However, I know that you call your children to let your light shine through us, and forgiveness is your greatest act of love. You have loved me so much that you've forgiven ALL my offenses against you and against others. Please live through me and empower me to forgive _____. I don't know what that will look like or feel like, but I know that You can do it. And, by forgiving _____, I will be making a great blow against the foothold that demonic forces have in my life from this offense. Thank you for your massive love! Amen

After praying this - try again to pray for your enemy. If you cannot, ask daily for God to help you to do so.

VISUALIZATION FOR FORGIVENESS AND HEALING:

Picture the person you need to forgive

Picture their offense(s) against you as a dagger dripping with *your* blood

Picture yourself walking to the cross where Jesus hung.

Place the dagger beneath him at the foot of the cross

See the blood from his feet drip on to the dagger.

Hear him declare "it is finished"

You then look down and realize that you are still bleeding where the dagger stabbed you.

(If the offense was physical or if you're having physical repercussions from the offense - stomach aches, head aches, etc, OR whatever part of your body cringes in pain when you think about this offense - picture that the dagger stabbed you in that place on your body.)

Look up at where the cross was ... now there is a brilliant light.

Christ stands at the center - beautiful - made of light and dressed in white.

Ask Him, "please heal me where the dagger stabbed me"

Feel his healing hands of love.

Release your pain into HIS care. ...

and whatever happens next is between you and Jesus.

CHAPTER 9

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO ASK FOR FORGIVENESS

The majority of this book is, for obvious reasons, about how to forgive. But we must be diligent to also ask for forgiveness. I'll make this section brief, and end with a true story that exemplifies this with a miraculous outcome, Praise God!

GUILT AND SHAME ARE DIFFERENT.

Recognizing that you are guilty of something (be it a small infraction or a major crime) is just recognizing a fact, a piece of data. And, when you recognize you are guilty of something, your *responsibility* is to ask for forgiveness - both from the person(s) you harmed (again, be it small or big) and from God. You can't just ask God for forgiveness. Jesus is clear about this. Matthew 5:23-24 is within the context of "The Sermon On The Mount", and Jesus says, *"If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift"*. This is why Catholics and Orthodox participate in "Confession" before they take Eucharist (Communion). As a protestant, I must remind myself to do likewise, even though it is not a formality. In other words, even if you are about to ask for forgiveness from God but you have not yet asked for forgiveness from the person you harmed, go do that first! Then, come back and commune with God. Now, the person you harmed may not forgive you. But *you* have done your part. You repented and asked for forgiveness, and attempted to reconcile. And, what Paul explains is, *"as far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men"*. So you need to do your part, but that is all that you can do.

One quick example. I was at a pastors luncheon, and across the room I saw my 10th grade math teacher. Her husband is (apparently) a pastor (I did not know that). I couldn't stand my math teacher. I thought she was out to get me because I asked too many questions. And, I honestly thought she was great at math but really bad at teaching it. I have said many unkind words about her over the years (when recalling high school stories). So when I found out we were going to take communion, I found a moment to stop at her table and ask for her forgiveness. She didn't recognize me at first (it had been 30 years, after all) and certainly carried no ill will! But I confessed that I had said unkind things about her when I was in high school and wanted to ask for her forgiveness before communion and of course she gave it to me, with a smile. Now, had I thought of that infraction at a time she was not present, I would've asked God to forgive me and asked Him to remind me to "look her up" so to contact her, and I would have proceeded with communion. I believe that any time I'm in prayer/worship/communion and God brings someone like that to mind, it is intentional. So I need to respond obediently, even if its not that exact moment.

WARNING: If you repent and your victim does not forgive you, you could become bitter about that - which would mean that you need to forgive that person for not forgiving you (ugh). So, before you ask, do yourself a favor and mentally prepare that they may or may not forgive you and you will be FINE either way. If you prepare yourself then you can avoid the bitterness and sin of unforgiveness (ironically).

Now, many times we recall things so far in our past, or the person has passed away or is long gone from our lives ...there are many instances where we can't even contact a person to whom we were unkind or violated in some way. Or, what you're recalling is a pattern of sin that is long gone, or the sin was at perfect strangers you'll never see again. In many cases we cannot repent to the person(s), so that's not what Jesus is talking about here. But, just as people in recovery programs "take inventory" and then "make amends" with those who were harmed during their season of addiction, we too can (and perhaps "should") approach our past harms to others in that way. Also, if there is anything current, then that is definitely within the scope of this command as well.

SHAME IS A BEAST OF EPIC PROPORTIONS.

Shame comes in many forms, but in this context, shame is when you are guilty, but instead of owning it and going to the person to repent and attempt to make things right or reconcile, shame leads you away from the repentance by fear and separation. Shame is why we hide from the person we wronged. It is why we feel embarrassed over something - even if that thing is simply a mistake and not even a sin (like tripping on some stairs in front of people, or striking out when you're playing baseball, or saying something that makes people laugh at you in class). Shame can be mild or devastating. And shame NEVER comes from God. Shame is a tool from demons, not Holy Spirit.

You see, when Holy Spirit brings your guilt to mind, Holy Spirit will encourage you to repent and reconcile - both to the person and to God. But shame produces a fear response, driving us into hiding. A faith response is to trust that a loving Father might have to discipline you or correct you (for your own growth) but will never cast you away or humiliate you or harm you.

SHAME IN ACTION

I was given a grant from a Christian foundation to execute a project. Right after I received the check, everything that could go wrong, did. My life hit a huge, chaotic, overwhelming situation that knocked the wind out of me. And, each of the 3 women I'd recruited to help me execute this project all had things happen that derailed their ability to start working on the project as well. So I didn't cash the check. I held on to it and was going to cash it when I knew we could begin working ... but fast forward about 6 months later, and I just gave the check back to the foundation.

I have a personal relationship with the Executive Director of that foundation. But for about a year, I did not speak to her even once. I was so humiliated that I'd not executed the project. I was embarrassed, I felt like a failure or worse, a fraud. And though I knew with my entire being that she would forgive me, I just couldn't get myself to pick up the phone to set up a meeting to talk about what happened, and restore our personal relationship.

But then (Thank God) I saw that she was going to be the speaker at a monthly lunch-meeting of pastors that I attend. I was actually going to skip that month but when I saw that she was the speaker, I made sure to go. And praise Jesus, as I was parking my car, I saw her and her associate getting out of hers. So I intercepted them in the parking lot, and immediately began apologizing and explaining. And you know what she did? She gave me a giant hug and told me to call her assistant and set a meeting at the first available time.

That could have been accomplished months earlier, but because of shame, I hid instead of repented. And whether it is between you and another person, or you and God, when you see shame creeping into your mind, KICK IT OUT! It is a deplorable tool of Satan to separate and destroy. A predator will target an animal straggling behind the pack or separated from the herd. Our demonic predators love shame because it leads us to separate ourselves from God and/or from other people.

So when you feel shame, and it's urge to hide, fight it head on! Defy it! Do not allow shame one ounce of space in your life! Because even if you repent to someone, and your repentance to that person is met with anger or the refusal to forgive, you are only responsible for your own actions, not theirs. Do NOT repent to someone expecting them to forgive you, or their unforgiveness can compound the problem. Give them time and space to heal after you have repented. But realize that you can only do your part. So, you can repent to them, then to God, and then pray for relationship healing if that is what you hope for. And, you can WORK for healing in the relationship if it is one that matters to you! Do your part, all the while, trusting God to do His.

A TRUE STORY OF FORGIVENESS, REPENTANCE, & SALVATION!

I'm going to end with one of the most beautiful stories of forgiveness that I've witnessed. I hope it brings you additional enlightenment, hope, and courage. Here I can use real names because this friend tells this story openly and often, and it has an amazing outcome.

Jim and my dad met in college and have been best friends ever since. Jim grew up in coal-country Pennsylvania. His dad was a very mean drunk. He beat his wife and Jim. So Jim took out his anger on the football field, and became a full scholarship football player at ASU, and was recruited to NFL training camp (though was cut on the very last day). He was a scrappy, 5'7 fighter who was feared (literally feared) by every football player at ASU after he knocked out on someone twice his size who started a fight with him. In his Jr or Sr year of college, Jim became a Christian and the angry man became the most kind and gregarious man I have ever met in my life. Hanging out with him and my dad is what taught me how to make people feel like a million dollars. He showed me by action, how to treat a homeless person with the same respect as the president of a company. To this day, I've never met anyone like him. He genuinely loves everyone he meets, he actively (physically) defends women (even strangers), and if you put him in a room of 100 people he doesn't know, he'll be introducing people to each other within a half hour.

Now, apparently, before I was born, someone challenged Jim to love his dad. But his dad was the one person on the planet he truly hated. And, Jim thought he would never forgive his dad nor speak to him again. But the Holy Spirit convicted him. So he took a trip to see his dad ... and ask for his dad's forgiveness.

Yes, you read that right - the man who, as a young boy used to get in between his mother and father to take the beating intended for his mum, went to ask the abuser for forgiveness.

When Jim asked for his dad's forgiveness, his dad was shocked and said, 'why are you asking me for forgiveness? I should be asking YOU for forgiveness'. To which Jim replied, "I am asking forgiveness for all the hatred for you that I harbor in my heart. And even if you are 99% responsible for the situation, I need to own 100% my 1%. I need to own 100% of the hatred in my heart".

Now, I don't know if it was that day or some time later, but this encounter opened the door for Jim Jr to share the gospel with his dad, and Jim Sr. ended up giving his life to Christ! Jim Sr. stopped drinking, and when I met him a decade or 2 later, he was just as kind and sweet and jovial as his son! I would have NEVER EVER guessed that he had once been a raging, wife beating, alcoholic.

God is the God of Miracles!! And many of them start with forgiveness!!

CONGRATULATIONS

You have completed the Forgiveness Journal. You may feel some relief, you may feel a good bit of healing ... or you may feel like crap. But we are not commanded to FEEL any sort of way, ever. We are commanded to Love (action that may or may not be accompanied by feelings of affection) we are commanded to Do Good in this world (summary of all the commands, really), we are commanded to Worship (again, this is an action that may include a spectrum of emotions both pleasant and painful - but we worship and rejoice anyways!), we are commanded to pray, to rejoice, to be thankful ... all of which are actions that may have happy feelings connected to them ... or not. We are commanded to DO these things regardless of our emotions. So too, we are commanded to forgive. And if you were able to pray that prayer (or one of your own), out loud, in regards to your offender, you have obeyed the command to forgive.

NEXT STEPS

As of 2026, when this book is being published, I am beginning to write "From Forgiveness to Healing" and "Forgiveness as a Weapon of Spiritual Warfare". But, I suspect that this material will not be completed for a bit. Therefore, my intention is to blog on these matters until the books are done.

You may find my ongoing writing on my website and on Patreon.com. So, please sign up for updates through Designed4Victory.com, Patreon.com/D4V, or Instagram/Facebook (search D4V and Designed 4 Victory with Carolyn Scott).

If you would like to support my ministry, you can join my patreon.com community where you will have access to the entire book From Forgiveness to Healing in a variety of formats: a downloadable PDF, and an audio book presented as podcast episodes.

At Designed4Victory.com you can also read all my blog posts, donate to support my ministry, and contact me if you'd like counseling/coaching, or to book a Designed 4 Victory workshop (2 to choose from) or speak with me about being a speaker or panelist at your event.

You can learn more about my ministry of Holistic Health (nutrition, weight loss, fitness, relationship health, mental health, and more) under the Lordship of Jesus at Designed4Victory.com



APPENDIX

A FEW MORE QUESTIONS ANSWERED

FORGIVING THE DEAD

What if the person you need to forgive is no longer alive? There's a lot of speculation, but no solid intel, about what happens after death. Is it soul sleep until Christ's return? Do believers enter glory instantly? Do spirits linger in some limbo, interacting with the living? Or do they live in glory and somehow hear our prayers? Whatever your denomination teaches, that's not my focus here. I want to talk about the very real struggle of forgiving someone who has already moved past this version of life. A friend asked me to write about it, and I'm glad she did.

TIME

1. God is not bound by time.

Psalm 90:4 says, *"A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night."* And 2 Peter 3:8 reminds us, *"With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day."*

God invented time. Time is how we experience life, but even science recognizes that it's not an absolute. How much more must the Creator of all things sit outside what He Himself made? God doesn't experience time the way we do.

2. God hears the prayers of His children.

Some traditions even suggest that, in a sense, we can pray "backwards." Based on both Scripture and science, I think this is at least possible. For example: I sometimes pray for my grandfather, who (as far as I know) walked away from Christ after World War II. He died 25 years ago. Yet I still pray for his salvation, believing that God, who is present at all times and in all places, may count those prayers together—past and present. Could my prayers now contribute to a turning of his heart near the end of his life? I don't know. I'm not declaring a theological truth, just saying it's possible.

What I do know is that the enemy's ideas always pull us away from God—through things like fear, shame, sin, idolatry, or indulgence. But the Spirit's ideas always draw us closer. So if praying "backwards" doesn't effect change, but it still draws me nearer to God, and honors Him with my heart's desire, then I believe God is pleased. If this concept helps you, keep it. If it confuses you, toss it.

FORGIVENESS IS NOT BOUND BY LINEAR TIME

Here's what I *do* know for sure: you can forgive someone who has already died. There are two main ways to practice this.

First: Pray & Forgive "God, I forgive this person for this wrong, even though they are no longer living. Please do not hold this sin against them."

Because time is not linear for God, He can absolutely honor that. Do I know what this means in eternity? Not at all. But then again, I don't understand how my phone call bounces through outer space and back, yet I still use my phone!

Second: Begin to heal.

You will never hear that person apologize. You'll never hear them say "I'm sorry." But Jesus and the Holy Spirit will be your healer, comforter, and guide in this journey. All you need to do is ask God to forgive them, and healing can begin.

Here's a prayer to help:

Holy Spirit, I am confused and I am hurt. But I want to obey. So even though _____ is no longer alive, help me forgive—by releasing their debt against me, and by entering into the kind of forgiveness that heals. Please God, help me.

If you're ready, you can continue:

Heavenly Father, please forgive _____ for _____. Even if my heart hurts and my body resists, I ask in obedience: forgive them. And I forgive them too. Amen.

Remember, this is not magic, it's a process!

- Step 1 is to "love your enemy" by writing off the debt - to forgive the debt.
- Step 2 It is to "love your enemy" by praying for the one who has persecuted you.
- Step 3 through 100 is healing and anything else that comes as you move forward.

This is the same process as forgiving the living. The only difference is that reconciliation is no longer possible in this life. If the person was a Christ follower, reconciliation may come in eternity. But here and now, you won't hear an apology. You won't restore the relationship.

Your responsibility—to God and to yourself—is to forgive, so that you can move forward into healing from the wounds they left behind.

WHEN “LEGAL” ACTION IS REQUIRED

I'll mention this briefly. Some violations can be forgiven without your offender ever knowing it. Whether they are alive or dead, there are times you simply need to forgive without going to them or explaining how they harmed you. At other times, however, forgiveness involves action—either taking legal steps or giving the offender the opportunity to repent.

If someone has violated you according to the laws of your country, it is your right to press charges. In fact, if a crime has been committed, it is not just your right but your responsibility. Whether theft, rape, a car accident, or assault—you can pursue legal action and still forgive from your heart. These are two separate acts, just as forgiveness is distinct from reconciliation, and forgiveness is distinct from healing.

There is also a time for intervention within the Christian community—a practice sadly neglected in many churches today. In Matthew 18:15–17, Jesus instructs: “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”

This protocol applies in two scenarios. First, when someone is guilty of ongoing sin (such as an affair, abuse, racism, or alcoholism) that dishonors the name of Jesus. In such cases, the community must hold the person accountable on behalf of both the victims and Christ's reputation. Second, when someone is caught in an ongoing pattern of sin against you personally.

But I offer two cautions. This process is not for petty disputes or minor offenses, and it must never be used as a tool for vindication. Its purpose is to help a person trapped in sin repent and be reconciled to Jesus—for their own good and for the honor of our Savior and King. In all things, approach this process with respect and kindness, remembering that you too are a sinner. Treat others as you would want to be treated.

The protocol itself is straightforward. First, go to the person humbly and kindly, pointing out what you've observed and urging them to repent before God. If they refuse (or you feel unsafe going alone), take one or two others with you. If they still refuse to acknowledge their sin and change, bring the matter before the church leaders. Should they remain unrepentant even then, they are to be treated as unbelievers—unable to take communion or participate in the sacred rites of the church. This does not mean they must be cut off from community life or friendships, but their sin pattern must be addressed—for their sake - praying that they will eventually repent and be restored, and for the preservation of Christ's good name.

FORGIVENESS “BEHIND SOMEONE’S BACK”

You may be sensing some resentment towards these protocols because you feel like by forgiving you're ‘letting someone off the hook’ for what they've done. Well, in a sense, yes - you are (except for legal matters as we have discussed). But what you're actually doing is incredibly profound. You are removing an obstacle from this person's path to Christ. In all of the contexts where you will never receive an apology, never see ‘justice’ in this life, or cannot even let your offender know that you've forgiven them (because they are dead or long gone from your saved contacts, or you simply hurt too much to even speak to them, or it is unsafe for you to do so) I call this “Forgiving someone behind their back”.

Forgiveness “Behind Someone's Back” is not “Letting Them Off The Hook”

Forgiveness “Behind Someone's Back” is not “Shortchanging Them From An Opportunity to Repent”... well, if you do it right.

Your reluctance to forgive has to do with your perception of time, and what God is doing in you, through you, and in the world. Your reluctance is deeply connected to your desire to control the outcomes! (Remember this from the beginning of the book?)

Yours is not to decide “if someone needs to learn how to repent so that they can more easily do so with God” as one friend of mine stated was their reason for not forgiving before the person asked for it (sigh). That is God's work. Can your situation be a ‘teachable moment’ with someone? Sure. Does it HAVE to be? No. Your obedience is not dependent on anyone else's actions. You either obey God in this situation or you don't obey. You don't even have to understand the process! You could literally pray the prayer I gave you in chapter 1, over and over for each offense and be done. But most of us want understanding to go along with our obedience, thus the need for this book.

The Forgiveness Journal



CAROLYN SCOTT