

MY HEART SANK // REAL WORLD // PAID IN FULL // GRACE RELATIONSHIPS

# lifechange

THE FORGIVENESS ISSUE



**MAKING THINGS  
RIGHT**

**FREEDOM  
THROUGH  
FORGIVENESS**



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LifeChange Magazine is published by Weymouth Community Church in Medina, Ohio as a free gift to our community. The purpose of this publication is to share the life-changing principles of the Bible in a friendly, practical format. "The Forgiveness Issue" is the fourth of six LifeChange Magazines offering Christian, non-denominational perspective on life issues.

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#### MISS SOMETHING?

Previous issues of LifeChange can be downloaded from our website or requested from the church office. We have action teams available to assist you with overcoming stress, working through marriage and relationship problems, digging out of debt and now, the Forgiveness Team is available to share wisdom and help for those struggling to overcome the hurts of the past.

You can submit prayer requests and ask spiritual questions by visiting our website or calling our office. Our teams will gladly pray and help, regardless of your church affiliation.

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## GET CONNECTED TO LIFECHANGE

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# FULLY AND FINALLY FREE

Unforgiveness, also known as bitterness, is a lot like cancer. Once you've been hurt, and you don't think you could ever forgive the offending person, it begins to grow. Sometimes it is dormant and you get on with life, ignoring mild symptoms. Other times it rages throughout your body and mind to where you feel physically ill with anger and anxiety. Give bitterness enough time to fester, without treatment, and it will destroy you.

I lived this way for nearly eight years. One Thanksgiving I finally learned the truth: that I had to forgive if I was ever going to have real peace. I sent an e-mail extending forgiveness to the person who had hurt me, and when I hit "send," the e-mail wasn't the only thing I "sent." Along with it went my bitterness. I was immediately cured. No more hurt feelings, no more anger and anxiety. No reason to ever feel that way again. I've been bitterness-free now for over five years. And yes, I've been hurt and offended by others since, and I've made my

share of mistakes. But now things are different. I'm quicker to forgive and quicker to ask for forgiveness.

My prayer for this magazine is that it will help free someone who is chained down with anger, revenge and hatred; and perhaps also prompt someone who has hurt others to make things right. Within these pages you will read personal accounts of how unforgiveness has affected people's lives, and you'll get some practical advice on how to extend grace, and, if necessary, how to ask for it.

Whatever pain you may be suffering, and that whatever wrong has been done (to you or by you), there is hope. Forgiveness can't change your past, but it can dramatically change your future. You're not alone in the way you feel. There is a whole community of "survivors" who have found healing from the deepest of spiritual and emotional wounds. With the help of God, His truth in the Bible, and others who can walk alongside us on this journey, we can be fully and finally free.

**Jeff Brianas**  
Forgiveness Team Leader

**WHATEVER PAIN YOU MAY BE SUFFERING, AND THAT WHATEVER WRONG HAS BEEN DONE (TO YOU OR BY YOU), THERE IS HOPE. FORGIVENESS CAN'T CHANGE YOUR PAST, BUT IT CAN DRAMATICALLY CHANGE YOUR FUTURE.**



## WHY AM I GETTING LIFECHANGE?

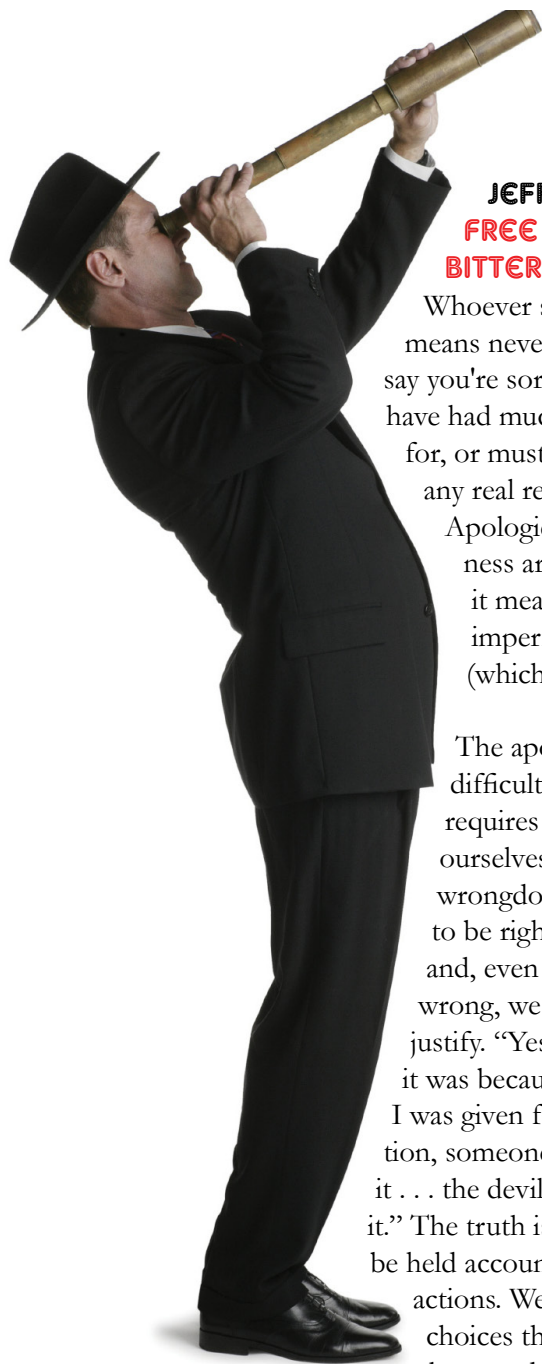
LifeChange is being sent out, free of charge, to every household in Medina, and a few surrounding areas as well. It has been written and designed right here in our community by members of Weymouth Church. We're not out to get anything from you, there's no obligation on your part at all. It's just a gift.

At Weymouth Community Church, we've seen time and time again how God changes lives through biblical principles. Our prayer is that by sharing these with our friends and neighbors, we can make a positive difference in Medina and beyond.

This is our fourth issue – previous issues have addressed money management, overcoming stress and enriching love relationships. If you would like back copies of LifeChange magazines, we would be happy to provide them as long as our supplies last. Or, if you like, you can download a digital version of each LifeChange at our website, [www.WeymouthChurch.com](http://www.WeymouthChurch.com).

Also, each LifeChange topic has a dedicated team of volunteers in Medina who can offer prayer, counsel or assistance. Feel free to call or email us for more information.





# PERSPECTIVES

## JCFF BRIANAS: FREE FROM BITTERNESS

Whoever said, "Love means never having to say you're sorry" must not have had much to be sorry for, or must not have had any real relationships!

Apologies and forgiveness are part of what it means to love imperfect people (which we all are.)

The apology side is difficult because it requires us to humble ourselves and admit wrongdoing. We want to be right all the time and, even when we are wrong, we find it easy to justify. "Yes I did it BUT it was because you did this, I was given false information, someone else started it . . . the devil made me do it." The truth is that we will be held accountable for our actions. We made the choices that resulted in hurt, and we owe it to

the other person to seek their forgiveness.

I've been blessed to have been married twice. Both are amazing women and I am truly blessed to have had such women in my life. Although there have certainly been times that I didn't feel that way. You see, both marriages ended in divorce.

My first marriage ended after eight years and a lengthy court battle filled with anger, accusations and bitterness. I was left feeling like a victim; hurt, offended and bitter.

Whenever I met someone else going through a divorce I would swap horror stories with them. At times I would try to be nice to her, but all the while there was anxiety and anger welling up inside and tearing me apart. I finally became convicted that I had to let go of everything and forgive. That was my first step toward freedom. Next, I knew I needed to apologize, so I wrote a letter to ask for forgiveness, confessing what I had done wrong.

My second marriage was different; it ended in an uncontested divorce after a year of separation following only five weeks of being married. I came home to an empty house. I was devastated and hurt but I did not feel the anger or bitterness. I simply wanted to understand why and make it right. After a year of trying to work through a plethora of family issues, I went ahead and granted the uncontested divorce. I still didn't think I was bitter - I just felt hurt and confused. My life was not going the way I had dreamed.

In the preparing to help people through LifeChange Magazine and the Forgiveness Team at the church, God showed me that I still did, indeed, have a root of bitterness growing in my heart. I had allowed anger to supercede my love for my ex-wife. And again, I found myself writing a letter of confession; being honest and admitting where I was wrong.

I don't exactly have a "happy ending" to my story, but I have experienced freedom from bitterness; and I know that God can bring healing to broken people.

## TIM VAN ARSDALE: IT STARTS WITH GOD

When we choose in our hearts to forgive and love someone who hurt us, we are not guaranteed they will do the same in return. What we are guaranteed is an overflowing love and forgiveness from our gracious Heavenly Father. And though it is not easy, the love and forgiveness He provides is so worth us forgiving those who have hurt us.

The power of God's Spirit can give us the strength to freely forgive. Forgiveness requires God's help because,

in ourselves, we can't do it. The process begins with Him. We love because God first loved us, and so we can forgive because the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus opened the door for God to forgive us and welcome us into His family. Are you ready for a lifechange? Begin by asking God for forgiveness, and then see what He does in your life. (You can stop in and meet Tim at Cups Cafe, 126 North Court Street in Medina. [www.cupscafe.org](http://www.cupscafe.org).)

## KORI STRATTON: DAILY FORGIVING

When my husband and I began our life together, we agreed we would never keep issues to ourselves. Like any marriage, there are trials that come and go, but the most important thing we do as a couple is talk and settle the issue before the end of the day.

Some of our problems have been more complex and we've needed more time to work things out, although I can say that we resolve most issues and forgive each other before we lay our heads down at night. We don't want walls to be built between us by bitterness or anger festering in our hearts. And, we've learned that we have to humble ourselves, as the Bible says, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as Christ has also forgiven you."

There are many times I have been so upset and have told myself, "There is no way I can forgive him! He doesn't deserve forgiveness!" But of course, if forgiveness was deserved, it wouldn't be forgiveness. God wants me to forgive my husband as Christ forgives me. I am still a sinner too, after all, and God has more grace toward me than I can imagine.

Forgiving is not a feeling, it is a choice -- to clean the slate of the offender and to leave the offense in the past. We attended a family camp last summer and learned this powerful truth: *Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die.* I know how much my spouse means to me and I don't want bitterness (the poison) to seep into our home. We are blessed to have each other and together we are working on honoring God in our marriage.

## ONECHURCH TWO LOCATIONS

Our mission is to share the life-changing truth of the Bible, in Medina and beyond. LifeChange Magazine is one way we hope to accomplish this mission, along with our Sunday services and community events. We are excited to announce that on September 11, 2011, we will be kicking off **LifeChange Church**, our new south campus, at Williams-on-the-Lake (near the Fairgrounds). That gives us two meeting places every Sunday morning that feature honest and practical Bible teaching, uplifting worship, children's church and prayer times. For each Sunday leading up to our grand opening, our startup team is meeting at our south campus at 10:30 to pray, study God's Word, build friendships and discuss our vision for LifeChange Church (guests are welcome). And, of course, our Weymouth services to the north of town are available as well, at 9:00 and 10:30 a.m.

If you do not already have a church home, we invite you to be our guest at either location. Visit [www.WeymouthChurch.com](http://www.WeymouthChurch.com) for directions, frequently asked questions, and to see our plans.



STEVE  
CANFIELD

# freedom through forgiveness leaving bitterness behind

It was like a dam broke loose—  
all the bitterness and resentment—  
and God set me **free**.

Corrie ten Boom, author of *The Hiding Place*, was taken captive and spent time in Nazi concentration camps during World War II. She tells stories of the filth and horrendous conditions, of how she and her fellow captives were herded like cattle, strip-searched, and abused.

The prisoners would intentionally let lice breed on their bodies, because the more lice they had, the less the guards would molest them. And in one of those brutal prison camps, Corrie's frail sister died.

After the war, God sent Corrie ten Boom on a mission of mercy. As she traveled through war-torn cities, she encouraged the residents to choose forgiveness. She would share the atrocities she had been through, implying, "If I can forgive, so can you."

In a meeting one night, a man she immediately recognized came walking down the aisle. He had been a particularly cruel guard in one of the camps. He didn't recognize her. (She was just another one of the cattle he'd herded through.)

Approaching Corrie, he said, "Fraulein, you don't know me, but I was a guard in one of those camps. After the war, God saved me. I wish I could go back and undo those years. I can't, but I've just been prompted by God to come tonight and ask you, would you please forgive me?" Then he extended his hand to her.

Corrie ten Boom said that for a moment her arms froze at her side. She couldn't move. Flashbacks rose vividly in her mind - all the atrocities, the death of her sister, the abuse . . . Then God's Spirit said to her, "Corrie, what have you been telling everyone else to do? As an act of your will, will you choose to forgive?"

She recalled, "I reached out my hand, and I put it in his, and I said, 'You're forgiven.'" She later reported, "It was like a dam broke loose—all the bitterness and resentment—and God set me free."

As I've traveled across North America challenging people to forgive, I've encouraged people to take these

five steps toward freedom. If you will take them in faith, I believe your life will be forever changed.

## 1. Make a list. •

*Make a list of everyone who has wronged you.*

If you've been harboring bitterness, this list won't be difficult to generate. Family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, former employers, pastors, ministry leaders...list whoever has caused you pain or grief. Be honest with God and with yourself. You can't take the steps of forgiveness if you haven't acknowledged the need.

## 2. Clear your conscience. ••

*Confess to God, and then the offender, any wrong responses you may have had (e.g. hatred, bitterness, gossip). (Acts 24:16)*

Jesus taught that we should deal with offenses quickly and personally. While we cannot control what happens to us, we are responsible for our *responses*. In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus lays out a simple plan to resolve conflicts with other Christians. When someone sins against you, first go and lovingly confront the guilty individual. If that meeting goes nowhere, have another one, this time with two witnesses. Finally, if the person refuses to repent, bring the issue to leaders of your church. (Notice what Jesus *doesn't* say: Share the issue as a prayer request with your small group, ask three friends for counsel, call the pastor and express concern, or vent to your spouse and kids.)

When we fail to walk through the process Jesus outlined, we disobey His direct command. If that's the situation you find yourself in, confess your wrongdoing to God and to others as necessary. Then go back and start at step one.

## 3. Thank God. •••

*Thank God for His ability to turn what others meant for evil into something good. (1 Thess. 5:18, Genesis 50:20, Romans 8:28)*

Like it or not, God has used the people on your list to mold you into the person you are today. The Bible says, "In everything give thanks," not just, "In the good times," or, "When you feel thankful." You might pray, "God, I don't fully understand



why I was hurt, but I trust You to restore me. As an act of my will, I thank You for these people and for whatever You can teach me through them as I work through this list." I'm not asking you to give thanks for sins that were committed against you. I'm asking you to give thanks for the fact that God is bigger than everyone else and their sin, and that He can take what others meant for evil and use it for good.

#### 4. Choose to forgive. •••••

*As Christ has forgiven you, fully forgive each offender. (Eph. 4:32)*

Make a commitment to clear the other person's record—forever. Whenever your mind brings up the offense, renew your forgiveness. Choose to never mention it again, just as we trust God to fully forgive the sins we have committed against Him.

After Jesus' instructions in Matthew 18, Peter asked the question that all of us wonder about: "How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" *Wouldn't that be pretty gracious, Lord?* Jesus answers, "Peter, I'm not asking you to forgive seven times. I'm commanding you to forgive seventy times seven times."

What? So, every time someone hurts us, we get out a little book and say, "Okay, that's the 432nd time, buddy; when we hit 491, you've got it coming!"? Obviously, Jesus is illustrating that there must be no limit to our forgiveness.

Most of us aren't wronged 490 times by the same person, but we do think about the wrong that was done that many times. We see reminders all around us; and every time, we have to choose between bitterness and forgiveness.

That's why I teach that forgiveness is not a one-time act. It's not that you just forgive somebody one time, and you say, "That takes care of that." It requires forgiving them every time you think about it—490 times. Or more.

#### 5. Rebuild relationships. •••••

*Confirm your love to the people on your list. (2 Cor. 2:8)*

Look for ways to return good for evil. We do this by investing positively in the lives of those who have

wronged us. You repay the damage they have caused, just as God sent His Son "while we were yet sinners" (Rom. 5:8). He came looking for us when we should have come looking for Him.

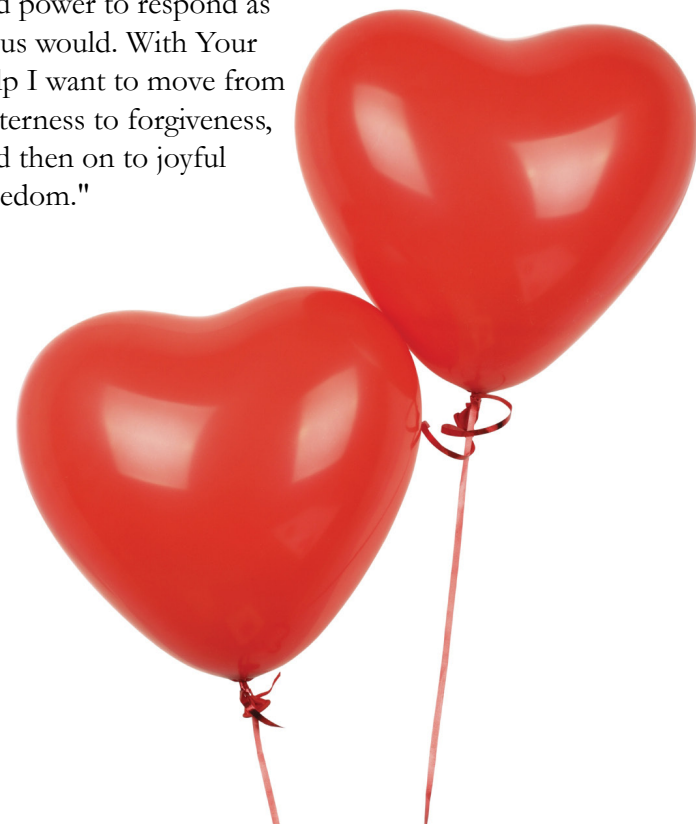
In Jacksonville, Florida, I met a woman whose husband had been stationed aboard the *USS Starke*. Years ago, the ship was fired on by an Iraqi jet fighter. Thirty-eight men were killed, including her husband.

She said, "God has shown me this week that I need to make the greatest investment where I have the greatest potential for bitterness." She continued, "My greatest potential for bitterness is toward the Iraqi people, because they killed my husband."

Her step of obedience? She sold her house, took her son, and moved to Iraq—to serve people with Christ's love.

I want to encourage you to take a moment to get alone with God. Perhaps He is speaking to your heart about bitterness, and you need to respond to Him.

"God, this was written for me. I've been bitter, and right now, I'm going to choose, as an act of my will, to forgive—to take these five difficult, necessary steps. I thank You for that person, for that circumstance, for that situation; and I choose to trust You for the grace and power to respond as Jesus would. With Your help I want to move from bitterness to forgiveness, and then on to joyful freedom."



# But I Can't



#### >The person who hurt me doesn't deserve forgiveness!

Actually, that's the whole point. If the person has to earn his way back into your favor, we wouldn't call it "forgiveness." Imagine if God measured His willingness to forgive you in this manner. (Ephesians 2:8-9) By forgiving someone, you turn them over to the justice of God. He will hold every human being responsible for their actions, good or bad. If you forgive, you'll be the one who goes free, not the offender. (2 Corinthians 5:10)

#### >I could never forget the evil that was done to me.

Whoever said that forgiveness equals forgetfulness must not have experienced much heartache in life. Forgiveness doesn't mean your mind erases the bad memories. It means that you choose not to "remember them against" the person—you choose not to bring up the issue before the offender or others, ever again. You must learn to live as if it is forgotten, just as God has done with your sin against Him. (Jeremiah 31:34)

#### >My painful feelings are too intense.

Letting go is an act of the will, not of the emotions. We will never be free from anger until we first make the decision to release the individual from his debt to us. It may take time, but feelings of forgiveness and the ability to move on will come, as we choose daily to follow Christ. (Colossians 3:12-15)

#### >The person never said he was sorry.

Your willingness to obey God shouldn't depend on someone else's confession of wrongdoing. Forgiveness is an attitude, a way of life. Jesus commanded us to love our enemies, to do good to those who harm us. Decide that you will extend forgiveness to anyone who hurts you, even if they remain unrepentant. (Luke 6:35-36)

Steve Canfield has over 20 years of experience ministering in local churches across America as a revivalist with Life Action Ministries. This article has been adapted for LifeChange with permission. Learn more about what Steve does at [www.LifeAction.org](http://www.LifeAction.org).



# PARENTCONNECT

teaching kids about forgiveness/laurel linden, mother of 3 & r.n.

Kids may be better at forgiving than grown-ups! If you've ever watched little boys play, fight, apologize, and go right back to saving the galaxy, you know what I mean. Verbalizing, "I forgive you" may come easy to our kids when prompted, but it's our responsibility to teach them what it truly means.

**PRE-K** -- It is not uncommon at a play-group to have multiple episodes of, "Now, say you're sorry to him!" However, we may be glossing over the reciprocating forgiveness part. True forgiveness means erasing a wrong some one else has written on our moment. The best way we can teach this to our preschoolers is by doing it ourselves. When your little one comes to you with a tearful, "I sowwy, Mommy", it is helpful to actually verbalize the words, "I forgive you" and then to act accordingly. Put on your happy face and quit reminding your kid of how he messed up. This role-models for him how you want him to forgive others and not stay sour.

**SCHOOL-AGE** -- Children need to learn to forgive before teenage drama kicks in. When your child has done something wrong and is suffering the consequences of appropriate punishment, be clear with her that you are not still angry. Tell her you have forgiven

her, but punishment is still due. Unclench your jaw, unfurl your brow and politely explain that your consequences now have the goal of teaching her to do the right thing in the future. If we forgive our kids without them having to jump through hoops first, they will see that they should forgive others the same way.

**TEENS** -- Which friends is your teen on speaking terms with this week? What a mess! If you've ever been burdened by someone carrying a grudge against you, you know it is not a pleasant thing, so don't let your teens do it to others! Sit down with them and work on some multiplication. Show them how a disagreement between them and a friend involves two people for one moment. Every person they bring into the loop, and everyday that they keep a cold heart, multiplies the amount of damage done. Give your teen the responsibility to stop the spread of that damage on day one! Don't enjoy the gossip your teen shares with you about another teenager. If your teen is having a hard time forgiving, take them to the Bible. Show them how much God has forgiven them and the price it cost Him. Ask them to extend just a fraction of that grace to others.

## IDEAS

- Teach young kids to respond with "I forgive you" when someone says, "I'm sorry," just like "Thank you" should result in "You're welcome."
- Model forgiveness by asking for it when you do

wrong in front of your children.

- If your teen has anger issues, get them involved in something that helps them get the focus off of themselves and broadens their perspective of others' needs.

## What if they won't forgive?

There's no reason for you to remain in bitterness or guilt just because someone else isn't ready to let go of theirs. If you have asked for forgiveness in humility, and attempted to do whatever it would take to right the wrong that has been done, you've done your part. You should continue to pray for the offended person, that somehow your relationship would be restored in the future.

## When should I apologize?

Jesus taught people coming into the Temple that they should leave their gifts and go make things right with their offended brothers before they come back to present their gift to the Lord. The Apostle Paul said: "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry." The best time to deal with offenses is right now, today - before bitterness takes root.

## Can I really forgive and forget?

God didn't design us with the ability to intentionally "unremember" something, so it may be that long after you have extended forgiveness, you will still have that memory surfacing in your heart. Each time your

mind wanders that way, reaffirm your commitment to forgive and to never bring up the issue again. You may not "forget" mentally, but once you have forgiven you can move on with your life, and as time goes on, you may find yourself thinking about the offense far less often. You can choose to treat the person as if you have forgotten.

## Do I really need God's forgiveness?

"Well, nobody's perfect!" Although this generalization is true, our sins against God are all very specific and personal. They can't simply be shrugged off with "everybody's doing it" logic. Think of this: Have you ever told a lie? Have you ever stolen something, even a small item? Have you ever used God's name flippantly? Have you ever lusted in your heart after another person's spouse? These questions represent just four of the Ten Commandments! Our sins put us in grave danger of eternal justice - but God is rich in mercy and forgiveness toward anyone who asks Him for it. Without God's forgiveness, we would stand on Judgment Day as guilty sinners who have broken multiple divine laws on countless occasions. We desperately need His mercy! Learn more in the Bible by reading Romans 3, 1 John 1:9, Revelation 21-22, and Romans 5:1-10.

## OF DEBTS

The Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. He couldn't pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt.

But the man fell down before his master and begged him, 'Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.' Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt.

But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it,'

he pleaded. But his creditor wouldn't wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full.

When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt.

That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.

- JESUS, MATTHEW 18:23-35

## & DEBTORS



grace

relationships

IN DALE BURKE

After God created man and woman, one of their earliest acts as Earth's first human inhabitants was to mess up. *Huge*. Think about it. They were set for eternity. The only perfect people to ever live on the planet (until Jesus, of course) are settled into the perfect job tending the coolest zoological park ever created. And God dropped by for fellowship every day.

It was the perfect start to a beautiful love story!

But rather than living happily ever after, Eve took a taste of sin, Adam followed suit, and the blaming and shaming started. Now, if the story ended there, we'd all be in permanent trouble. The good news is that the entire rest of God's recorded story, all 1,185 chapters, is an account of His redemption plan - His plan to put these two lives, and the lives of countless couples since, back together.

And at the heart of this relational repair job is God's specialty - forgiveness. It's all about forgiveness - why we need it, how God extends it, what happens when we receive it, and how we're to extend it to others.

### a MODEL for GIVING GRACE

God understands our hurts because we hurt Him daily. We fall short of His expectations. We make promises we do not keep. Our sin truly causes God to grieve. But He, the injured One, the innocent and holy One, still holds out forgiveness. Believe me, Jesus knows what you are going through when you are faced with the need to forgive!

Ephesians 4:30 says that we're not to "grieve the Holy Spirit of God." And then verses 31-32 give the context: "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and

slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

When we rip each other apart and refuse to forgive each other, it breaks God's heart. And there's a reason these wounded relationships break God's heart: it grieves Him to think that His children, the offspring of the God of grace, refuse to give the one gift He lavishes on us - forgiveness.

We find a great model for both giving and receiving forgiveness in the New Testament letter to the Hebrews:

And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more. Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin. Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (10:17-22).

This text hints at four aspects of grace giving. Let's look at each one:

**1. Grace chooses not to keep score.** "I will remember no more" (v. 17) is what God says of our sinful ways. What makes this statement so significant is that it's a choice to put our offenses out of His mind. It's not that we literally forget past offenses. That's impossible. But when we say we forgive, we're expressing a decision to let go of the offense and a refusal to hold it against the offender anymore. Forgiveness of this sort is a great gift of love.

**2. Grace chooses not to be demanding.** When the text says, "Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin" (Hebrews 10:18), God is telling us that grace is unconditional. Forgiveness is not like a down payment with future installments due. Add demands like, "I will forgive you if . . .," or, "I will forgive you when . . .," then you're no longer offering grace. You're proposing a deal. You're requiring a wage or some kind of payment before you will act, and grace will have no part of such an arrangement. And neither should you, if you're hoping to see forgiveness do its divine work

in your marriage.

Let me offer one clarification. I'm not saying that you can't honestly express your hurts and expectations. God certainly communicates His disappointments with the past and His expectations for our relationship in the future. But He motivates us to respond by engulfing all of this honest communication in grace and unconditional love. Your husband or your wife needs that kind of out-of-this-world grace.

**3. Grace chooses not to withhold love.** After God said "their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more" (v. 17), He followed this promise with an invitation to reconciliation: "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus . . . let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith" (vv. 19, 22). God not only wants to encourage you to trust His forgiveness, but He wants you to draw near to Him so that your relationship can get back on track!

Likewise, a grace response to an offense in our marriage is to invite our spouse back into a reconciled love relationship. The signal here is clear. You, the offended one, are to be taking the initiative and inviting repair, renewal, and reconciliation. Rather than withholding love, you extend it, selflessly.

As you consider an area or an incident in your marriage that has required forgiveness, and you feel you've found the grace to extend that forgiveness, it's healthy to ask yourself, "Do I wish my husband well?" "Do I wish my wife well?" If the answer is yes, then you've exercised grace. That's exactly how God forgives us when we sin against Him, and it's our model for forgiving each other as well.

### when FORGIVENESS COMES to LIFE

We've all endured offenses from people. Often we feel justified in lashing out at them. We feel angry - and rightfully so. At least that's what we tell ourselves. After all, isn't that how justice is done? It sure feels like the best way to respond. At least it feels good to vent! There's no doubt about it - forgiveness runs absolutely counter to our nature! It's like the dentist telling you



to relax as he's about to drill a cavity into your tooth. Your natural response is to grip the arms of the chair and hang on for dear life.

And when we've injured the one we love, a battle rages within as we try to rationalize our behavior and minimize our responsibility. The idea of coming clean and throwing ourselves at the mercy of the one we've offended, expecting nothing in return, flies in the face of our senses of pride and self-preservation.

But all kinds of positive options become available when you choose to give and receive forgiveness - anger can be diffused, dignity can be preserved, gratitude can grow, peace can be restored, joy can be retrieved, confidence can be rebuilt, and trust can find a fresh footing. And that's not a bad return on your investment! So give forgiveness generously, just as it is delivered daily to you from above.

a ROADMAP to RESTORATION

Sometimes it seems the only lesson in life that's harder than learning how to forgive is learning how to receive forgiveness. God offers forgiveness, but for us to be restored and reconciled, for the relationship to be healed, the guilty party must have the right spirit. The Bible calls it *repentance*. If you've offended your spouse and are seeking forgiveness, here is a road map for

authentic restoration:

**Come with a humble heart.** If I've wronged my spouse, the only appropriate way to approach them is the way I approach God when I'm seeking a restored relationship with Him: "Be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Luke 18:13).

**Come with a repentant heart.** If I've wronged my spouse, I must go with awareness of my sin and a willingness to walk away from it. Ask your spouse for help in figuring out what kind of changes need to take place.

**Come with a committed heart.** After enduring our sinful behavior, it would be perfectly normal for a husband or wife to wonder whether those offenses revealed cracks in the foundation of the relationship. Assure your spouse of your unconditional, lifelong commitment to your marriage.

**Come with a loving heart.** Do not expect all the blessings of grace to be instantly restored to your relationship! Let your spouse know that you mean business when it comes to your marriage and that you are willing to work on being the kind of husband or wife you need to be.

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resentment&retaliation

**D**o you expect to get hurt in life? I do. I certainly don't ask for it, but I know that pain is unavoidable in this fallen world.

The same is true for you. Everyone gets wronged and offended by others. There's no way around it.

That much is obvious. But I want to challenge you to consider another observation that may not be quite so easy to accept: The outcome of our lives is not determined by what happens to us *but by how we respond to what happens to us*.

Of course, we will be affected by the circumstances that form the backdrop of our lives. They will carve grooves into our hearts that will always be part of our experience. But those circumstances, horrendous as they may be, do not have the power to control the outcome of our lives.

As long as we believe that our happiness and well-being are determined by what happens *to us*, we will always be victims, because so much of what happens to us is beyond our control. Our only hope lies in realizing that *we do have a choice about how we respond* to life's circumstances—and it is those responses that determine the outcome of our lives.

To whatever extent you may have been imprisoned by your response to wounds inflicted on you by others, I assure you that embracing this truth is the starting place in your journey to freedom. When we as God's children realize that His grace is sufficient for every situation, that by the power of His indwelling Spirit we have the ability to respond with grace and forgiveness to those who

have sinned against us—at that point we are no longer victims. There are essentially two ways of responding to life's hurts and unfair experiences. The first and natural response is to become a debt collector. We set out to make the offender pay for what he has done. This is the pathway of resentment and retaliation—getting even, exacting payment for what he did. But the problem is that being a debt collector does more than keep our offender in debtors' prison; it puts us in prison.

But there is another way.

As an alternative to being debt collectors—the pathway of resentment and retaliation—God calls us to the pure, powerful choice of forgiveness—and to pursue, wherever possible, the pathway of restoration and reconciliation.

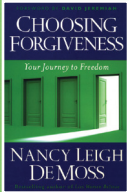
Actually, this is not presented in Scripture as an option. "As the Lord has forgiven you," Paul writes in Colossians 3:13, "so you also must forgive."

The Lord Himself was equally clear and direct: "Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him" (Mark 11:25). "*Anything against anyone*." No offense is too great, no offender is beyond the boundary to which our forgiveness must extend. Our fellowship with God requires it and depends on it.

I realize that this journey into forgiveness may require you to delve into areas of your life that are sensitive and still hot to the touch. But I am also aware that our natural way of handling these hurts only results in keeping them sore and inflamed. Will you choose to forgive?

MAKE THE CHOICE NANCY DEMOSS

Nancy Leigh DeMoss is a nationally-known author and radio personality whose mission is to encourage women to honor God and to motivate Christians toward a renewed relationship with Jesus. Learn more at [www.ReviveOurHearts.com](http://www.ReviveOurHearts.com). This article was used with permission.



The Forgiveness Team highly recommends "Choosing Forgiveness" by Nancy Leigh DeMoss as one of the most comprehensive and practical books available on this issue.

restoration&reconciliation





# MY HEART SANK

**JAMIE & PAUL SELBY**

**A** s I stood there watching the police woman performing C.P.R. on my almost 9 month old son, she suddenly looked up at me with tears streaming down her face.

It was a quiet morning in December. My husband was on a trip and my two oldest boys were downstairs watching Sesame Street. My youngest son Joshua and I were in the kitchen cleaning. Deciding I was going to vacuum, I brought him downstairs with me and placed him on the floor in the toy room, surrounding him with his favorite toys. As I got the vacuum out, I glanced back to see Joshua still in the same spot, playing happily. Not thinking too much about it, I walked past my two older boys and up the stairs with the vacuum. As I began plugging it in, my oldest son ran up the stairs saying, “I want to vacuum!” I told him that he could, but I was going back downstairs to get Joshua. Not wanting to stay in the kitchen by himself, he came barreling past me down the stairs. He ran straight into the playroom where Joshua was and began yelling, “Mommy, Joshua is sleeping!” Immediately my heart sank.

As I came around the corner, all I could see was my baby’s head as he was trapped beneath a children’s toy shelf. He was blue and lifeless. I immediately threw the shelf off of him and, in a panic, picked him up and ran for the phone.

I performed C.P.R. on Joshua until the first police officers arrived. As I stood there watching the police woman performing C.P.R. on my almost 9 month old son, she suddenly looked up at me with tears streaming down her face. At that instant I fell to my knees begging God for help!

Things happened quickly. A friend came over to take me to the hospital and a neighbor came over to look after my older boys. I was shaking as I entered the E.R. Doctors and nurses covered every inch of my son’s bed. I was numb as I sat there and watched them try to get my son’s heart to beat. As my heart raced, my pediatrician came over and knelt down in front of me. She said after 60 minutes of trying to revive Joshua, nothing was taking. With tears streaming down my face, my thoughts went to my husband. I remembered him holding our son that morning and the smiles on their faces as they looked at each other. Joshua had the most beautiful smile. Now, he may never see his baby boy alive again. I got up out of my chair and went over to the bed. I began rubbing and kissing Joshua’s arm, all the time telling him how

much his Daddy and Mommy loved him. At that moment the monitor next to his bed started beeping and the doctors began scrambling, saying, “We have a heartbeat, his heart is beating!”

Joshua and I were then life-flighted to a Trauma 1 Medical Center where they immediately began working on him. I started replaying my day over and over again, asking myself why I had left him, even if it was only for two minutes. The guilt was setting in.

My husband, a pilot, had not been able to be reached until landing in Norfolk, Va. When he finally got back to Cleveland and entered the waiting room, he sat down next to me, and holding each other we began to cry. I told him about the day and every detail that came to my mind. Our pastor then walked in to be with us, followed by the doctor. He told us that Joshua had no brain function. He was alive, but only by machines.

The whole night we took turns holding Joshua, laying beside him, singing to him, as family and friends began pouring in to offer support. Late that evening we all held hands surrounding his bed, praying for a miracle and singing, “Jesus Loves You.”

Early the next morning Paul and I talked with the doctors again. There had been no changes. With all of our family surrounding us, Paul and I made the heart-wrenching decision to take our son off of life support. As we sat on the bed together, the nurse carefully laid Joshua in our arms. We sang “Jesus Loves You” to Joshua as the nurse turned off the machines that were keeping him alive. By the time we had finished singing, Joshua had slipped away to heaven.

As funeral arrangements were being made, family and friends came pouring in. I was a mess. The pain was at times unbearable. I would just sit on my bed and sob uncontrollably while Paul held me in his arms. He read the Bible to me. The comfort that God’s Word brought to me was unexplainable. It seemed as if God made Paul strong on the days I was weak.

I got a surprise visit from the police woman who was first on the scene the day of the accident. She asked if I could come outside and talk with her. She gave me a huge hug and told me she had come by on behalf





of herself and the entire police department to let me know that they did not think badly of me. They could tell I was a good mother and that I loved my children. At that moment I felt a huge weight come off my shoulders. Though it didn't release the guilt, I very much needed to hear those words.

The days following my son's funeral were worse than the day of the funeral itself. All of our family and friends had gone home and things were very quiet. Each day brought different feelings and emotions. Some days I felt a sense of peace and joy, knowing Joshua was in the arms of Jesus, happy and healthy. Other days, I'd cry knowing that we wouldn't get to raise our beautiful son. It broke my heart to think that my "three peas in pod" were now only two and they would never get to know their little brother.

Nights were the worst. As I would lay down I would start having flashbacks. I would go through every detail of that day, ending with holding my beautiful son as he passed away. I remember calling my pastor to tell him of my struggles at night. He encouraged me to memorize Scripture verses and recite those when I started to have flashbacks. Isaiah 40:31 was a verse I chose: "Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength." As I began digging into the Bible it became alive to me again. God was working in my life to bring me closer to Him. I was starting to

see that He could bring good from all of this. About two years after Joshua passed away, God blessed us with a beautiful little girl.

Still, there was something deep down inside me that I was fighting. In October of 2008, we had a conference at our church. We began talking about forgiveness and how we need to forgive those who have offended us. This really spoke to my heart, but in a different way. Deep down inside I realized that I needed to forgive myself. I had been blaming myself for Joshua's death. I left the sanctuary and went down to the prayer room surrounded by many loving friends. We prayed together and that night God gave me the peace that "passes all understanding." I was released from the pit of despair. The anger inside was gone and I began to trust God again. I felt free.

Psalm 40:1-3 says, "I waited patiently for the Lord to help me, and he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the pit of despair, out of the mud and the mire. He set my feet on solid ground and steadied me as I walked along. He has given me a new song to sing, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see what He has done and be amazed. They will put their trust in the Lord." God was and is my wonderful, merciful counselor. Through His Word I learned that if we rely on Him for everything, He will get us through tragedy, one day at a time.

**M**y heart sank when I heard the news: there had been an accident at home involving my youngest son, Josh. My boss told me to get home as quickly as possible. I didn't have details, but I knew it was bad. My mind flashed back to holding Josh earlier that morning and how everything was completely normal. I prayed and cried on the return flight home, a flight that seemed to take forever. My friend picked me up at the airport and told me what had happened. I wept while trying to process everything. I couldn't believe it.

My emotions felt so crushed and emptied. I asked God, "Why is this happening?" I prayed for God to heal my son, to do a miracle.

That night in the hospital was the longest night of my life. I felt so far away from God, but I knew from Scripture He was there. I started reciting verses I knew like, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." I thought of the biblical story of Job, who after losing his family said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be praised."

Today was the day I had to put my faith into action. I sure didn't feel like praising God, but I tried the best I knew how.

The night of the accident, I remember our pediatrician saying to me, "Jamie has so much guilt, be careful what you say." Your mind tries to process everything and you start thinking, "what if this" or "what if that," and maybe "if" it would not have happened. I remember having thoughts like, "Honey, why did you leave him even though it was just a few minutes?" I quickly prayed to God to release those thoughts and to help me be the support my wife needed. By God's grace and mercy, He gave me strength to not blame her or let bitterness build up inside me.

I finally found peace when I realized that if Josh was supposed to be with us, he would be. Psalm 139:16 says, "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." God gave us Josh in the first place and He decided to take him home, as hard as it was.

People often ask me how I'm doing. I tell them that God has healed my heart, but I will always have a scar.

**Paul & Jamie Selby are members of the Weymouth Church family and live in Medina with their four children. They also serve on our Forgiveness Team to help counsel and encourage people whose hearts are hurting.**





# How Sorry are you?

**“I’m so, so sorry!”** Words cannot express how sorry I am. I was so wrong to do that. Will you please forgive me?”

If you’ve ever done something that hurt someone you care about, you’ve probably uttered a few apologetic phrases like the ones above. And, whether or not we enjoy the process, saying “I’m sorry,” is often a first step we must take toward restoring broken relationships. But there are different types of apologies.

**Political apology:** “I’m sorry if you were offended by what I did.” Notice how this “apology” actually spins the guilt for the problem around, accusing the victim of misinterpreting or overreacting to the situation. Alternate wording that is just as bad: “I’m sorry you feel that way.”

**Careless apology:** “If I’ve ever done something that offends you, I’m sorry.” If there is true hurt in a relation-

ship, the guilty party should admit the specifics. I’ve heard it put this way: “If you sin against someone specifically, you should confess that sin specifically.” The careless apology is the coward’s way out of true confession. People do this to God all the time, saying things like, “*Lord, if I’ve sinned today, please forgive me.*”

**Unrepentant apology:** “I am sorry that I keep acting this way.” When people are drunk, angry, or have other repeated sinful behaviors, they’ll often throw out unrepentant apologies as a way of cleaning up their messes. Notice that there is no stated plan to change the behavior (or even a desire to do so) in this type of apology.

**Non-apology:** “I’m sorry, but...” These are the people who, when confronted with their wrongdoing, might reply: “This is just who I am.” “I didn’t have any choice.” “I did what I had to do.” The non-apology is not really an apology, it’s an excuse. On some occasions, a non-apology is appropriate, if someone actually did misunderstand your actions. Usually, however, an excuse is a way of deflecting the guilt of the situation to other people or circumstances, rather than facing up to the personal responsibility of the sin.

**Criminal’s apology:** “I’m sorry I got caught.” More often than not, people with this attitude won’t verbalize the “criminal’s apology.” But deep down, they don’t have any remorse over the action itself, just the consequences. They’re sorry that their family fell apart, they’re sorry that they have to spend time in jail, and they’re sorry that their addictions led to all these terrible ends. A curious reoccurring theme you may hear among criminals is how the police or a judge “violated” them (picked them up on a probation violation). It’s another type of guilt-shifting language; after all, they were the party that “violated” the law; the police were just doing their jobs.

**Honest apology:** “I’m sorry. I was wrong when I specific action. Will you forgive me?” Honest apologies should always end in a question, seeking the forgiveness of the offended party. Honest apologizers define what was wrong, take the appropriate blame, and seek to make things right. They are willing to face the consequences, make restitution, or even publicly confess their wrongdoing, if necessary. Even if the situation is not entirely their fault, they’re willing to apologize for the portion of it that was, without casting blame on the other parties.

The Bible speaks about honest apologies in 1 Corinthians 7:10: “For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation...But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death.”

So, how sorry are you? Have you offered honest apologies to everyone you’ve harmed or hurt? Is your conscience clear before God and everyone else? Have all of your strained relationships been restored? If not, it’s time to take the first step.

## examples of honest apologies

**To a spouse:** “Honey, I should never have said those hurtful words to you. I love you and I never want to explode in anger like that again. I have no excuse, and I know it was wrong. Would you please forgive me?”

**To a child:** “Son, you heard your father and I arguing earlier, and it was wrong of us to say the things we did, and to be yelling in anger that way. We’ve worked things out and apologized to each other, but I wanted to talk to you as well. Would you forgive me for being a bad example, and for letting my temper get out of control?”

**To a boss:** “I have to confess that I wasted some company resources last week and I first want to ask your forgiveness for not being more careful. I realized I wouldn’t use my own money that way, but here I was using yours. I calculated the value of what was wasted and would like to pay it back. I have a check here for you.”

**To a store:** “About six months ago I stole a few items from your store. I have no excuse, and I know it was very wrong of me to do that. Here is a check for the value of what I stole plus more, which I hope will cover the costs of my wrongdoing against you. Will you accept this, and then, would you please forgive me?”

## a cheater clears his conscience

Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich. He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way.

When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. “Zacchaeus!” he said. “Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.”

Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. But the people were displeased. “He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner,” they grumbled.

Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, “I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!”

Jesus responded, “Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.”

Luke 19:1-10





# Left Out

## THE SCENARIO

I was named as the Executor of Dad's will, and since Mom is gone too, it's up to me to carry out his wishes. But reading the will has caused a lot of hard feelings and a lot of unanswered questions. I feel like I've been responsible and successful - financially speaking - but Dad left most of his estate to my brother Jimmy, who has made a mess of his life. Why would you give such a massive inheritance to someone who won't treat it with respect? Both my sister and I can't understand it, we feel like Mom and Dad spent most of their lives caring about Jimmy, dealing with his problems, and maybe even enabling him to continue being

irresponsible. He was always the "favorite" and as the youngest sibling, they let him get away with anything. Yet here we are, trying to do the right things with our lives, and we're not getting nearly what we expected as an inheritance. How am I supposed to feel about this?

I guess I'm OK with Dad doing whatever he wants with his own money, but I wish I knew why he would choose to settle things this way. Did I do something wrong? Did my sister offend him somehow? Did Dad not realize how Jimmy is the kind of guy who will just blow the money? I mean, a year ago Dad paid off a bunch of Jimmy's debts and even set him up in a new apart-

ment, which I'm sure wasn't cheap. I understood that he needed a hand up, but even then it rubbed me the wrong way. Jimmy had an ungrateful attitude and was taking advantage of Dad's compassionate heart. And now this? I feel sick to my stomach thinking of carrying out my father's wishes and handing so much hard-earned family money over to Jimmy, of all people. It's not that I wanted much for myself, or feel entitled to more than I'm getting, it's just that this whole thing doesn't make sense. I'd rather Dad would have just willed it all to charity or something, or split it evenly. Now I have to spend the rest of my life wondering

*A "good son" is feeling angry about Dad's will.*

## Luke STRATTON

God has a plan for each one of us. I think that's important for you to remember as you struggle with this.



Your father has put you in a position to carry out his wishes. He has given you the gift of control of his final worldly materials. You have mentioned your brother Jimmy and how he has done this or that and how you fear he will not respect what your father has left for him. Have you or your sister spoke with your brother about your feelings and worries? Have you offered to help him manage the inheritance he is expected to receive? You mentioned you are "financially" successful; you could try to use this as a way to mentor Jimmy.

It sounds like you have some animosity toward your parents and your brother, or at least the potential is there for that to grow. I personally have had to deal with similar situations and most of them were not even realized by the offending party. Sometimes that is the worst part. Your parents are not there to discuss your feelings, and Jimmy may not know what you are feeling either. That's one reason you guys definitely need to talk, before you start making conclusions about how Jimmy will handle the money.

This passage from Proverbs 3 has helped me along the way, and I'd like to pass it along to you:

"My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ..."

## Norm & Jane WEHNER

We understand where you are coming from. You have spent your life trying to do the right thing and now you feel betrayed by your dad. You even feel a little jealous of your brother, which in your shoes we can understand.



Since your dad has past away and you can't question his decisions, the question for you becomes, "Who do I turn to for help? Do I need to give forgiveness, or ask for it?" The dictionary says that to forgive is to "cease to blame or feel resentment." This is probably where you need to begin.

It is important that hard feelings and jealousy not take root in your heart. These will eventually turn into bitterness and can result in all sorts of problems later on. Perhaps a starting point would be to go to a trusted friend or pastor and share what you are feeling.

Remember, even as you and your siblings work through this, that God is aware of your situation and He cares deeply for each of you. He knows "why" and if you trust Him, you can rest that He will take care of you. We will pray for you as you walk through this difficult time.

## Mark IACONA

It sounds as though your dad was a wonderful man. He had a hand in raising two good and responsible children, was full of compassion for his third child, and built what seems to be a sizable estate.



You didn't mention whether or not you have children. If you do, you probably will relate to this; if not, let me give you some insight from a parent's perspective. Children are like fingers on a parent's hand. Each finger is a bit different in size, strength and function, yet the parent regards them all the same. If one finger is hurt, that is the one that gets the attention. Only if this finger is infected and endangers the entire hand would the parent ever consider cutting it off. Instead the parent will continue to tend to it and nurture it, in order to heal the finger. So it may be with

your dad for your brother. You and your sister are your dad's living legacy. In the case of your brother, your dad's legacy may be his never-ending love for him as he continued to care and show compassion no matter how irresponsible your brother was. There are several parables in the Bible that illustrate a father's love for a son, but the "prodigal son" (Luke 15:11-32) seems to speak to your issue the best.

Similar to your father's handling of his estate, God our heavenly Father deals with us. Like your dad with regard to you and your sister, God delights in His children that follow His Word, and in doing so you have already secured a reward. God also loves His children who stray and sin, (and that's all of us at one time or another) and therefore treats us with compassion, as your dad did with your brother. God has promised that He will forgive us if we ask and turn away from the error of our ways. I know your thought may be that your brother never expressed remorse for his life choices, and perhaps to you he didn't. But your dad may have seen or heard a different message from him and obviously forgave. For while we all deserve punishment for our sin, our God is good and grants us mercy through grace. It sounds as though your dad may have taken a page from God's book.

Finally, be careful not to poison yourself with resentment and unforgiveness for the rest of your life. It will fester and eat at you all of your days and then for eternity. It is written "But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" Matthew 6:15. The good news is the inheritance that God has promised to us far exceeds all the riches on earth. Don't let your brother keep you from this inheritance too. Forgive and be a fine legacy for your dad and Heavenly Father.



# PAID IN FULL

ray  
pritchard

The Romans like Skull Hill because it can be seen from the main road, and everyone can witness the crucifixions carried out there. Crowds gather to watch with morbid fascination.

But this day is different. A man named Jesus is being crucified.

The crucifixion begins at nine o'clock sharp. The Romans are punctual about things like that. At first the crowd is rowdy, loud, raucous, and boisterous, as if this were some kind of athletic event. They cheer, laugh, shout, and place wagers on how long the victims will last. The one in the middle has already been severely beaten. His skin hangs from his back in tatters, His face is bruised and swollen, His eyes nearly shut. Blood trickles from a dozen open wounds.

Sentence fragments float through the air. Something that sounds like, "Father, forgive them" . . . something else about, "If you are the Son of God" . . . then a promise of paradise.

Then it happens. At noon, darkness falls over all the land. One moment the sun is right overhead; the next moment it's gone. This is not an eclipse or a dark cloud cover. It is darkness itself—thick, inky-black darkness that falls like a shroud over the land. It is darkness without any hint of light to come. It is chilling blackness that curdles the blood and freezes the skin.

No one moves. No one speaks. For once, even the profane soldiers stop their swearing. Something eerie is going on. You can almost reach out and feel the evil all around. From somewhere deep in the earth, there is a sound like some dark, subterranean chuckle. It is the laughter of hell.

Three long, frightful hours later, the darkness gives way to daylight, revealing that Jesus is at the point of death. Whatever happened in that darkness has sapped His remaining strength. His chest heaves with every tortured breath.

He cries out: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Moments pass; death draws near. Then a hoarse whisper: "I thirst." If you listen, you can hear the death rattle in His throat. He has less than a

minute to live.

Then He speaks again. "It is finished."

That phrase comes from a word that means "to bring to an end, to complete, to accomplish." In Greek, "It is finished" also means "Paid in full." It's the word you would use when you make the final payment on your car. It's the word you would use when you cross the finish line of a 10K run. The word means more than just "I survived." It means, "I did what I set out to do." The debt is paid, the job is done.

"It is finished" was the Savior's final cry of victory.

## WHY JESUS HAD TO DIE

How could an all-loving God allow His Son to be murdered on a cross to redeem guilty sinners?

God's justice demands that every sin be punished—no matter how small it may seem to us. If He were to overlook sin without proper punishment, He would cease to be holy and just. That's why sinners can't simply say, "I'm sorry," and instantly be cleared. There is still a price to pay.

We often see this principle at work in the family. Through carelessness, or perhaps through deliberate disobedience, a five-year-old boy breaks an expensive lamp. Realizing what he has done, he apologizes to his parents and promises never to do it again. The parents forgive their son, but the lamp is still broken. Mom and Dad have to pay a price to replace it.

God needed a plan of salvation whereby He would remain just and still provide a way of forgiveness for guilty sinners. Somewhere, somehow, there had to be a place where grace and wrath could meet. That place is the cross of Christ.

The paradox of salvation is this: God is love and wants to forgive sinners. But He is also holy, and He cannot overlook sin. What could He do? God sent His own Son to die for sinners. In that way, the just punishment for sin was fully met in the death of Christ, and sinners who trust in Christ could be freely forgiven (Romans 3).



Think of it. In the death of this one Man, the price for sin has been fully paid—past, present, and future. As a result, those who believe in Jesus find that their sins are gone forever. Finished. Name Your Sin

So let me ask you a personal question. What sin is keeping you from God right now? Is it anger? Is it lust? Is it cheating? Is it gambling? Is it adultery? Is it abortion? Is it pride?

It doesn't matter how many sins you've piled up in your life. It doesn't matter how guilty you think you are. It doesn't matter how bad you've been. When you come to Christ, you discover that all of your sins have been stamped by God with this phrase: *Paid in full.*

- Anger
- Uncontrolled ambition
- Gossip
- Drunkenness
- Fornication
- Embezzlement
- Lying
- Disobedience
- Slothfulness
- Pride
- Murder
- Bribery



# GOD'S GREAT LOVE

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will

Through the blood of Jesus Christ, the price for your sins has been paid in full.

Since Jesus Christ paid the price in full, all efforts to add anything to what Christ did on the cross are doomed to failure. Going to church, doing good works, giving money to the poor, being baptized, and trying to do your best may be positives, but they cannot add anything to the value of what Jesus accomplished in His death on the cross. They will not help you take even one tiny step toward God. The payment isn't based on what you do, but on what Jesus did.

God is not trying to sell you salvation. He's not offering salvation at half price. He's not offering salvation on an installment plan. God is offering you salvation *free of charge*. The bill has already been paid. Jesus finished what He came to do.

Dr. Ray Pritchard, speaker, writer, and pastor, currently serves as president of Keep Believing Ministries (KeepBelieving.com). This article has been adapted from An Anchor for the Soul, © 2011 by Moody Publishers. Used by permission.

# meetthe**FORGIVENESSTEAM**

**A**t LifeChange/Weymouth, we are committed to helping people experience the truth of the Bible and the joy of having a personal relationship with God. Our experience has been that in the area of forgiveness, it is often necessary to get some help from a friend who has walked down a similar road. That's why we have brought together the Forgiveness Team. We have been praying for you, as a recipient of LifeChange Magazine, and we would

be more than happy to speak with you on the phone, via email, or even in-person.

If you are struggling with issues in your past and the need for forgiveness, our team is available to pray with you, point you in the right direction, and share wisdom from our own life experiences. Contact one of us by emailing [lifechange@weymouthchurch.com](mailto:lifechange@weymouthchurch.com) or calling (330) 723-1750.

### Jeff Brianas

I've been a resident of Medina County my whole life, and part of Weymouth for about 8 years. Through divorce, a job loss and a lot of turmoil in my life, I've had plenty of opportunities for God to teach me about forgiveness. I am so glad He gives us the power to forgive, and am grateful for the incredible freedom that comes through forgiveness. I hope that the work of our team can extend this joy to many other people in our community.



### Paul & Jamie Selby

We have lived in Medina for over 10 years. Paul is a pilot for ExpressJet Airlines. Jamie is a stay-at-home mom. We have four children, ages 8 to almost 2. We home school our children and enjoy teaching them God's Word. We love camping, fishing and spending time with our family and friends. We joined the Forgiveness Team because, through our own experience, God helped us learn the true meaning of forgiveness.



### Mark & Angie Iacona

We've lived in the Medina area for over 30 years and have been members of Weymouth the last 10. Angie is an RN and Mark owns several small businesses dealing with real estate and auto sales. We enjoy hiking, travel, hunting and dining out, but have our most fun with our 5 grandchildren. We joined this team because we've experienced the mercy and grace of forgiveness and the freedom that forgiving others allows. We are excited to share it!



### Nancy Walton

I grew up in Indiana and after retirement, I came to Medina to be with my youngest daughter and her family. I have 5 children and 13 grandchildren. I had a lot of things occur in my life that were hard to accept, and I had to come to a point where I would forgive the people involved. But I've learned that God is faithful – He has taken care of me. I have had so many things to face myself, I think I understand where hurting people are coming from.



### Greg & Harmony Aungst

We've been in the Medina area for almost four years, having moved from Pennsylvania, along with our two sons. We enjoy spending time together as a family, playing sports, being outside, and travelling whenever we can. When we joined the Forgiveness Team, we didn't realize how much we would need to learn this lesson for ourselves. Our team has been praying for Medina, that everyone in our city can experience the freedom that forgiveness brings.



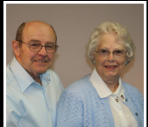
### Don & Sue Long

We have been married for 49 years and have attended Weymouth for 21 of those. Don retired last year, so we are together a lot more now. Forgiveness is something we have both been learning, and we are drawing ever closer together. We are enjoying our time together. God has blessed us with 4 children, and now we have grandchildren and great-grandchildren. God has been so good through the rough and the smooth years of our lives together.



### Norm & Jane Wehner

We moved to Medina fourteen years ago, and have attended Weymouth Church for most of that time. Norm retired from the Navy after serving twenty years. We have two daughters, one son, and seven grandchildren. There is a lot of forgiveness that takes place in raising a family – we have learned that forgiveness brings inner peace and freedom that we would like to help others experience.



### Luke & Kori Stratton

Kori and I have lived in the Medina area much of our lives. We have been attending & enjoying Weymouth for 4 years. I work as a National Account Manager at TurfCare Supply Corp. & Kori is working as a P.E. Teacher at Medina Christian Academy. We have 2 boys; we enjoy fishing, camping, and spending time with friends. We joined the team so we can share our experiences and encourage others to obtain the freedom that comes with forgiveness.



If you would like prayer or help from the Forgiveness Team, let us know. [lifechange@weymouthchurch.com](mailto:lifechange@weymouthchurch.com) or (330) 723-1750



DO I NEED TO FORGIVE? < - - - - -

This worksheet is designed as a personal test to determine if there is any unforgiveness in your heart. Find your copy of the Bible or visit [www.BibleGateway.com](http://www.BibleGateway.com), then complete the exercises below.

Part 1: Am I Bitter?

If you have truly forgiven every person who has ever sinned against you, then you are able to experience the great freedom, joy, peace, and blessing that result from being a forgiven, forgiving child of God.

However, it is possible to live with seeds of unforgiveness for so long that we become blinded to its presence in our lives. The following exercises will help open your eyes to any unforgiveness that may have become lodged in your heart.

Checkmark any of the following hurts you have experienced:

- ☐ Lied to
- ☐ Rejected by parents
- ☐ Promise(s) broken
- ☐ Stolen from
- ☐ Neglected by grown children
- ☐ Cheated in a business/financial deal
- ☐ Violent crime against self or a loved one
- ☐ Rebellious/wayward son or daughter
- ☐ Treated unfairly by an employer
- ☐ Belittled
- ☐ Parents divorced
- ☐ Alcoholic parent or mate
- ☐ Slandered/falsely accused
- ☐ Abandoned by parent or mate
- ☐ Divorced by mate
- ☐ Publicly humiliated
- ☐ Mate committed adultery or other sexual impurity
- ☐ Abused (physically, emotionally,sexually)

Make a list of the people who have offended or hurt you over the years, on a separate sheet of paper.

As you reflect on the ways you have been offended, do you find any of these statements to be true?

- \_\_\_ Every time I think of (person or offense), I still feel angry.
- \_\_\_ I have a subtle, secret desire to see (person) pay for what he (she/they) did to me.

- \_\_\_ Deep in my heart, I wouldn't mind if something bad happened to the person(s) who hurt me.
- \_\_\_ I sometimes find myself telling others how (person) hurt me.
- \_\_\_ If (person's) name comes up, I am more likely to say something negative about him/her than something positive.
- \_\_\_ I cannot thank God for (person).

These statements are an indication that we have not fully forgiven all those who have sinned against us.

**Remember:** Forgiveness means that I fully release the offender from his debt. It means fully cleaning his record. It is a promise never to bring up the offense against him again (to God, to others, or to the offender himself).

Part 2: Why Should I Forgive?

The first reason to forgive is because God himself is willing to forgive us. Jesus suffered for our sins; He took our penalty upon Himself. Forgiveness is part of God's amazing grace, and He gives us the power to pass that grace on to others.

Read **Titus 3:3-8** and **Ephesians 2:1-10**.

How did Jesus command us to respond to those who wrong us?

**Luke 6:27**

**Romans 12:17-21**

Based on **Romans 5:8** in the Bible, what did we do to earn or deserve God's forgiveness?

We may feel that if we forgive another this freely, justice will not be served—they'll get off scotfree. The problem is, we have put ourselves in the position of a "bill collector." What does **Romans 12:19** have to say about "bill collecting"?

**Remember:** Letting the offender off of your hook does not mean they are off of God's hook. Forgiveness involves transferring the prisoner over to the One who is able and responsible to mete out justice. It relieves us of the burden and responsibility to hold them in prison ourselves.

Put a checkmark next to the attitudes of heart you have toward the person who hurt you.

- ☐ Emotional churning
- ☐ Desire for God to change him for the better
- ☐ Desire for revenge
- ☐ Never want to see or hear from him again
- ☐ Hate him
- ☐ Want the best for his future
- ☐ Don't trust him, but I care about him
- ☐ Desire to see him spiritually restored
- ☐ Hope he goes to hell
- ☐ Sense of rest and relinquishment
- ☐ Hard to see his good qualities
- ☐ Gratefulness to God for this person
- ☐ Want others to know how bad he is
- ☐ Humbled by how greatly I have been forgiven
- ☐ Willing to forgive, but not there yet

One of the most important verses in the Bible that can help you experience the freedom that comes through forgiveness is **Romans 12:21**. Write out that verse here:

The act of forgiveness is only the starting place for dealing with those who wrong us. The initial act of releasing the offender must be followed by a commitment to invest positively in his/her life. This investment is the key to experiencing emotional healing and wholeness.

Whenever possible, we should seek to rebuild the relationship between ourselves and the offender. In situations where this is not possible or appropriate, we can still invest in their lives through prayer.

What are several practical ways that you could "return good for evil" or invest in the life of someone who has wronged you?

Part 3: Will I Make the Choice?

God will give you the power to forgive if you are willing to make the choice to do so. According to the following verses, what can we expect if we refuse to forgive those who sin against us?

**Matthew 6:14-15**

What steps do I need to take in order to forgive the person who hurt me?

Part 4: Clearing My Conscience

On a separate sheet of paper, list the people to whom you may need to apologize, pay something back, or make something right. (stolen items, broken promises, hurtful words or actions, etc.)

Pray carefully for the names on this list, and then go to each person to specifically ask for forgiveness. In cases where the blame for the problem goes both ways, only focus on your sin - not the sins of the other person. Your goal is to clear your own conscience before God and people; not to make accusations. When you are ready, determine the best way to make things right.

(In cases where the hurt is extremely deep, seek the counsel of a pastor before making your apology.)





# BEYOND FORGIVENESS

Let's say I do it. I choose. "I . . . um . . . I . . . forgive . . . you." There. I said it. Am I done? Is that all I'm supposed to do?

I've started, which is probably the hardest part. I've ignored my emotions that still scream for vengeance. I've committed to walk God's path. I've uttered the three words that so many promise themselves they could never—will never—utter.

But the place I go next is where the light of Jesus can shine through me, where I enter the realm of divine, undeserved, almost unimaginable forgiveness.



**DANIEL  
JARVIS**

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## "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."

In Acts 7:60, Stephen spoke these words as he was being stoned to death by an angry crowd. If step one on the road of forgiveness is a choice to "cancel the debt," step two is when we are so free in our souls that we can look to God and say, "You know, Lord, that sinful hurt . . . as far as I'm concerned, You don't need to take vengeance on my behalf. Don't charge that sin to their account."

The Father smiles. Finally, we're getting it. *Blessed are the merciful.*

## "Lord, please bless the one who hurt me."

In Luke 6, Jesus said, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." That may be the easiest verse in the Bible to quote and the hardest to obey.

God asks us to participate in His plan to reverse the evils of our dark world. I am called to seek the best for the person who did me the worst. I'm asked to answer a wrong with a right. I'm told to overcome evil with good.

"Lord, I ask that You would give Your best blessing to this individual who has caused harm. I ask You to save him and set him on a path of repentance."

Jesus applauds. His followers are turning the status quo of worldly wisdom upside down. *Blessed are the peacemakers.*

## "There but for the grace of God go I."

English Reformer John Bradford admitted this candidly when he saw a criminal being led off to execution.

The moment we realize that we're no better than the next person—that left alone without God's grace or truth, blessing or direction, we might find ourselves acting just as wickedly as those who hurt us—that's when we can draw near to God. That's when we move from self-righteous hypocrisy ("Thank You that I'm not as bad as that person") to humble honesty ("Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner").

Such humility doesn't excuse the guilt of the offender, but it does change our perspective. Instead of, "Lord, give them what they deserve," I'm crying, "Dear God, thank You for Your great salvation to me, for giving me undeserved favor in Your sight."

The Holy Spirit is pleased. A humble, grateful heart is a prime candidate for His lifechange. *Blessed are the poor in spirit.*

My choice to forgive is the beginning of a joyful journey toward restoration, reconciliation, and redemption. But why would I come this far only to abandon the process, unlatching the gate but never following the path it reveals?

In faith I'll take a step through that gate—beyond the hurt I feel, beyond the bitterness that holds me captive, beyond my expectations of restitution . . . even beyond my initial choice to forgive.

There is so much more God wants to do. There is so much more grace.

*Dan Jarvis is the lead pastor of LifeChange/Weymouth Church in Medina, Ohio. He is still learning about forgiveness, mercy, and God's amazing grace!*

## FROM PASTOR DAN

**I** can't think of a more sensitive, difficult topic than the one addressed in this magazine. Some people have been hurt so deeply they can't even imagine forgiving. And of course, all of us have some issues in our past we need to make right.

My wife Melissa and I have shared in our own hurts and difficulties along the way, and so, unfortunately, our discussion of forgiveness comes from life experience. As foster parents in Medina, and having opportunity to share in ministry at the Medina County Jail, we've encountered some of the most heart-wrenching circumstances I can imagine – stories of pain, tragedy, abuse and evil right in our own city. Some of these have hit really close to home. Some of the kids we have cared for have been wronged beyond comprehension. Some of our good friends have endured unimaginable tragedy.

The answer begins with forgiveness. From there, we can start overcoming evil with good. Spiritual renewal in our city, and ultimately in our whole culture, can begin with us, as we turn to God for forgiveness and then extend grace to one another. Perhaps in a world where everything seems to be going wrong, we can make something right.

My urgent prayer for you as a reader is that God will give you the grace to forgive those who have hurt you, that He'll give you the courage to ask for forgiveness from those you have hurt, and most of all, that you can experience the joy of His forgiveness forever. If you are ready to take a step forward to this freedom, let me know.







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# FORGIVENESS

**reconciliation**  
**restoration**  
**reprieve**  
**release**  
**rest**



~~resentment~~  
~~retaliation~~  
~~rebellion~~  
~~rejection~~  
~~revenge~~

## WEYMOUTH COMMUNITY CHURCH IS EXPANDING!

Our desire is to share the life-changing truth of the Bible with everyone we can, and to do that we have added a new service location on Sunday mornings. **LifeChange Church**, our south campus, is at **Williams-on-the-Lake** (near the Fairgrounds), and features the same family events and strong Bible teaching you'd find at our historic Weymouth building just north of town, near the I-71/Rt 3 interchange. If you don't already have a church home, we have room for you. *Learn more at [WeymouthChurch.com](http://WeymouthChurch.com)*