

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 21 • Issue 6

PRESERVED OR PICKLED?

A tale of two servants

Placing Blame

A question of perspective

The Choice

490 ... and counting



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE SETTLEMENT

The first verses in the first chapter of the book of Isaiah are terrifying! In them, God uses strong language to outline the many offenses of the nation of Judah, including oppression of the poor, corrupt dealings, and blood on their hands, which have led to their being estranged from Him. He says that their religious observances have become false and worthless, and their hearts are wicked and in rebellion to God; and as a result, they are being utterly and completely defeated by their enemies.

But in spite of their willful sin against Him, God's heartstrings are touched by the suffering of His people, and He doesn't dwell on the punishment that they deserve. "Give up your evil ways," He pleads. "Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed."¹

He then makes one of the most beautiful promises in the Bible—and one that also offers more than a little insight into the kind of friendship He wants to have with us: "Come now, let's settle this. Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool."²

What this promise shows is that God isn't just willing to forgive; He's *eager* to. And just like a fresh snowfall covers up a pool of blood, and makes it as if it had never been there, God's forgiveness is so complete that it makes it as if the wrong had never happened. He doesn't even remember our sins anymore.³

That kind of forgiveness is supernatural and a part of God's divine nature. It's not often that *we* can take the hurt, anger, and injustice we feel, and "make it as if the wrong never happened," but that doesn't let us off the hook when it comes to being willing to forgive others.

The key is to remember what Jesus has done for us. Although we didn't deserve for Him to take upon Himself the weight of all our sins and wrongdoing, He did so when He gave His life for us.

Let's try to become more like Him by passing on to others some of that unearned forgiveness that we've received.

1. Isaiah 1:16–17. NLT

2. Isaiah 1:18 NLT

3. See Hebrews 8:12.

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BY CHRIS MIZRANY

A LIFE OF FORGIVENESS

THROUGHOUT MY LIFE, I've received my share of (well-deserved) consequences for wrongdoing. But more than once, I *didn't* get what I deserved. Instead, I received mercy.

One day when I was around 12, my family was at the mall. I was supposed to keep an eye on my younger brother while my parents stood in line, but I got distracted, and he wandered away and almost reached the parking lot outside before we found him. Did my parents give me a stern lecture? You bet, but it was tempered with so much love and mercy. I got grace that day, undeserved but never forgotten.

When I was a little older, I once took something that wasn't mine. When my mom confronted me, I felt blood thundering in my ears as I thought *Why did I do this? Life will never be the same!* But Mom took me in her arms and said she knew I

could be a better man—and to start, I would return the item immediately. And it turned out I was right (however, not in the way I expected)—my life *has* never been the same since this poignant lesson.

Then came the nasty fights, pointless arguments, and snide comebacks of my teen years and young adulthood. I would behave badly to a friend, sibling, or parent, and then feel ashamed, knowing I had earned exclusion, rejection, or some other consequence. Sometimes, I got it. But often, I found that others had bigger souls and hearts than I imagined, and time and again, I was forgiven.

Now I strive to be both a loving husband to my amazing wife and a kind father to my two little girls. Most days, I do okay. Some days, not so much. There have been times when I've behaved badly and it was hard to face not only them, but also

myself. But incredibly, when my head has been bowed in shame, their love lifted it and blessed me with their kindness and reassurance. All this has shown me that life is one long learning process.

Jesus forgave those who hated, beat, and killed Him. He had patience with His disciples when they struggled to understand His teachings. He welcomed back those who had denied Him and friends who had hurt Him deeply. He touched the doubters and outcasts and gently lifted their heads, blessing them with unrestrained love. He affirms to us daily that there's room in His kingdom for all of us lost and lonely sinners when we come to Him.

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BY PETER AMSTERDAM

THE CALL TO FORGIVE



THE GOSPELS DESCRIBE JESUS BEING WHIPPED, beaten, and then nailed to a cross. As He hung there, waiting to die, some of His last words were “Father, forgive them.”¹ Forgiveness was His response to an unjust trial, being lashed by a whip with weighted strands that lacerated the skin, inflicting unimaginable pain, having spikes hammered

through His hands and feet, and being left to die on the cross in agony. While on the one hand, His reaction is very surprising, it also makes perfect sense when we read what Jesus taught about forgiveness throughout His ministry. He not only taught it—He embodied it, both in His life and His death. He practiced what He preached.


GOD’S FORGIVENESS

Jesus’ forgiveness reflected His Father’s forgiveness. In the Old Testament, when God revealed Himself to Moses, He said of Himself, “The Lord, the Lord, a God

merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.”² God was saying that forgiveness is one of His divine attributes, that it is rooted in His character. This point is made throughout the Old Testament, for example: “You are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”³

When we forgive others for things they have done to us, this reflects our understanding of divine forgiveness. We are to forgive others because we

1. Luke 23:34 ESV
2. Exodus 34:6–7 ESV
3. Nehemiah 9:17 ESV
4. Kelly Minter, *The Fitting Room* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook Publishing, 2011), 90



have been forgiven. Jesus died so that our sins could be forgiven, and we are called to forgive others when they sin against us or wrong us.

WHAT FORGIVENESS IS, AND ISN'T

Some hurt is done intentionally. We are assaulted in some way physically, verbally, or emotionally. Someone steals from us, perhaps by intentionally misleading us so that we are defrauded and lose our money, possessions, etc. We are betrayed by someone we love—a spouse, a family member, a close friend. Some hurts we experience are minor, but eventually become major, if they are repeated over and over again.

Forgiveness doesn't deny the harm or wrong someone has done to us. It doesn't make excuses for why they hurt us, and it doesn't minimize the seriousness of the offense. It doesn't mean that the offense stops hurting or is forgotten. Forgiveness isn't an automatic restoration of trust. It doesn't replace justice, as sometimes there are consequences to be faced even after the act of forgiveness. It's not instant emotional healing.

Forgiveness looks at the wrong done to us, admits that it has wounded us, and then decides to forgive—which is actually a decision to *start* the process of forgiving. It's recognizing that the hurt we experienced was personal, unfair, and deep, and choosing to let go of the inner negative feelings we have toward someone who has hurt us, in order that the hurt no longer negatively affects us.

As Kelly Minter explains in her book, *The Fitting Room*:

Forgiveness is not denying what our enemies have done; it's not calling something whole that's fractured or something pure that's corroded. Forgiveness is looking in the face of what our offenders have done, recognizing their wound for all that it is, and then choosing to forgive. It has nothing to do with denying the wrong of those who hurt us, but has everything to do with changing our hearts towards them.⁴

Sometimes we wait to forgive until the person who hurt us apologizes for what they've done. We want them to acknowledge that what they did was wrong and express regret. But there are a few problems with this. Sometimes the person doesn't know they hurt you, and if that's the case, they won't ever apologize. In some cases, the person knows they hurt you, but they don't care; and other times, the individual is no longer in your life. If you wait for someone to ask for your forgiveness before forgiving

them, you may end up carrying your hurt for the rest of your life.

There are cases where we're hurt by those whose own problems spill over onto us in some way. For example, parents' marital problems may hurt their children, but that isn't intentional hurt. Sometimes we're hurt by those who make mistakes. Sometimes someone is even trying to do something they think will be beneficial, but in the end, it doesn't work out the way they expected. In such situations, it's helpful to remind ourselves that we also do things that result in unintentional hurt to others. When we do, of course, we hope that those we have hurt will forgive us. And therefore we should be willing to forgive those who have harmed us without intending to.

There's also the factor that not every hurt that we experience needs to be forgiven. Many of the injuries we feel in life are caused by the actions of others who mean us no harm. We live in a world where we regularly interact with people just like us, who often say or do things with no intent to hurt others, but sometimes these things do cause hurt unknowingly.

Author Lewis Smedes gives an interesting example:

There was once a person in my life who did outrageous things to me. She screamed at me all through dinner; she made me jump to her service anytime, day and night, no matter how busy I was with other



things; and now and then she would pee on my best slacks. To make matters worse, she got acutely sick and drove me mad because she did not tell me what was wrong. There were moments when I felt like whacking her. But I never felt the impulse to forgive her. ... She was my six-month-old baby, and I did not feel a need to forgive the outrageous things she did to me, because she did not hurt me wrongfully. I loved her and I took whatever she dished out.⁵

LETTING GO, HEALING, AND RECONCILIATION

Understanding that Scripture tells us to forgive others, and agreeing that we should do so, is one thing. But the act of forgiving someone

who has deeply wounded us can be a difficult and gut-wrenching task. C. S. Lewis wrote, “Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive.”

The Greek word most often translated as forgiveness is *aphiemi*, which is used to express letting something go, or canceling a debt. When we forgive someone for what they have done, we release them from a legitimate debt. We acknowledge that we’ve been injured or wronged, our trust has been betrayed, and our life has been marred by someone else’s hurtful actions. But we also understand that we too are sinners, that we offend and hurt others, and that we’ve been forgiven for our offenses by God. When we forgive, we make the decision to let go of our pain, our desire for retribution, our anger and negative feelings toward the person. We put the person, and their actions, into God’s hands.

It can be natural to feel that forgiving someone is equivalent to

excusing them for what they have done. Not so. Rather it sets you free to let go of the pain of the offense, to move on without your feelings of ill will toward the person who harmed you constantly plaguing you.

IN CONCLUSION

Forgiveness is a complex topic with many aspects. However, it’s clear that Jesus, by His example and His teaching, emphasized forgiveness. He instructed us to forgive, and He didn’t put caveats on that command. If we desire to be more like Jesus, then we must forgive others for their trespasses against us—as hard as it may sometimes be—because God has forgiven our trespasses against Him.⁶

PETER AMSTERDAM AND HIS WIFE, MARIA FONTAINE, ARE DIRECTORS OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL, A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH. ADAPTED FROM THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE.⁷ ■

5. Smedes, *Forgive and Forget*, 8

6. See Ephesians 4:32.

7. Points for this article were condensed from the book *Forgive and Forget*, by Lewis B. Smedes (New York: HarperOne, 1984).



BY SALLY GARCÍA

ASKING FOR FORGIVENESS

YEARS AGO, I was in a complicated and unpleasant work situation with one of my coworkers. Things didn't improve, and I was relieved when he eventually moved on. Some time later, I received a short email from him with two simple words: "I apologize."

That's good! I thought. *He wants to apologize.* So I looked for the attachment that would have the "formal apology." But there wasn't any. I'd expected a written, detailed acknowledgment of the headaches, tensions, and complications that he had caused. What I got was those two words—"I apologize."

I knew that God was asking me to forgive him and turn the page. He had done his bit by asking for forgiveness, and the right thing to do was to extend that to him—but deep down, I felt a bit cheated. *Couldn't he have put a bit more effort into his apology?*

1. *When Sorry Isn't Enough: Making Things Right with Those You Love*, Moody Publishers.

But it wasn't long before I needed to apologize to someone and didn't know how to go about it. Getting into the reasons behind my actions would give the impression that I was creating a platform to justify myself and would make my apology sound insincere, plus I risked starting the controversy all over again. In the end, I copied the apology I'd received from my former coworker—and it was no less sincere for being simple.

It isn't easy to ask for forgiveness. It's awkward, and most of us don't have enough practice. Gary Chapman and Jennifer Thomas share some very helpful advice in their book, *When Sorry Isn't Enough*.¹ They say that when we seek reconciliation, **the key ... is learning the apology language of the other person and being willing to speak it. ... When you fail to speak their language, it makes forgiveness more difficult because they are not sure if you are genuinely apologizing.**

The authors break this language down to five main categories:

- Expressing regret. For some people it will be enough to sincerely say, "I'm sorry."
- Accepting responsibility. Avoid making excuses and admit, "I was wrong."
- Making restitution. Do more than say sorry—for example, ask, "What can I do to make it up to you?"
- Repentance. Promise, "I will try to never do it again."
- Requesting forgiveness. Show vulnerability by humbly asking, "Please forgive me."

I think that humility and sincerity are key, to be genuinely concerned about the offended person's needs and learn to listen to their hurts. And if both sides are willing, anything wonderful can happen in the restored relationship.

SALLY GARCÍA IS AN EDUCATOR, MISSIONARY, AND MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN CHILE. ■

BY TINA KAPP

Preserved or Pickled?

MY FAVORITE TASTE IS SOUR—sour candies, pickles, anything with lemon, sour cherries, you name it—I love it! Some people may prefer savory, or sweet—or the newcomer to the block, umami—but the one basic taste I’ve never found to be anyone’s favorite is bitter. I’m not surprised! In fact, the word I’ve seen most used in definitions of the word bitter is “unpleasant.”

It seems to make sense that the word “bitter” is also used to describe the act of holding on to resentment and anger. I once read an article that said there are three types of bitterness.

The first is against God. This type of bitterness can come from situations where you don’t understand why something bad happened: the loss of a loved one, a natural disaster, or anything that you feel is unfair. It’s getting angry at God for not having stopped it and figuring that He didn’t hear you when you prayed—or maybe that He doesn’t care.

1. NIV
2. Matthew 18:35 NIV
3. Ephesians 4:31–32 NIV
4. See Philippians 4:13.
5. www.just1thing.com

The second type is toward others. Maybe someone treated you wrongly, did something dishonest, or talked badly about you behind your back. You feel that you can never really forgive them—and that even if you could, they don’t deserve it, and it certainly wouldn’t be fair.

The last one—which we don’t always realize is a form of bitterness—is bitterness toward yourself! You may know in your heart that God has forgiven you for some mistake you’ve made, but you can’t forgive yourself, and you hang on to those negative feelings.

I think everyone is affected by bitterness toward others at some time. Everyone gets hurt, and it’s hard to handle tough people and situations. The secret lies in *how you deal* with that hurt.

Hebrews 12:15 says, “See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble.”¹ Bitterness can make you miss out on the grace that God wishes to give you. And like the example of the root, at first it’s difficult to notice bitterness, but as that “weed” sprouts, there will be symptoms. And if you let it continue to grow without uprooting it, it can take over your life.



In Matthew 18, Peter asked Jesus how many times he needed to forgive someone, and if perhaps seven times was sufficient. Maybe

Peter had been wronged six times and figured he’d had quite enough. Jesus answered that it was seventy times seven, and He followed up on that with the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant.

In the parable, a king wants to sort out his accounts, so he gets his

servants to pay back the money they owe him. It turns out one servant owed him ten thousand talents—about 200,000 years’ wages! He wasn’t able to pay, so the king decreed that, in line with some contemporary Roman legal practices, his wife and children and everything he had would be sold to pay back the debt.

But when the servant fell on his knees, crying, “Be patient with me and I will pay back everything!” the king took pity on him, canceled the debt, and let him go. I don’t know what *you* would do if you just had an unimaginably monstrous debt forgiven and your family and life returned to you, but something was seriously wrong with this servant, because after leaving the king, he found someone who owed him a hundred denarii—a debt that was 600,000 times smaller than the one he had just been forgiven—and he attacked him and began to choke him, demanding he pay the money back immediately.

When the debtor dropped to his knees and begged, “Be patient with me and I will pay you back,” the servant instead had him thrown in prison.

When the king heard about this, he called the servant back and reprimanded him, saying that he should have had the same mercy on others as had been shown to him. Then he had the servant thrown into jail until he could pay back his debt. Jesus concluded with a pretty hefty statement: “This is how heavenly

Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”²

Talk about motivation! Of course, it’s not always easy to, as the Bible says, “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”³ But God knows that, and He promises that He will help us to forgive, if we ask Him to.⁴

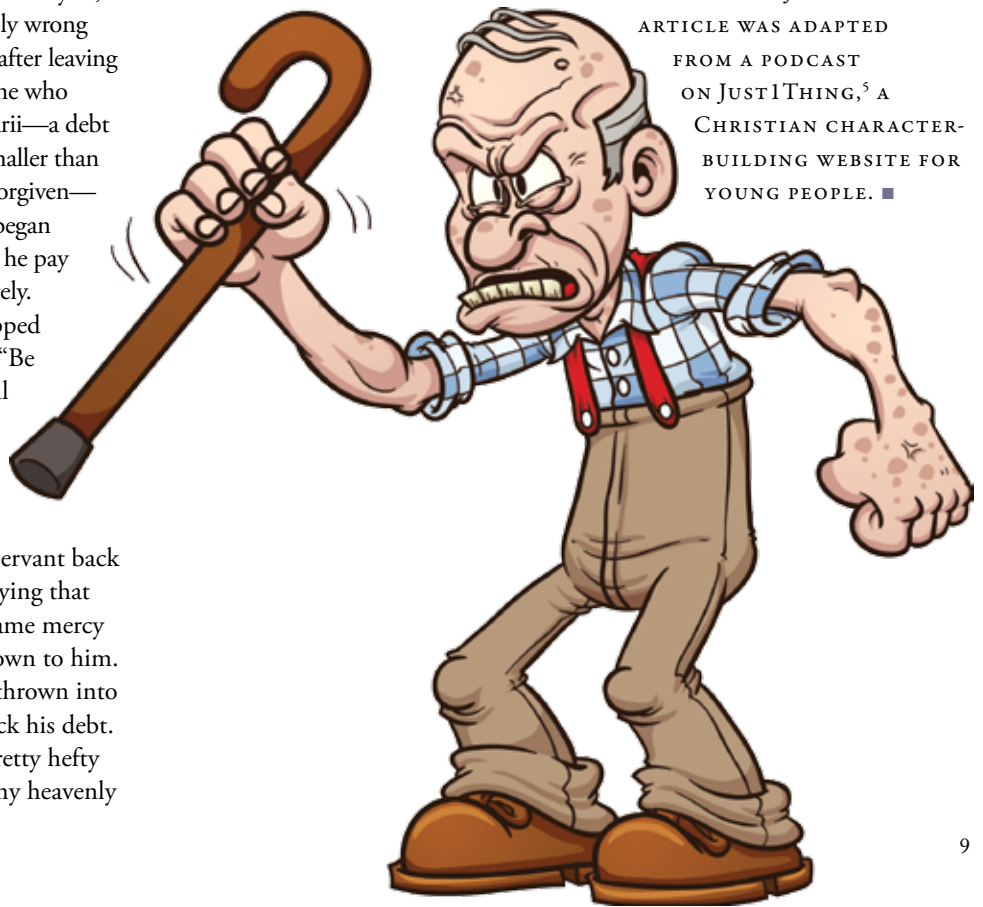
I once saw a funny illustration of two elderly people. One was a woman with a big heart, always

helping others, and who forgave easily. She looked bright, cheery, and robust for her age. The other was a man who always saw the worst in people, grumbled all the time, and couldn’t forgive. He looked mean and weathered. The caption read, “Some people are well preserved; others are well pickled.”

Which are you?

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ARTICLE WAS ADAPTED FROM A PODCAST ON JUST1THING,⁵ A CHRISTIAN CHARACTER-BUILDING WEBSITE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. ■





He saved us, not because of righteous things we have done, but because of his mercy.

—*Titus 3:5 NIV*

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

—*Matthew 5:7 NIV*

The weak can never forgive.

Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.

—*Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948)*

The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy.

—*James 3:17 NIV*

Forgiveness is the key that unlocks the door of resentment and the handcuffs of hate. It is the power that breaks the chains of bitterness and the shackles of selfishness.

—*Corrie ten Boom*

God bestows His blessings without discrimination. The followers of Jesus are children of God, and they should manifest the family likeness by doing good to all, even to those who deserve the opposite.

—*F. F. Bruce (1910–1990)*

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

—*Lewis B. Smedes (1921–2002)*

There is no difficulty that enough love will not conquer; no disease that enough love will not heal; no door that enough love will not open; no gulf that enough love will not bridge; no wall that enough love will not throw down; no sin that enough love will not redeem. ... It makes no difference how deeply seated may be the trouble; how hopeless the outlook; how muddled the tangle; how great the mistake. A sufficient realization of love will dissolve it all.

—*Emmet Fox (1886–1951)*

Forgiveness is a redemptive response to having been wronged and wounded. Only those who have wronged and wounded us are candidates for forgiveness. If they injure us accidentally, we excuse them. We only forgive the ones we blame.

—*Lewis B. Smedes (1921–2002)*

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

—*Luke 6:36 NIV*

God loves you as you are, not as you should be, because no one is as they should be.

—*Brennan Manning (1934–2013)*

You may feel that what you've suffered is unpardonable, beyond forgiveness, but God can lift that burden and give you a change of heart. The miracle-working love of God is love enough to forgive—and to help you forgive.

—*Gabriel Sarmiento* ■

BY JOYCE SUTTIN

PLACING BLAME



RECENTLY, I was reviewing my past, thinking about choices I made, and I began to blame others for how some things had turned out. I blamed my parents for the decisions they made that affected my childhood. I blamed my school for the insecurities I felt, and how I never felt I was perfect enough to succeed in various areas. I blamed my church for attitudes I had about God that affected my relationship with Him.

But as I lay in bed thinking deeply about my life, I began to see my parents with understanding and realized that they'd done the best they had known how. I remembered all the ways they had encouraged me and helped me become the person I am today.

Likewise, I looked back at my time in school and realized that a lot of what I had experienced was on me. I was shy and afraid to try new things. I was fearful of stepping out and taking risks. It was mostly my own insecurities that got in the way of my academic and social success.

When I relived the years I spent going to my family's small independent church, sure, I remembered gossip and some hurts that had stuck with me; but with the benefit of a much longer life, I realized how easy it'd been to blame the situation or the institution, when in reality I'd received a wonderful foundation of faith, and so often the members of the congregation there had helped me and been examples of genuine Christianity.

It's important not to get stuck blaming situations. My life hasn't been perfect. I have made some decisions that have hurt myself, and at times others have hurt me. But it wasn't my home life or my school or my church that was responsible. It was individuals. And when I remembered the individuals, I saw a woman struggling with grief because her oldest child had died; an unhappy middle-aged woman who had spent her time caring for an elderly mother and aunt who had numerous infirmities; a fresh-out-of-college youth leader who thought he was an expert on teenagers but simply needed a bit more life experience; and an exhausted and stressed math teacher whose wife's pregnancy had landed her in the hospital for months. These people made mistakes, just like I've made mistakes along the way in my life.

It's too easy to draw conclusions and make generalizations about our experiences and the people we feel justified in casting blame on. But some serious introspection can give insight into why things happened. At the time, we might not understand why someone reacted the way they did, but looking back with understanding helps us have a clearer picture and find freedom in forgiveness.

JOYCE SUTTIN IS A RETIRED TEACHER AND WRITER AND LIVES IN SAN ANTONIO, USA. CHECK OUT HER BLOG AT [HTTPS://JOY4DAILYDEVOTIONALS.BLOGSPOT.COM/](https://joy4dailydevotionals.blogspot.com/). ■

BY YVETTE GLADSTONE

THE ONGOING PROCESS

“FORGIVE US THE WRONGS WE HAVE DONE, as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us.”¹ The first time I heard that Bible verse, my heart hurt, and I felt so ashamed. Why? Because I knew there were people I hadn’t forgiven. Yet I really wanted God to forgive me for the things that I had done that hurt someone else.

I didn’t want God to forgive me the way *I* forgave others, because I knew I hadn’t forgiven others! But I wanted God to forgive me, because *He* is merciful, because I really needed it, and because I was sorry for what I’d done. But I felt *others weren’t* sorry for what they’d done to *me*. So that wasn’t fair! Or so I thought.

1. Matthew 6:12 GNT
2. Proverbs 17:22 AMP
3. Roderick McFarlane, *Reader’s Digest*, December 1992



Squirming in my seat, and in my heart, I told God in prayer that I didn’t feel that was fair. Then He spoke to my heart and said, *It wasn’t fair what they did to Me either*, referring to His death on the cross.

I’m so sorry about that, I replied. *But You’re God and You can do the impossible. I’m just a weak woman who does stupid things sometimes.*

Well, I made you in My image and likeness, didn’t I? So you have what it takes to do what you need to do. I know, because I gave it to you.

Oh ... right. Well, then, You’ll have to be the One within me to forgive them, because I don’t feel strong enough. You’re my strength, Lord. So

please help me to forgive them, by Your grace.

And He’s helped me every time since! Forgiveness isn’t easy, yet it is possible with His help.

I have discovered that forgiveness is an ongoing process, and in His love and mercy, God has given me a few tools to help make it easier along the way. Some of the tools are funny, some are profound, and some are just good sense—like looking at things a different way, perhaps the way God sees things.

One funny tool is a sense of humor. The Bible says, “A happy heart is good medicine and a cheerful mind works healing.”² Just



like the right medicine can help soothe our aches and pains, and speed up our healing from injuries or sickness, so a happy heart—a good sense of humor—can be very helpful to comfort and soothe our hearts and minds when others have hurt us, whether

intentionally or unintentionally.

One time when I was working alongside some new coworkers, I just couldn't seem to do things the way they liked. I was feeling angry at them and sorry for myself. Alone in prayer, I started to tell God, *Well, if they don't like me ...* Before I could finish my sentence, a still small voice said to my heart, *I'll eat their French fries!* What?!

That made me laugh! Because out of the blue, it reminded me of an inside joke my late husband and I shared. Years ago, when he was first learning Spanish, he and some friends were having lunch together. As they were finishing, he said to

someone in broken Spanish, "If you don't like me, I'll eat your French fries!" The friends were shocked! Then they laughed, because what he meant to say was, "If you don't like them, I'll eat your French fries."

Anyway, that good laugh helped me lighten up, so I could forgive my new coworkers and stop taking myself so seriously.

Another tool is what I call "10 Things to Forgive." It comes from this anecdote:

On her golden wedding anniversary, my grandmother revealed the secret of her long and happy marriage. "On my wedding day, I decided to choose ten of my husband's faults which, for the sake of our marriage, I would overlook," she explained. A guest asked her to name some of the faults. "To tell the truth," she replied, "I never did get around to listing them. But whenever my husband did something that made me hopping mad, I would say to myself, 'Lucky for him that's one of the ten.'"³

Another helpful tool comes from a story attributed to Corrie ten



Boom, where she explains forgiveness through an image of a large church bell. Concerning the difficult emotions that go along with the process of forgiveness—such as resentment, hurt feelings, reliving painful moments over and over, etc.—she says the process of forgiveness is like letting go of the rope that rings the church bell. We say we forgive and let it go, yet those bad feelings aren't gone right away. After letting go of the rope, the church bell continues to ring for a time, yet increasingly slower and quieter, until eventually it stops altogether.

The full circle of forgiveness may take time to complete, yet it does eventually bring us peace of mind and rest of soul.

YVETTE GLADSTONE IS A FREELANCE WRITER AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL LIVING IN GUERRERO, MEXICO. ■



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

—George Herbert
(1593–1633)

BY MARIE ALVERO

THE CHOICE

MAYBE PETER THOUGHT HE WAS GOING TO STUMP JESUS WHEN HE ASKED THE QUESTION “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me?” He wanted a number, some quantification of when enough was enough and forgiveness was spent. Peter throws out a number, “Seven times?” “No, not seven times,” Jesus responds, “but seventy times seven!”¹

Some quick multiplication tells us that 490 seems to be the magic number—a much larger number than Peter was suggesting. But it’s not a random number. As always, Jesus’ words were precise and targeted. In Hebrew numerology, each letter has a numeric value, and words that have

1. See Matthew 18:22.

the same numeric value are often connected in meaning. “Tamim,” the Hebrew word for “complete” or “perfect,” has a numeric value of 490. In other words, you forgive fully. You don’t set a limit on your forgiveness.

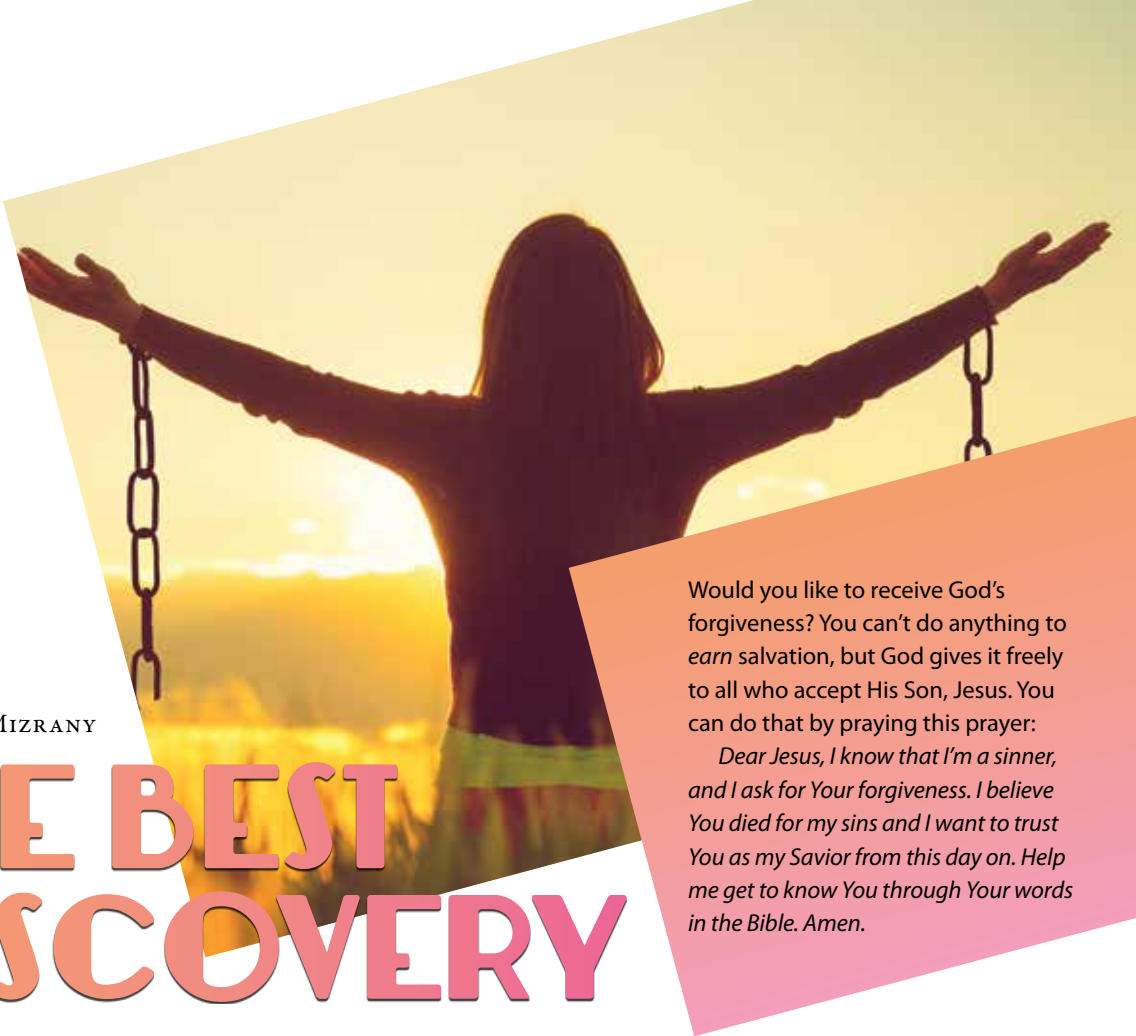
Let me state the obvious here: this is hard! Sometimes forgiveness is not deserved, or even sought out. Sometimes there’s no repentance. But still, the choice to forgive is already made. I know I will forgive because that is what Jesus has asked of me, and what’s more, it is what He has done for me. He has forgiven me for all my sins, past, present and future. So I will strive to forgive in the same way.

One of the biggest things I’ve learned about forgiveness is that it’s a continuous process. I can make the choice to forgive someone for

something, and be genuine in my desire to forgive, but down the road, I may again find myself angry at the person for the exact same offense. Maybe that’s another way the 490 comes in? Continually forgiving for the same event until the memory doesn’t make me angry, vengeful, or distraught.

Sometimes, forgiving takes more strength and love than I feel capable of. Thankfully, forgiveness isn’t an emotion. It’s a choice and an action. Because we are saved through Jesus, we have the grace to make the choice to forgive others.

MARIE ALVERO IS A FORMER MISSIONARY TO AFRICA AND MEXICO. SHE CURRENTLY LIVES A HAPPY, BUSY LIFE WITH HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN IN CENTRAL TEXAS, USA. ■



BY AMY JOY MIZRANY

THE BEST DISCOVERY

Would you like to receive God's forgiveness? You can't do anything to *earn* salvation, but God gives it freely to all who accept His Son, Jesus. You can do that by praying this prayer:

Dear Jesus, I know that I'm a sinner, and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe You died for my sins and I want to trust You as my Savior from this day on. Help me get to know You through Your words in the Bible. Amen.

I HAVE ALWAYS LIKED THE DISCIPLE PETER. He made a lot of mistakes, opened his mouth at all the wrong times, didn't want to have to forgive his brother, and ultimately even denied Jesus—three times.

Yet, Peter appeals to me because I am a lot like him. Like Peter, each of us makes mistakes, each of us has times when we don't forgive our offenders—and most certainly, each of us has disappointed our Savior. I know I have many times.

I came to the point when I looked at myself and all the mistakes I'd made (and would undoubtedly continue to make) and concluded

that I was an awful person. I am not always honest, I get angry, I'm lazy, I argue a lot, I'm sarcastic and critical ... and on the list goes.

Maybe He loves me for the person I could be, I thought. That made sense. So I decided to try to be that person. Loving, kind, helpful, always ready to inspire and lift others up.

Well, that was the plan. But even the best plans are useless if you can't put them into practice. And I couldn't. I did try to be better, but now that I was aware of all my failings, it seemed that I only made more mistakes. However hard I tried, I couldn't become the person I *could*

be, the one I thought God loved so much.

Then it came to me: God *doesn't* love me as the person I could or should or might be! He loves me for who I am! Right now, right here, me. Broken, shattered, disappointing me. He doesn't need a "because" to love me. And that goes for everyone.

AMY JOY MIZRANY WAS BORN AND LIVES IN SOUTH AFRICA AND IS A FULL-TIME MISSIONARY WITH HELPING HAND AND A MEMBER OF TFI. IN HER SPARE TIME SHE PLAYS THE VIOLIN. ■



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

LIFE-CHANGING FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is not an emotion, it's a choice. When you make the decision to forgive, it doesn't mean that all the hurt is gone. But once you decide that you'll forgive, then you allow Me to work in your heart.

To forgive is a step toward freedom and away from the weight of resentment that hurts you and can hurt others. When you carry around hurts that you haven't forgiven, that weight can crush you and eventually destroy your emotional health and control your life. Letting go of the hurt may be one of the most difficult things you need to do, but you are the one who benefits the most from doing so.

I can set things straight, work in others' lives and change them—and that will

help them, but it won't help you. I call you to forgive those who have wronged you, because I want to relieve you of the pain and the burden. I want to help you to let go of the hurt that brings sadness, anger, or grief. I want you to forgive, because I know that forgiveness is the path to freedom, happiness, and growth.

I see the peace of mind and freedom that will be restored to you once you make the choice to forgive. Save yourself from the continued pain, grief, and crippling that comes from holding on to hurtful experiences, and leave them with Me to take care of in the way that I know is best. As you take that step of forgiveness by faith, I will bring the healing that you desire.