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# activated

Vol 19 • Issue 4

## LIFE AND TETRIS

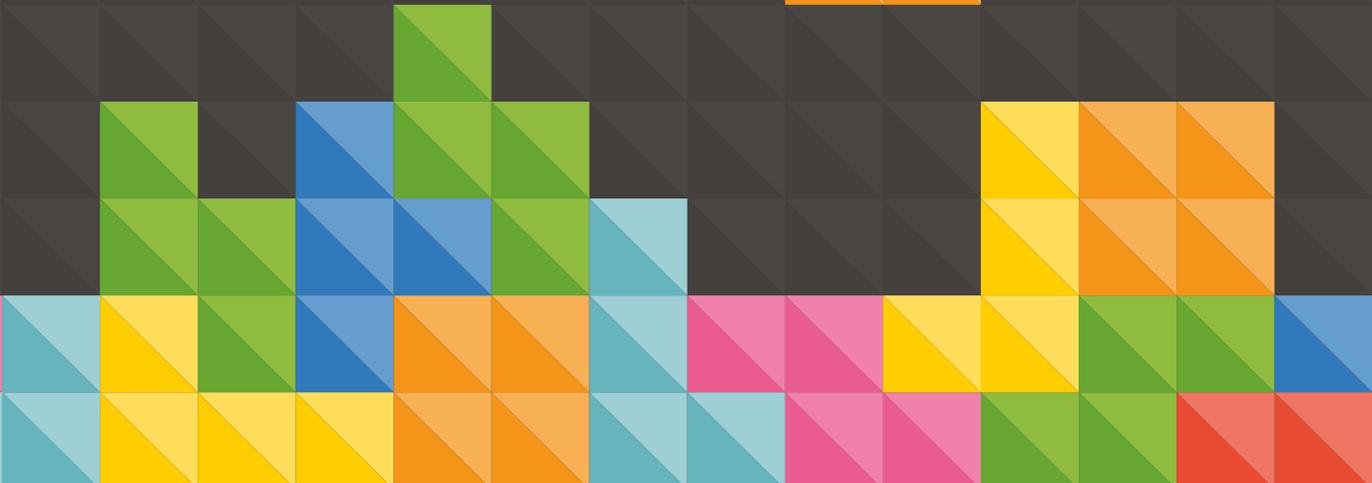
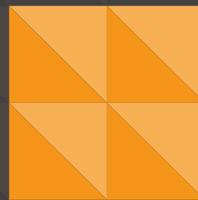
Game not over

## Power to Forgive

Tortured by Idi Amin's  
soldiers

## My Mistake

A tale of two  
presentations





## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

### THE PRISON

There's a story of a visit Pope Leo XII made to the jail of the Papal States in 1825, which goes like this: The pope insisted on questioning each of the prisoners as to how he had come to be there. As you'd expect, every man protested his innocence—all but one, that is, who admitted that he was a forger and

a thief. Turning to the jailer, the pope said sternly, "Release this scoundrel at once, before his presence corrupts all these noble gentlemen here!"

We may chuckle, but there's a lesson here for all of us: God's forgiveness is granted to those who know they need it, don't deserve it, and can't earn it—to those who depend solely on His mercy and grace.

This principle applies to our salvation by faith, but it also goes for everyday life. How often are we like the other men in the story, unwilling to admit our mistakes and shortcomings, which could lead to forgiveness and facilitate reconciliation with those we've wronged? And how often do we hold on to the hurt and resentment caused by someone else's actions instead of letting go and forgiving them for *their* mistakes and shortcomings?

God's Word tells us we are to forgive others (even if we think they don't deserve it), because we were forgiven by God when we didn't deserve it: "Be kind, compassionate, and forgiving to each other, in the same way God forgave you in Christ."<sup>1</sup>

Whether the person who offended you is sorry or not, whether he or she ever expresses remorse or not, your decision to forgive is essential in releasing you from your prison of pain and bitterness and enabling you to move forward. Forgiving someone who has hurt us is never easy. But with God, it is possible.

Samuel Keating  
Executive Editor

1. Ephesians 4:32 CEB

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# AFTER THE BULLETS STOPPED

BY UDAY KUMAR

Your love for our family has helped to provide the healing we so desperately need. Gifts you've given have touched our hearts in a way no words can describe. Your compassion has reached beyond our family, beyond our community, and is changing our world, and for this we sincerely thank you.—*Marie Roberts, widow of Charles Carl Roberts, the shooter of October 2, 2006, in an open letter to her Amish neighbors.*

I WAS GOING through a tough period. People who had offended me were frequently on my mind, and I found myself almost exploding with resentment and anger.

The only thing being angry and flustered does, though, is cloud my thinking and perspective. It never solves my problem. My natural reaction is to retaliate and set things right, but in the long run, this only makes matters worse.

Author Dale Carnegie once quoted a police department bulletin that advised, “If selfish people take advantage of you, cross them off your list, but don’t try to get even. When you try to get even, you hurt

yourself more than you hurt the other fellow.”

The shooting incident at the Amish community in Pennsylvania some years ago is a powerful example of forgiveness in action. A disturbed man—an outsider to the community—walked into an Amish schoolhouse and took ten girls hostage, eventually killing five of them before taking his own life. I can barely imagine what their families must have gone through, yet they forgave the shooter, reached out to his wife and children, and even set up a fund to help them.

Of course the ways in which I feel mistreated are minimal compared to the loss those Amish parents experienced, yet they were able to

forgive. I realized that much of my unhappiness stemmed from the fact that I hadn’t forgiven others for what they’d done. As a result, these incidents kept replaying in my mind, causing me a lot of anguish.

Judgment is God’s prerogative.<sup>1</sup> Our prerogative is forgiveness. It applies a balm of healing to our own hearts and lets God work in the situation as He sees fit. Forgiveness does not absolve the wrongdoer of the wrong, but it does lift a heavy burden from our hearts. That’s a lesson I hope to apply.

UDAY KUMAR LIVES IN BANGALORE, INDIA, AND TEACHES ENGLISH AND PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT COURSES. ■

1. See Hebrews 12:23.



# NON-RETALIATION

BY PETER AMSTERDAM, ADAPTED

**JESUS STARTED THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT** with the Beatitudes,<sup>1</sup> which spoke of blessings for the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted. He was teaching what those who were part of the kingdom of God were to be like. Then He moved on to another topic:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the

right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.”<sup>2</sup>

The Old Testament stated that when someone injured or killed another, their punishment was to be equal to their wrongdoing.<sup>3</sup> This concept of proportionate retribution is called *lex talionis*, and was also present in other ancient codes of law.

The purpose was to lay the foundation of justice, eliminating blood feuds, where one person or family took the law into their own hands because they felt bound to avenge the damage done to them or their relatives. *Lex talionis* called for equal retribution for the guilty party, so that the matter would be resolved.

1. See Matthew 5:3–12.  
2. Matthew 5:38–42 ESV  
3. See Exodus 21:23–25;  
Leviticus 24:19–20;  
Deuteronomy 19:18–21.

4. Leviticus 19:18 NIV  
5. Proverbs 24:29 ESV  
6. See Exodus 22:25–27;  
Deuteronomy 24:10–13.  
7. See Matthew 27:32.



However, there are similarities to what Jesus taught even in the Old Testament: “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>4</sup> “Do not say, ‘I will do to him as he has done to me; I will pay the man back for what he has done.’”<sup>5</sup>

Let’s look at the first example Jesus used: “If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

Slapping someone’s cheek was considered a severe insult, and one could be taken to court and fined for it. In order for a right-handed person to slap someone on their right cheek, it would be necessary to use the back of the right hand, and in those days, slapping someone’s cheek with the back of the hand was considered extra insulting and resulted in a double fine. So Jesus was saying that when someone dishonors you (in this example by giving a backhanded slap on the cheek), you are not to seek financial compensation within the legal system, but rather to accept the insult and not retaliate, and even offer the left cheek for a further insult.

Jesus then specifically speaks of a lawsuit: “If anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.”

This speaks of a situation where one is sued in court for their tunic, or shirt. Jesus says that in such a situation one should give up his cloak or coat as well. For many, giving up their coat—which was generally heavier than a tunic and doubled as a blanket at night—would mean real hardship. According to Old Testament law, it was not legal to

keep someone’s coat overnight if you took it as a pledge for a loan. Jesus was saying to go beyond what was demanded, to give the cloak freely even if it meant being cold at night.<sup>6</sup>

His third example had to do with the Roman law by which a subjugated people were legally bound to bear a burden or perform a service on command: “If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.”

This concept of a person being forced to carry a burden on command of the Romans can be seen when Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry Jesus’ cross.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus was telling His disciples that if they were compelled to do such a service, even by an enemy, they should do so, and more.

The fourth example doesn’t deal with something in the legal realm, but rather reflects more of an everyday situation: “Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.”

Jesus is teaching generosity toward those in need, whether they are beggars or someone who would borrow money from you. As in the previous cases, He puts forth an example of the right attitude for members of the kingdom of God. We are to be generous and to give or lend cheerfully. This is not a call to give all you have to beggars, nor that you loan all of your money to others and impoverish yourself. The point is to give with a right attitude, not with a grudging heart. As the apostle Paul wrote when collecting funds for the poor Jerusalem church, “Each one must give as he has decided in his



heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”<sup>8</sup>

Through these four examples, Jesus addresses our natural bent toward being selfish or defensive, retaliating, or demanding justice in situations where we consider that we are being taken advantage of or being insulted or hurt in some way.

Jesus calls us to follow the principle of non-retaliation and teaches us to strive against the natural desire to defend ourselves or to desire revenge when someone has harmed, insulted, or wronged us. As Christians, by God’s grace, we are called not to give way to offenses or to model our response according to the actions of others.

The example of the deep insult, as well as that of the tunic and the law, points to the Christian response to personal injustice—of not responding in kind in a spirit of vengeance or retaliation when someone wrongs us. This doesn’t imply that Christians cannot or shouldn’t avail themselves of the legal system when their rights or the rights of others are being infringed upon, particularly when life and liberty or basic human rights are at stake.

The example of being compelled to carry something teaches that when things are legally demanded of us (as long as they are not immoral), we should go the extra mile by doing them willingly and without resentment.

Giving and lending to those that ask addresses the attitude of “what’s mine is mine” and “if I share what I have, I may suffer loss.” Again, Jesus wasn’t advocating giving until we have nothing left and we also become beggars; He was addressing our instinctive self-concern and selfishness. We may not be able to give to everyone, but if someone is in need and we have the means to help, we should. This would especially hold true when it is a brother or sister in Christ, as the apostle John wrote: “If anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?”<sup>9</sup>

As Christians, members of God’s kingdom, we are challenged to transcend natural behavior. We are to move away from self-interest and become more aware of living the principle of loving our neighbors as ourselves. This isn’t a call to be a “doormat” which everyone walks on; rather it’s a challenge to have an attitude of love, mercy, and compassion, and the dignity to let some things pass, to absorb some loss, whether of face or finances. Rather than retaliating and seeking to defend our pride, or always looking out for our own best interests, we are called to love, to follow Jesus’ example of not looking to His own interests.

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

8. 2 Corinthians 9:7 ESV

9. 1 John 3:17 ESV



BY SALLY GARCÍA

## I'M SORRY

**FOR YEARS** I monitored children during recess and playground activities. Between all the running, jumping, rowdiness, and good-natured play, someone would often end up getting run into, tripped, shoved, etc.

Often the child who had caused the accidents would immediately raise his or her hands and say, “It’s not my fault” or “I didn’t do it on purpose!” But of course, establishing guilt wasn’t the immediate priority. The most important issue is the welfare of the “injured” one.

I saw this scene play out so many times that I finally realized that most of us have to *learn* empathy. It doesn’t come naturally. The children were confusing “I’m sorry” with an admission of guilt, and since they hadn’t harmed anyone on purpose, they didn’t feel the need to feel sorry for them. But in life, like on the playground, we sometimes inadvertently hurt someone and need to apologize.

We may have reasons. Maybe we didn’t realize, we didn’t think things through, we didn’t consider the implications of our actions. Maybe there were extenuating circumstances, misunderstandings, others involved. Every story has *at least* two sides. The problem is that when we say, “I’m sorry, *but let me explain...*” we’re usually turning the focus on ourselves instead of the one we’ve hurt. Then we become the victim of a misunderstanding. It’s sometimes helpful to offer clarifications if we can and give our side of the story. But first things first—did someone get hurt? An apology spoken with sincerity contains a healing balm.

Back to the playground. Another lesson I learned from 35 years of working with children—if we’re quick to apologize, the other side is usually quick to forgive. That’s the best part.

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

Who cares who’s right or wrong when the last word is a kind apology?

—*Richelle E. Goodrich*

Apologizing does not always mean that you are wrong and the other person is right. It just means that you value your relationship more than your ego.

—*Author unknown*

An apology is the superglue of life. It can repair just about anything.

—*Lynn Johnston (b. 1947)*

When an apology is due, give it freely, then follow your apology with action.

—*Judy Ford*

Apology is a lovely perfume; it can transform the clumsiest moment into a gracious gift.

—*Margaret Lee Runbeck (1905–1956)*

# POWER TO FORGIVE

BY STELLA SABIITI, AS TOLD TO *ACTIVATED EAST*  
AFRICA CORRESPONDENT KATHLEEN MURAWKA

I DISCOVERED THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS on a July afternoon in 1976. It was during the Idi Amin regime, when Uganda had come to a standstill—careers, the economy, the infrastructure, education, everything. I was a student at Makerere University and also newly married and expecting a baby.

Because the university didn't have any supplies and the lecturers didn't have any fuel to get them to and from the university, they didn't come to teach us. So we students would go to the library every morning and either read there, or get books to study in our rooms. Idi Amin, not having gone to school himself, didn't understand why we were doing that.

He thought it was a demonstration against him, so he routinely sent soldiers to the campus to terrorize us.

At that time, my husband was working in the northern part of the country, near the border with Sudan. Every so often, he would come to Kampala or I would visit him and we would spend a few days together. He had just come for the weekend, and Monday morning he dropped me at the campus. When I got to my room, my roommate, Judith, and another friend, Brenda, told me that soldiers had been coming and going from another hall of residence on the other side of the campus, and had broken things and beaten up some students.

This wasn't the first time this had happened. Off and on, truckloads of soldiers would come and beat some of the boys. We girls would shout at the soldiers from the balconies of our rooms, telling them to stop, and they would yell back that we were stupid women who didn't know anything. We were used to not being attacked by them because we were women.

About noon that Monday, there was a knock on our door. We thought it was some friends playing a joke on us, so we shouted, "Go away, you soldiers!" and we laughed. You know how students are. But the knocking got louder and louder until we realized that it was soldiers!

Brenda and I ran onto the balcony

Stella Sabiiti with her husband and daughter about one year after her Makerere University ordeal.



Stella Sabiiti in more recent years.

and crouched down. Judith jumped into her bed and covered herself. Moments later, the soldiers broke down the door with such force that bits and pieces of the lock and door flew across the room and onto the balcony. Soldiers burst into the room, shouting. Miraculously they never saw Judith in bed, but they did find Brenda and me on the balcony. I remember thinking, *This is it!* Whenever the soldiers went after someone in particular, that was the end of them.

They pulled us from the balcony and shoved us through the room and into the corridor at gunpoint. One soldier stayed behind and leafed through our papers. Judith could

hear him just a few feet away, but he never saw her.

“We found you! We found you!” they kept shouting at me, as though they were sure I was some sort of ringleader. When we got to the top of the stairs, they pushed us down. Each time we would get up, they would push us again. Fall and roll, get up, fall and roll, down one flight of stairs after another. At the top of the last flight of stairs, which was the longest, one of the soldiers hit me from behind so hard that I went flying and didn’t stop until I hit the floor. I lost consciousness.

When the other soldiers reached the bottom of the stairs with Brenda, they said they were taking us to

Makindye, a barracks that at the time was a slaughterhouse. But first they took us next door to Lumumba Hall, a male hall of residence built around a courtyard. There, soldiers were torturing the boys—boys we knew, good boys. Apparently this had been going on all morning without us knowing about it, even though we were in the next building.

The soldiers made Brenda and me join the boys for a while, but soon we were all ordered to go outside, in front of the hall. Brenda and I were separated from the others. I was told I would get special treatment because I was the ringleader.

More soldiers arrived—hundreds of them. They brought many more



girls outside and made them join the boys, crawling half-naked back and forth at gunpoint on the tarmac, their knees bare and bloody.

I have no idea why they thought I was the ringleader. That was what gave me strength—knowing that the accusations they kept shouting at me were baseless. They beat and whipped and trampled Brenda and me, but their main attention was on me. This went on for hours—one cruel form of torture after another. Remember, I was also about one month pregnant at the time. It was a miracle that the baby survived.

By the end of the afternoon, the soldiers apparently decided they had tortured me enough and said they were taking me to Makindye, the slaughterhouse. But before I died, I wanted to find out why they were doing this to me. Why, out of the hundreds of girls at my hall of residence, had they picked me as the ringleader?

All day I hadn't said anything. I hadn't cried. I hadn't screamed. I hadn't done anything to resist. I had been like a piece of wood. Now part

of me wanted to ask them why they were doing this to me, but another part said that if I did, it would only make them come down harder on me. Then a voice inside said, *Just look into their eyes. That's where you will find the reason for this.*

So I looked them in the eye, and I was so surprised at what I saw there! Despite all their curses and bravado, they were hurting inside! They didn't like what they were doing, contrary to what I had thought all along.

I was so overwhelmed with compassion for them that I wanted to tell them before I died that I understood, that it was okay. But how could I tell them that? I was still being beaten and tortured, but between blows the thought came to me, *Maybe if I talk about something we have in common, that will help them understand.* It was a crazy idea, but I didn't care. I had nothing to lose.

But what did I have in common with those soldiers? They were strong men—I was a pregnant woman. They had guns, boots, whips—I was a simple helpless girl. Then it dawned on me. You've just been married,

you're expecting a baby. These men must have families too.

"What did your wives cook for you last night?" I asked.

"What?" they asked in disbelief. And then they said something in Kiswahili. Whenever Idi Amin's soldiers tortured people, they spoke in Kiswahili. Today, many Ugandans don't speak Kiswahili—they associate it with torture and bad things. "What a stupid woman!" they yelled, and they kicked me some more.

When they stopped, I took a deep breath and asked them again, "What did your wife cook for you last night?" They hit me again. That continued until they must have thought, *Let's humor her.* And they started answering, "I ate this," and "I ate that."

Then I asked, "Where do your children go to school? Did you take your children to school this morning?"

My simple questions led to a conversation, and the soldiers eventually sat down with me under a tree, where we talked and laughed. Yes, we actually laughed together! Brenda told me later that when she saw that scene, the fear and pain left her.



It turned out that the soldiers who had been with me the whole day were the leaders. They made a signal, and the whole thing stopped, just like that! By this time, it was around 6:30, so some of the boys had been tortured all day long and the rest of us for about six hours.

Trucks came and collected the soldiers, and ambulances came for those who were the most severely injured. All the gates to the university had been locked and guarded all day, but the ambulances must have been waiting outside, because they arrived while the soldiers were still leaving.

The university cooks and kitchen staff, whom the soldiers hadn't harassed, brought us tea and bread, then sat with us on the ground and cried for us. That's when I finally broke down. I couldn't imagine what it had been like for them, having to witness all this but being unable to do anything to stop it.

Looking back, I can honestly say that I forgave those soldiers the moment I looked them in the eye, because that's when I realized that all of us—students and soldiers alike—were victims of

something we didn't understand. And when I asked them about their homes and families, they got the message that I realized that and forgave them.

I also owe a lot to my upbringing. My parents taught me that there is some goodness in everyone, no matter what. There has to be, because the Bible tells us that God created us in His own image.

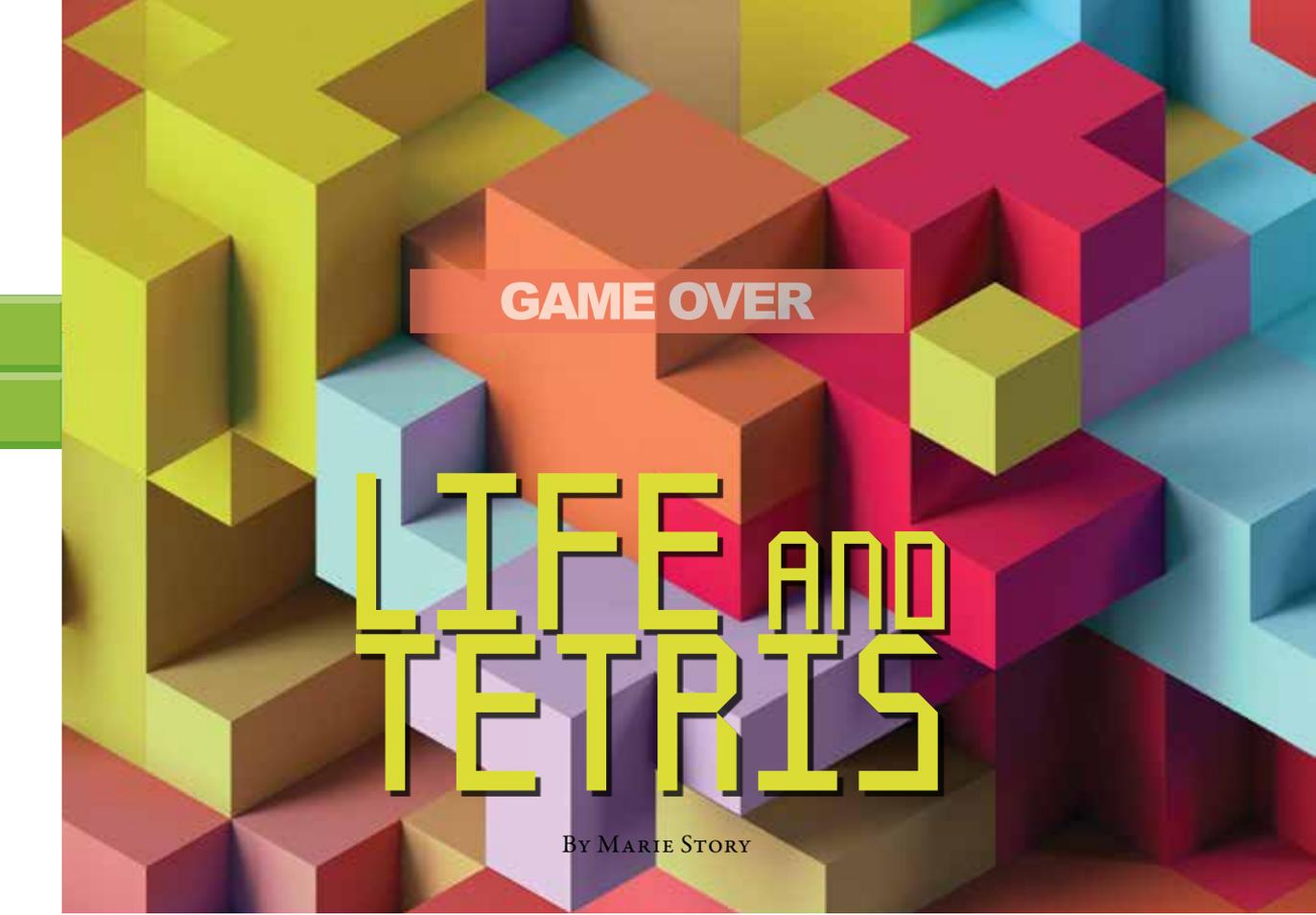
That experience gave me so much strength and showed me that I should never fear another human being! That's how I can do the work I do today. I'm at ease even with armed soldiers, and will even go into areas where there are landmines. I fear the landmines and the guns, but I don't fear the soldiers or rebels holding the guns or planting the landmines. I know that they are human, just like me, and we share a deep commonality that can never be taken away.

Having gone through that experience at Makerere University gives legitimacy to the talks I now give about forgiveness. When I tell my own story of how I was able to forgive and the wonderful things that happened as a result, people listen.

“Why should I forgive anyone who doesn't say they are sorry?” people often ask me. And I tell them, “Life is too short for me to hang around waiting for someone to say sorry to me.”

So much good has come from that horrible experience. Best of all, I discovered that, like everyone else, I was born with a wonderful something—the power to love people! I didn't have to earn it. It's just there. And it doesn't run out. The more I use it, the more I get!

STELLA SABIITI WAS A FOUNDING MEMBER OF THE CENTER FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION (CECORE), A UGANDA-BASED NOT-FOR-PROFIT NGO FOUNDED IN 1995 BY WOMEN ASPIRING TO PROMOTE ALTERNATIVE AND CREATIVE MEANS OF PREVENTING, MANAGING, AND RESOLVING CONFLICT. SHE HAS TAKEN HER MESSAGE OF FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION ACROSS THE WORLD, AND HAS BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN HELPING TO RESOLVE BLOODY CONFLICTS IN UGANDA, THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO, LIBERIA, THE SUDAN, RWANDA, BURUNDI, AND ELSEWHERE. ■



GAME OVER

# LIFE AND TETRIS

BY MARIE STORY

## I LOVE PLAYING THE TILE-MATCHING VIDEO GAME

**TETRIS.** The reason I like it is that I can plan it all out by looking at the pieces that will come up next, and as they come down, I can fit them all in place evenly and lower the stack. At least, that's the idea.

Even better is correcting the mistakes I make. Sometimes I plunk a piece down in the wrong spot, and then I have to figure out how to work around that mistake to get rid

of the problem spot. It doesn't always work out, though. I do great for the first few levels, but as things speed up and pieces are dropping faster and faster, I can't control them as well anymore. Pieces end up in the wrong places, and the stack gets closer and closer to the top.

Soon enough, "GAME OVER" is blinking on the screen, and my excitement for the game is tinged with frustration.

Sometimes life can feel like that. We make one mistake after another, and suddenly it seems like there is nothing we can do to fix things. Sometimes even our best plans end up in a mess, and no matter what we try or how we maneuver things, problems pile up and it feels like the game is over.

But the best thing about a game like Tetris is that there's always a chance to play again. It doesn't matter how many times you lose; you've always got a fresh start when you want it.

That's what Jesus does for us. He knows we're not perfect. He understands our limitations and weaknesses. He designed us, and He understands that we can't "win" every time.

Jesus has promised to remove our mistakes and sins "as far as the east is from the west."<sup>1</sup> That means they're gone; we've got a clean slate and we can start over. And this doesn't just apply to your spiritual life. No matter how well you plan out your life, there will come times when

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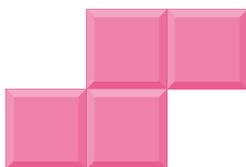
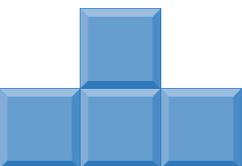
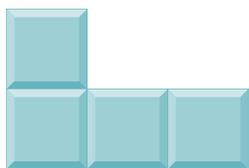
1. Psalm 103:12

2. 2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV

3. See Proverbs 24:16.

4. Isaiah 41:7

5. Billy Graham, *Nearing Home: Life, Faith, and Finishing Well* (Thomas Nelson, 2011)



you'll need to begin again. When that happens, it can be discouraging. All you see is that big "GAME OVER" sign blinking in your mind.

But there's always a chance to play again.

A clean slate is an awesome thing. It means the past is done and gone. When you start a new game of Tetris, it won't refuse you the chance to play again if you've lost too many times. When Jesus gives you a clean slate, it's *really* a clean slate. He's not looking back at your past record of mistakes and failings. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"<sup>2</sup>

Do you feel like your plans have gone up in smoke, and you don't know how to start rebuilding? Or are

you just discouraged because your first attempts have gone nowhere? Remember that you've always got a chance to start a new game. Jesus has a plan and a goal for your life, and He'll use even the mistakes you make to bring you closer to that goal.

King Solomon tells us that a righteous man falls seven times and gets back up.<sup>3</sup> There's no way around the falling. It's the getting up and starting again that matters.

MARIE STORY LIVES IN SAN ANTONIO, USA, WHERE SHE WORKS AS A FREELANCE ILLUSTRATOR AND VOLUNTEERS AS A COUNSELOR AT A LOCAL HOMELESS SHELTER. ■



Life can be like traveling a treacherous road. There are potholes that jolt us, detours that get us off course, and signs warning of danger ahead. The destination of the soul and spirit is of utmost importance to God, so He offers us daily guidance. Some pay close attention to God's directions; others ignore them and speed past the flashing lights. But everyone eventually arrives at the final destination: death's door...

No one escapes life without difficulties. Some experience bad health even in their youth. Some born into wealth lose everything. Some seek love and find only rejection time and again. Without a firm foundation, life's load is harder to bear.

God has a purpose for each of us, and He desires that we build upon Him, the very foundation He has put in place. Scripture speaks of craftsmen fastening the work of their hands with pegs "that it might not totter."<sup>4</sup> When Christ's hands were pierced by spikes and fastened to the cross, He became our secure foundation.—*Billy Graham*<sup>5</sup>

◆  
Do you want a new beginning? Jesus can give you that. Just ask Him:

*Dear Jesus, I accept Your offer of a fresh start with You. Please come into my life, fill me with Your love, and help me become more like You. Amen.*

BY MARIE ALVERO

# FORGIVENESS as God Sees It



JESUS TOLD A STORY about forgiveness that pokes at my heart and conscience every time I hear it.<sup>1</sup> It tells of a good king whose accountant brought to his attention that one of his servants owed him an enormous amount of money, something to the tune of billions of dollars if measured in today's money. An amount so huge that there was no possible way this servant could ever repay the debt.

The king summoned the servant and demanded payment. When the servant told the king he could not repay the debt, the king commanded that the servant's family be sold into

slavery till the debt could be reconciled. The servant pleaded for mercy, and the king's heart was moved and he forgave the debt. No payment plan, no penalties, but a straight-up wiping clean of the record. The servant was free, a debtless man. I imagine he felt the way I'll feel when I make my last mortgage payment, only so much better!

But this servant's jubilation was short-lived. As he left the king's court he happened to run into an acquaintance who owed him some money, about a month's wages. Somehow forgetting the great mercy he had just received, the servant felt no compassion and foreclosed on the debt this acquaintance owed, sending him to debtors' jail.

One of the king's friends witnessed these events and reported everything to the king. Again, the servant was brought before the king.

"How could you not have shown forgiveness when you were shown so much mercy yourself?" The king was angry. "You will be cast into prison until every penny of your debt has been paid!" I always imagine that the king then released the man who owed the smaller amount of money and forgave *his* debt, because that seems to be the heart of the king.

Each time I hear this story, I regretably recognize myself in the servant's actions. Too often I am like the servant who would not forgive. Through Jesus' death on the cross, He atoned for and forgave my sins. It simply makes no sense not to forgive those who have wronged me as I have been forgiven of so much more. "When someone has been given much, much will be required in return."<sup>2</sup>

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God proved His love on the Cross.  
When Christ hung, and bled, and died,  
it was God saying to the world,  
"I love you."—*Billy Graham (b. 1918)*

1. See Matthew 18:21–35.

2. Luke 12:48 NLT

BY ELSA SICHROVSKY

# MY MISTAKE



I **GENERALLY** consider myself a forgiving and “nice” person, but I had an experience in my sophomore year that tested my ability to forgive. My classmate Matt and I were paired up to do a presentation about modern English literature, and Matt got on my nerves from the start.

My nitpicky and demanding work habits conflicted with Matt’s spontaneous approach to the project. He was frequently late for scheduled discussions, and he continually neglected details I felt were important. To top things off, he was also often late in completing his parts of our project, despite my increasingly frantic text message reminders.

Only three days before the presentation, I realized Matt hadn’t completed the final portion he was responsible for, and I was unable to reach him. Matt finally uploaded a hastily contrived conclusion only hours before the deadline, apologizing and explaining that he had been preoccupied with another assignment.

As I expected, our presentation failed to satisfy the professor, and while he enumerated our team’s many failings, I was burning with resentment toward Matt. But he didn’t seem too disturbed, and I heard from a friend that he felt he’d done his part well. Since there was no satisfaction in snubbing a person who didn’t think he’d done anything wrong, I remained outwardly polite and congratulated myself for being so magnanimous to one so undeserving.

Two months later, in another class, I was paired up with Celine to do a presentation about Japanese grammar. I believed I’d done my best to prepare, but it became apparent during our team’s Q&A that I’d completely misunderstood some of the concepts we were presenting, and our team again got a bad score. I expected Celine to be upset, since it had clearly been my fault, but instead, she consoled me and helped me make the needed adjustments to the final version. Celine’s ready forgiveness provoked

some soul-searching, as her response to my failure contrasted with my resentment toward Matt.

As I thought back over the last few weeks, I realized that I hadn’t really forgiven Matt and had been unable to restrain myself from making some snide remarks about him to my friends. While Matt had been late and perhaps even uninterested, it was painfully clear that I too could be a careless student who caused a team to fail. I’d thought of myself as tolerant and merciful, but my response to Matt showed otherwise. Though I hadn’t deserved mercy, Celine had given it to me freely and without condescension. I prayed that through this experience I could gain some of the loving, humble generosity of spirit that comes from knowing that we are all fallible humans who need the forgiveness of those around us.

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FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

# FORGIVENESS IS DIVINE

The power to forgive is part of the nature and essence of God, and when you exercise it, you rise above the limitations of your human nature.

Choosing to forgive another is one of the hardest things most people ever do, especially if it's undeserved. Human nature cries out for revenge and retribution, or at least compensation. But I came to bring forgiveness and salvation from sin.

As you take on My nature, one of its traits is a readiness to forgive others. Whether the person who wronged you deserves forgiveness is not the central issue. The central issue is you doing the right thing in extending the same mercy and forgiveness I extend to you.

Forgive others who have wronged you, even as your heavenly Father forgives you.