

BRIEFING #10

FORGIVENESS VS. UNFORGIVENESS

A rainbow appeared in the bright Hawaiian skies as we prepared to visit the *Arizona* Memorial. The Navy skipper piloting our launch across the famous waters of Pearl Harbor instructed us to silence our cell phones, reminding us that the site was both a gravesite and a memorial to the many men who died on December 7, 1941, *a Day that will live in infamy*. The crowd grew quiet and respectful as we walked the simple, white structure spanning the sunken, rusting hulk of the battleship *Arizona*. I scanned the plaque listing the names of all the sailors and Marines that had died in the attack, proud to see the Davis surname listed frequently, exceeded only by the prolific Smith clan. As I stared down at the water, the *black tears* of the battleship's crude oil to this day leaking up to the surface to form fast-fading iridescent patterns, I couldn't help but think of the man who had personally led the Japanese attack against Pearl Harbor. Only God could have arranged the extraordinary patterns of this man's life, a life utterly transformed by the power of forgiveness.

Very few people in the history of the world can claim they actually launched a world war, but Commander Mitsuo Fuchida is one of them. As the flight leader of the aircraft carrier planes launched against Pearl Harbor, his radio signal *Tora! Tora! Tora! (Tiger! Tiger! Tiger!)*, signifying success in surprising the US Navy fleet, has become infamous. Fuchida's signal was received back in Japan at Imperial Headquarters and then simultaneously relayed to the Japanese Armed Forces in Taiwan, French Indochina, Malaya, Borneo, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Guam, and Wake Island, signaling the start of combat operations. During the war, Fuchida was proud to participate in the Pearl Harbor attack; he considered it a daring and ingenious attack against the aggressive United States, a surprise attack well within the *Bushido* code of gaining the upper hand in combat. Throughout the war he participated in many of the major Pacific battles, including Midway, and even directed aerial operations. He was in Hiroshima literally the day before the atomic bomb fell and toured the radioactive ruins the day after (Everyone who toured the city with Fuchida eventually died of radiation poisoning, save one.) You can read the story of this man's amazing life in the book *God's Samurai* by Gordon Prange, or Fuchida's own memoir, *For That One Day*. Proving once again that truth is stranger than fiction, Fuchida became a Christian evangelist after the war, sharing the stage with Billy Graham, and spending time with former enemies like Nimitz, Doolittle, Truman, and Eisenhower during his many visits to America.

To fully appreciate Fuchida's shocking transformation from Japanese war hero to a gospel-preaching Christian, you must first understand that *forgiveness* is a foreign concept to the Japanese. The moral thing is to seek revenge; only a lunatic or an extremely weak-willed person would fail to seek punishment against an offender. Prange cites the tale of a Japanese man captured and awaiting death, who would pray to be reincarnated again 7 times so he could seek revenge against his oppressors in each life (with the expectation that his offspring would continue seeking revenge until the debt was paid). The Japanese word for revenge, *katakiuchi*, literally means, "attack enemy." Fuchida tells the heart-rending story of witnessing in Hiroshima a Japanese boy and his younger sister, both horribly burned by radiation. The boy was bringing bowls of water to give to his



desperately thirsty sister, who, with her body burned and swollen, could barely drink the water. With her dying breath the sister thanked her brother and then whispered, "Brother, get revenge." How does a man raised in such a culture, trained in the hawkish traditions of the Imperial Navy, a warrior famous for leading one of the most infamous attacks in modern history—how does such a man become a Christian?

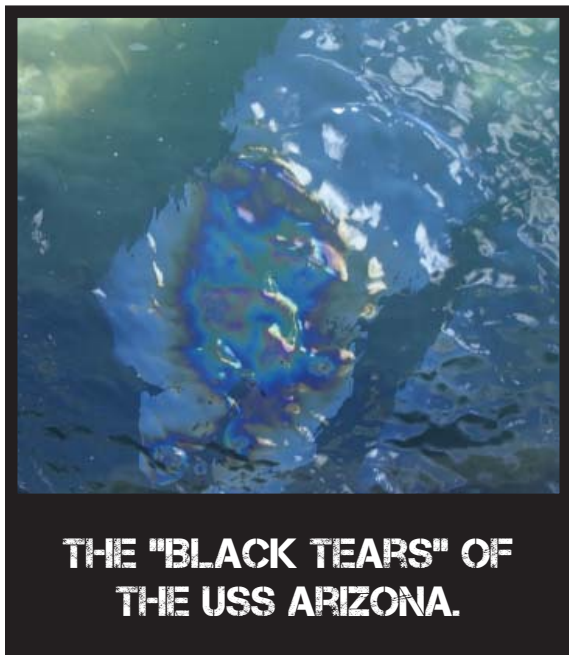


The Power of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is God's secret weapon, one I am sure the devil can't figure out, no matter how hard he tries. I can picture him, still scratching his head, wondering just how things went so terribly wrong that day on Golgotha. Forgiveness seems to defy both devilish and human logic; it goes against the grain, against, as it were, the very laws of nature, as if Newton's apple suddenly flew upward into the air. It isn't just the Japanese who struggle with the crazy notion of letting go one's right to judgment and revenge—we all struggle with it. It's human nature; our basic, gut reaction is to want to hurt those who hurt us. An eye for an eye makes perfect sense when someone has caused you pain, but letting a person yank out your eye—and leaving it at that—well, that's asking way too much. Like the doctrine of hell, the practice of forgiveness is yet another proof of God's existence, because it's quite obvious no human being would ever invent such an outlandish concept.

Think I exaggerate? Meet Margaret (Peggy) Covell. Her story changed Fuchida's life. Fuchida survived the war, poor, depressed, and embittered by the war trials convened to punish those who had led Japan's war effort. In searching for proof of America's hypocrisy, Fuchida interviewed returning Japanese POWs who had been interned in the US. From a few prisoners he heard the astounding story of a young lady who had volunteered her time at the internment camp, seeing to the prisoner's needs day after day. When they asked Peggy why she was helping them, she explained that her parents had been Baptist missionaries to Japan who had fled to the Philippines when the war started. The Japanese then took the Philippines, forcing her parents into hiding; they managed to elude the Japanese army until the end of the war, when they were caught. Sadly, the possession of a small radio raised suspicions and doomed Peggy's parents. They were beheaded on the spot. Peggy explained that serving the Japanese POWs was her way of obeying God's command to love one's enemies and transforming her hatred for her parent's killers into love.

This story astounded Fuchida. He became obsessed with tracking down more details about the death of Peggy's parents. Through Filipino sources he heard the story of how Mr. and Mrs. Covell, blindfolded with hands tied behind their backs, were forced to kneel as their captors stood behind them with swords drawn. The Covells remained united, praying together until the very end. "What did Mr. and Mrs. Covell pray as they were about to be beheaded?"



asked Fuchida, "That was my long wondering." God answered Fuchida's unexpressed prayer by bringing him into contact with Jacob DeShazer, a member of the well-known Doolittle raid. Taken captive by the Japanese after the attack on Japan, DeShazer was brutalized for years by his captors. It was in prison, however, that DeShazer returned to his Christian roots and, in reading the Bible, realized that he had to forgive the Japanese he had so intensely hated. Upon his conversion he vowed to return to Japan as a missionary, a vow that he fulfilled, preaching the Gospel across Japan, though with little effect at first. Once again confronted with the mystifying concept of forgiveness, in a coincidence only God could arrange, the man who led the raid on

Pearl Harbor was introduced to the Bible by an airman who flew on America's first bombing raid against Japan. Fuchida discovered the Scripture story in which Jesus forgave those who crucified Him, and suddenly, in a flash of inspiration, he understood that Mr. and Mrs. Covell must have prayed the same prayer. Here indeed was a weapon Fuchida could not defend against. Such a love rocked him to his core and, like a homing beacon, drew him irrevocably to cast himself before the cross of Christ. Fuchida recognized that only divinely inspired love and forgiveness could end the inevitable cycle of kill and be killed in a world torn by the ugliness of war and atomic bombs. DeShazer explained to Fuchida later that having grown discouraged in his work, and realizing that it would take a miracle to break through to the Japanese, he had fasted 40 days on water only. Fuchida was the obvious, immediate answer to his prayers, a man the Japanese had to take seriously. Fuchida's conversion eventually led to the conversion of thousands of Japanese.



The Tyranny of Unforgiveness

Unforgiveness, of course, is equally powerful. Think for a moment about the many conflicts across the world, and how they revolve around old hurts and grievances, ancient injustices, and bad blood between peoples that stretches all the way back to Ishmael and Isaac. How many families and how many marriages across time immemorial have been sundered by the inability and unwillingness to—I know it's an old cliché, but it's a great one—*let go and let God*? The choice to hold on to hurts and remember every wrong is both a wound *and* a sin that keeps on wounding. I remind you again that I am using *wounds* in a very broad sense: sins, hurts, dysfunctions, curses, diseases, mental health issues, ancestral sin, and anything else that falls short of the glory of God as it was meant to be expressed in us His children. Unforgiveness forces open spiritual wounds which then, inevitably, become infected, the infection exacerbating and enlarging the original wound. Remember this image: If you have unforgiveness in your heart then you have spiritual stitches and staples permanently pulling your hurt open, a constant invitation to bitterness and spite and rage and the demons that inevitably feed on such festering sores.

Your personality type has a major impact on your ability or inability to forgive. In my experience, there are two kinds of people in this world, people who like Neil Diamond and people who can't stand him. It has been scientifically proven that people who like Neil Diamond forgive others easily, whereas people who can't stand the "Jewish Elvis," hold on to grudges and find it very difficult to give up their hurts.

Did I mention that 83 percent of all statistics are made up on the spot?

People who struggle with forgiveness usually don't have much of a sense of humor. Ha! Caught you!

Does this describe you? You have a very strong sense of right and wrong, and naturally remember even the slightest slights. Often this kind of person (you know who you are) has been hurt deeply by others or simply by life itself, and therefore their pessimistic and begrudging outlook is quite logical. This is the second reason why people often struggle with unforgiveness. Those who have suffered much have far more to forgive! Obviously, the greater the offense and the level of damage done make it that much more difficult to actually forgive. There are plenty of people like my son, Luke, out there as well. Luke is naturally easygoing, unflappable, and slow to anger. Slightings and offenses roll off him like water off a duck's back—that's how readily he is willing to forgive. He hasn't suffered much in this life so, as is typical for the Pollyannas of this world, his glass remains half full. If you are like my son, your kind of personality typically struggles more with codependence and boundaries than with unforgiveness.

Regardless of where you fall on the personality spectrum (Neil or no Neil?), this is a very important chapter because everyone has hurts they need to forgive. Everyone has been hurt by someone. Some of you will find this chapter's homework easy while others will prefer a root canal. I owe Neil Anderson (the other Neil in my life) a debt of gratitude for a lot of things, but especially for explaining *forgiveness* and *unforgiveness* to me in a way that finally made sense. Even better, he provided "The Forgiveness List," one of the Steps to Freedom (see *The Bondage Breaker*) and a practical method for doing something about it. I agree completely with Neil when he says that The Forgiveness List is one of the most important steps,

if not *the* most important to achieving true freedom. Like many Christians, I had never given forgiveness much thought; I understood the Biblical doctrine and the logic behind it, but I had never really personalized it. Before the Steps to Freedom, I always thought of myself as an easygoing type, I did not hold grudges, and I forgave people quickly. I was shocked to discover how much anger I had towards God (especially as the sexual and ritual abuse in my childhood came to light) and how much I needed to forgive myself, not to mention the many people who had hurt me. I had no idea unforgiveness was such a major issue for me. I suspect there are many more Christians out there just like me. I challenge you to read this chapter and do the homework carefully, particularly if you have never gone through something like The Forgiveness List before.



SWEET CAROLINE!

others. This is why, no matter how difficult it may be (and sometimes it is incredibly difficult!), you simply have to forgive. You do it, first and foremost, for your own benefit (not for the other person) because you aren't stupid and want to live in heaven with Jesus forever.

Now, you unforgiving types, stick with me. Here's another reason why forgiveness is so important. Remember that God practices what He preaches. Jesus forgave the people who crucified Him. Did you ever stop to think that *forgive them Lord, they know not what they do* was actually meant for you and me? Jesus forgave all of us for nailing Him to the Cross with all our disgusting sins pinned to His soul. You may have experienced horrible diseases, multiple rapes, the agony of loss, and the hell of war, but Jesus experienced *all* of it. Every rape that has ever happened, every horrific disease, every abuse and starvation, every murder and every death that has occurred and will ever occur—all of it, everything that *falls short* of His Father's will—He became the sin *and* the wound on our behalf. And if that weren't enough, His body and soul suffered God the Father's unfathomable wrath so that we could be *forgiven* our sins. Forgiving others, especially when you have endured terrible suffering, may be the ultimate test of your salvation precisely because it so readily reveals whether the Spirit of the Living Christ is indeed living inside of you!

Hear me clearly. I am not saying forgiveness is easy. For some of you it may be the most difficult thing God ever asks you to do. Keep reading, however, so that you understand precisely what forgiveness requires—and what it does not require. I think you will be surprised by what you learn. That said, the bottom line is still the bottom line. Why should you forgive others? There is nothing in this life that remotely compares to infinity in hell. At the very least, forgive others out of sheer self-preservation.

Forgive? Why?

I am not going to spend a lot of time Biblically justifying the need to forgive others—other than stating the obvious. Scripture *commands* us to forgive those who sin against us. It's a command, not a suggestion or an option, and far more than just a nice thought. *Forgiveness of others is required to get into heaven.* The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6) immediately and eternally links God's forgiveness of our *trespasses* with our forgiveness of those who *trespass* against us. Notice that out of all the praises and petitions contained within the Lord's Prayer, only one section gets an addendum. This is because Jesus, being God, knew that we wouldn't have any problem praying *Thy will be done, give us this day our daily bread, and protect us from evil*; Jesus knew the one section that would stick in our collective craws was that little bit about *forgiveness*. So at the end of the prayer He adds an explanation. You want God to forgive your sins? Forgive others their sins against you! In other words, if you remain in unforgiveness, you are going to hell. Think it through logically. There are no unforgiven people in heaven. Period. If you can't forgive people their sins against you, no matter how horrific their crimes, then it is the ultimate proof that you remain lost, because you have not truly experienced Christ's forgiveness and therefore cannot extend it to

Forgive? Who?

Whom do we forgive? *God. Self. Spouse. Children...*

God?

Forgive God? I can feel you Baptist types getting nervous. Obviously God is perfect, so technically He doesn't need forgiveness for anything. Or does He? Anyone who has suffered must wrestle with the age-old problem of how a loving, all-powerful God can permit such seemingly endless suffering and evil. For the sake of those who haven't experienced a great deal of suffering, I will attempt to briefly explain why this is such a deal breaker for so many people. The first issue you have to overcome is the suffering itself. Remember, it isn't just the initial event that is painful; the consequent suffering that follows trauma and loss and abuse can easily last a lifetime. As a child I was repeatedly abused by my grandfather; not to mention the fact, that if my many nightmares were accurate, that I was forced to have sex with other children and adults and to participate in the ritual torture and slaughter of human beings (It's was actually a lot worse than that; I am sparing you the details.) I can't begin to describe to you the massive impact experiencing such horrific events had upon me. When you have dangled helplessly over the Abyss, is recovery and healing even possible? In my darkest times, when I felt like I needed God the most, those were often the times He seemed impossibly far away...

The second issue follows logically upon the first. Why would I ever want anything to do with Someone who, with the slightest blink of eye, could have prevented my suffering and yet did not? Imagine a father looking on while his son was repeatedly raped, tortured, and ultimately murdered. This father, gun in hand, could easily shoot and kill the people abusing his son, and yet he stands there and does nothing. What would we think of such a man? What would we do to such a father? He would be worse than the torturers! And yet this is precisely what God the Father does every day of the week. All-powerful and all-knowing, He sees all and rarely seems to do anything to stop the constant parade of evil occurring in this world. Pain and suffering are bad enough; the fact that God so often stands by and gives evil free reign, well, that just adds insult to the injuries we all sustain.

Trust me, I know all the theological explanations behind why God allows suffering and evil. I even believe them most of the time. I know God can't give people free will, for example, and then control their actions. Theological truth, however, does not a human heart heal. The only thing that saved me out of a very deep pit was experiencing God Himself through His Holy Spirit. And even then, during those profound experiences, God did not explain Himself to me, nor did He defend His inaction. He did not answer my questions; He just wrapped me up in His awesome presence. Being filled with God is something I now crave and desperately need on a daily basis; He satisfies my heart, even though I still have many questions in my brain. Experiencing God on a tangible level has allowed me to let go of the *why* (at least until I get to heaven), and in this sense, to forgive God for allowing me to endure such hell.

Anyone who has suffered will have to wrestle with these issues and how they impact your relationship with God. If you are like me, when it comes to God, you will most definitely have to let go of your anger and mistrust and questions. If this describes you, please also see the chapters on *Suffering and Restoration* and *Grief and Healing* for more thoughts on reconciling faith in God with suffering. You may want to process these chapters first before you tackle the Forgiveness homework. Just make sure you come back to this chapter, it is one of *the* most important chapters in the book!



FORGIVE GOD?

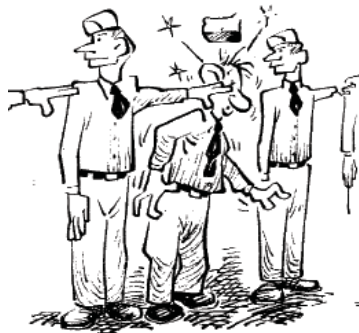
SOMETIMES THE HARDEST PERSON TO FORGIVE IS YOURSELF!



Self?

Second on the “most overlooked person needing forgiveness” list is _____ (*insert your name here*). It’s amazing how people, if left to their own devices, invariably neglect to put *God* and *Self* on their forgiveness list. Most people hold a great deal against themselves. Particularly driven types and those who have frequently failed. As an overachiever who repeatedly failed and flaked out (at least in my younger days), I had to forgive myself for lots of screwups. I also hurt a number of people, so I had to ask for their forgiveness. But what about you? What are you still punishing yourself for? You lost your marriage. Lost a business. Maybe you hurt or betrayed someone. Failed your children. Got yourself put in jail. Did something stupid and got fired. Got stuck in an addiction. You are not the Christian you know you should be... The list is endless. I think you will be shocked to discover how much you have been holding against yourself. This is yet another reason why going through something like The Forgiveness List is so important. *God* has already forgiven you for all these sins and failings and flaws. What are *you* waiting for?

YOU HAVE TO FORGIVE EVERYONE AND ANYONE WHO HAS HURT YOU!



Others?

Parents. Children. Siblings. Extended family. Friends. Pastors. Church members. Co-workers. Bosses. Business partners. Classmates (kindergarten through graduate school). Politicians. Strangers. People of other races. Neil Diamond? You name it... Think about it. More people in your life equals more opportunities to be hurt and wronged. You will likely be amazed at the amount of unforgiven baggage you’ve been carrying around all these years. Again, it doesn’t matter if you are the easygoing type or the grudging type, all of these hurts and wrongs need to be acknowledged in detail and laid down, preferably in the presence of a trustworthy spiritual brother (for guys) or sister (for gals). We will get more specific shortly, but for now start letting your mind wander back to the many different people, places, and events of your life...

Forgive? What?

What is forgiveness? There is a lot more to it than initially meets the eye for an eye. A number of popular misconceptions about the act of forgiveness need correcting. It is far more complex than simply telling another person, “I forgive you.” Forgiveness is more than just laying down your right to hold a grudge or seek revenge. Here’s my best shot (again, inspired by Neil Anderson’s book, *Victory Over the Darkness*).

FORGIVENESS IS NOT

1. Forgiveness is not about the other person.

It seems that many people forgive others expecting that the guilty party will then confess how horribly they behaved, repent of their crimes, and change their lives forever. There are a number of problems with this expectation. First of all, remember rule #1. You forgive others their sins against you because you want to be obedient and go to heaven. Forgiveness is for you, not the other person. You forgive so you can heal and move on. End of story. The other person may or may not change. That outcome is completely out of your control. Even God doesn't force the other person to change; who are you to demand repentance? Let's say, for example, that you are finally confronting your mother over the fact that she used to beat the crap out of you when you were young. What should you expect from her? She may fall on the floor weeping in conviction, she may accuse you of lying, blame your father, or fall asleep in the middle of your speech. In other words, expect the unexpected. That said, I have seen that the act of forgiveness releases breakthrough in the spiritual realm, and sometimes the guilty parties experience profound change. Even then the timing is always unpredictable—anything from instant repentance to deathbed conversion 20 years later. Your best bet is to focus on yourself and the steps you need to take. All else is bonus.

2. Forgiveness is not forgetting.

Another reason people get hung up on forgiveness is they can't imagine how they could ever forget the trauma they have experienced. The pain is still too fresh. Well here's a news flash. Forgiveness has nothing to do with your memory. I guarantee you, even after you complete The Forgiveness List, the hurts and wrongs will be just as vivid. God doesn't come down and do a memory wipe. Forgiveness lays the hurts and wrongs down; it doesn't make them go away. In fact, there will always be things that trigger your memories; you will experience the pain again, if but briefly. Your memories will normally fade and lose something of their sting, but this is probably related as much to the passage of time as it is to forgiveness.

3. Forgiveness does not heal your wounds.

Closely related to the previous point, forgiving someone does not make all the pain magically disappear. If your business partner stole all your company's money, forgiving him isn't going to fill your bank account. There are consequences that accompany hurts and wrongs; sometimes they last a lifetime. Nor does forgiveness stop you from experiencing emotions all over again if you are triggered by a memory or an event. Old wounds and current consequences can cause you to feel anger, fear, despair, depression, and so on, long after you forgive someone. You need to express these emotions, not bury them, working through them in prayer, journaling, counseling, and accountability. Think of forgiveness as one step in the healing process—it's a very important step, but it's only one step. Think of forgiveness in relation to the gears of a car: Laying down your hurts moves you out of reverse gear and into neutral. That's great progress; you're not going backwards anymore, but neither are you moving forward. Forgiveness just means you are now free to work on healing and managing your emotions.

4. Forgiveness is not justifying the wrongs committed.

Forgiving someone does not remotely mean that what the other person did to you is now, somehow, okay. You should in no way minimize the particular hurts and damage caused (nor should you exaggerate them). Nor should you try to justify what the other person did (this is common with Christians who are codependent). In fact, you should, by all means, press charges for crimes committed against you. Your forgiveness of a person in no way changes the government's right and responsibility to punish someone for crimes committed. A lot of Christians get confused here. Take domestic abuse for example. Let's say a woman's husband is a vicious wife beater. This has nothing to do with turning the other cheek, this isn't persecution, this just means the husband is an asshole who deserves to go to jail. (Sorry for the language, but I have zero tolerance for wife beaters!) The wife should call the police first. Then she can forgive the man for his abuse even as she leaves the home, taking the kids, and finding place a safe place to live. She lays down the wrongs even as she protects herself and her kids. The wife should only resume living with her husband if, and only if, the husband has undergone extensive counseling and has proven, through his actions, measurable change in behavior. Forgiveness does not replace common sense or healthy behaviors like setting boundaries and holding people accountable for their actions.

FORGIVENESS IS

1. Forgiveness is an act of the will (not a feeling).

Remember what we learned in *Basic Training!*: You don't feel your way into right actions, you act your way into right feelings. You don't wait until you *feel* like forgiving someone. That will probably never happen, especially if the hurts are deep. Go back to the Lord's Prayer. Does Jesus mention feelings anywhere in the passage? *Forgive those who have trespassed against you, but only if you feel like it?* The command is cut and dried, remarkable for its apparent lack of empathy. There is no consideration of the level of pain or amount of injustice—it's just *forgive*. There is always cost in picking up the cross of forgiveness. Pick a date, do your homework, and then go through The Forgiveness List. You publically declare your forgiveness in front of a witness, you choose to lay down any attempts at revenge, and you work through the pain, anger, fear, and hatred created by the hurts (without throwing those emotions back in the face of the perpetrator). Then as the Spirit leads you meet with the guilty party (or at least send them a letter) and declare your forgiveness to that person. (See the homework section for instances where you do *not* contact the other party!) Rest assured that forgiveness is really a *continual act of the will*. The greater the damage, the longer it takes to heal and process your memories and emotions. This means, as the memories and emotions are triggered yet again, you will have to repeatedly *choose* to forgive that person by continuing to lay down the past. Forgiveness does, however, get easier with practice and with the passage of time. The reward for your hard work is the irreplaceable peace that only comes from knowing that you gift to others the same, extraordinary grace gifted to you.

2. Forgiveness is substitutionary.

As Neil Anderson points out, all forgiveness is substitutionary. In other words, you eat the cost of the sin against you. Forgiveness is not *fair*, at least from a human point of view. It often, at first, seems irrational. Imagine you're Peggy Covell and you're called to serve and love Japanese prisoners of war, soldiers from one of the most brutal armies ever, the same people who beheaded your parents! Are you kidding me? To paraphrase Dr. Anderson: *The Cross of Christ is the only possible legal and moral justification for forgiveness*. The cost, the fairness, the justice for everyone's sins—yours and mine included—was paid by Jesus. Seen from the perspective of Calvary, forgiveness makes perfect sense because you are simply doing for others what Christ did for you. He substituted Himself for your sins and mine; He took our place. When you forgive another person his or her sins against you, it's as if you are hanging on your own personal cross, paying the price for that other person's sins. God's grace to you is now passed on to others, and such amazing grace continues to be, well, amazing!

3. Forgiveness takes the person off your hook; they still are on God's hook.

Neil Anderson again. A visual picture that immediately made sense to me. And brought me comfort. I had to make the choice to let my grandfather off my hook—and even more, my ritual abusers. I had very real claims against them; I had every reason for revenge and deep hatred. They have cost me far more than I could ever explain. And here is God telling me I have to let all that pass like water under the proverbial bridge? I forgave them, and I continue to forgive them when the pain resurfaces, but my forgiveness in no way lessens their accountability before God on Judgment Day. They will pay for their crimes before the righteous Judge, the only Person who can judge them impartially—I can rest secure in this fact. In fact it's a relief. The older I become, the more I realize I cannot fairly judge anyone; I haven't walked in their shoes, I don't know their hearts. I didn't lose my father at age 5 as my grandfather did; I at least had a relatively healthy and stable home with parents who loved me unconditionally. What did my grandfather have in comparison? I make no attempt to justify his actions (far from it); I simply have told God, *Hey, I forgive Grandpa Don for what he did to me. He is in Your hands now; he is Your responsibility*. Try it. I believe you will find it an enormous relief to *let go and let God be the judge*. Remember, however, that forgiveness does not overrule boundaries, common sense, or the law. If, for example, I had found out that my grandfather was still abusing other children, I would have forgiven him *and* reported him to the police. As for my ritual abusers, I don't have enough memories to even accuse anyone, and it would probably be impossible to prove something that happened nearly 45 years ago.

4. Forgiveness is confessional.

Many Christians miss this one, but it's one of the most important aspects of forgiveness. Remember that unforgiveness is a sin; therefore it must be confessed as such. This isn't optional! Even more important, unforgiveness is a sin that should be confessed before another trustworthy, mature believer (the same sex as yourself). *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed* (James 5:16). In my experience sins that involve other people

(like sexual sin) need the extra power of a brother or sister agreeing with you in prayer to fully break the power of that sin. Much of what typically needs to be forgiven is the damage caused by other people sinning against you; indeed such sins have the power to form soul ties nearly the equivalent a sexual soul tie. (See *Basic Training, Breaking Soul Ties* if you are unfamiliar with the concept of soul ties.) In other words, you are spiritually bound with the person that hurt you as long as you nurse unforgiveness in your soul. These spiritual bonds, though invisible, can be very powerful. Again, in my experience it takes at least two believers united in prayer to claim the woefully underused promise of Mathew 18:18-20 and the concurrent authority to loose all things under heaven and on earth. This wide-open promise clearly includes the ability to loosen the sometimes incredibly thick and powerful chains formed by unforgiveness. Trust me, I'm speaking from lots and lots of personal and counseling experience! Once you have gone through the process laid out in the homework section in the manner prescribed, you will feel as though a 400-pound weight has been lifted off your shoulders.

What are you waiting for? Start breaking those chains today!

Final Thoughts on Forgiveness

Saint Screwups often remain screwed up, unable to mature in Christ, because they refuse to forgive others or themselves (be it intentionally or subconsciously). Take a look at the comic below: Poor St. Screwup not only has to carry his own weight but all the ponderous baggage of all those who have hurt him as well. No wonder he thinks of the Christian walk as some incredibly attractive and yet unachievable mirage. Running the race is hard enough as it is, but it is impossible when you remain spiritually tied to everyone who has ever hurt you, not to mention the grudges you hold against yourself and God for failures real and imagined. Why would you ever want to remain a St. Screwup, with one spiritual foot nailed to the floor of unforgiveness as you run around in ever more useless circles?!

Saint Steadfast, on the other hand, is moving past the baby stage of the Christian walk because he is willing to obey the commands of Christ, even when it costs him dear. Check out his comic: Notice he isn't smiling. Laying down one's hurts and grudges, the despising of self, bitterness against God—and all such burdens—is never easy. The greater the millstone around your neck, the more it hurts to cut yourself free. Nonetheless St. Steadfast remains *steadfast* because he understands that there is no moving forward if he remains still chained to the past.

I ask you again, therefore. St. Screwup or St. Steadfast?



ST. SCREWUP?



ST. STEADFAST?

SPECIAL OPS! HOMEWORK: LET'S GET PRACTICAL



Maturity Actions Steps: The Forgiveness List

1) Writing Your List:

It is very important that you write down your Forgiveness List. *Remember to keep this list in a secure place and destroy it when you are done!* I recommend a two-week process of remembering, so that the Spirit has time to bring to your recollection people and events you may have forgotten or even repressed. For the people, your father or mother, for example, who may have caused the most damage, remember to write out specific hurts (for some of you this will mean pages and pages of material). Be specific as to the what, the how, and the when. Those of you with major wounds and trauma may need to do this with professional help. If you find yourself falling apart as you do this or, say, becoming suicidal, then you most certainly need to seek professional help and *not* attempt this list on your own. As you write out your list of specific wrongs, also describe how the behavior or event made you feel at the time.

Go through the following slowly and specifically, as it is designed to help you remember your hurts. Remember to include the following persons and write down the specifics of what you are forgiving. (You will need this for the prayer section.)

- **God** (in terms of unrealized expectations and dreams on your part, unanswered questions, trauma and suffering, etc.)
- **Self** (what you hold against yourself, self-accusation, inner vows or promises that must be renounced, unrealized expectations and dreams, etc.)
- **Spouse** (offenses held against you by your spouse or that you hold against your spouse, especially in the case of broken marriages and failed relationships, etc.)
- **Family** (this includes parents, your father or mother wounds, children, siblings, extended family, and in-laws)
- **Friends** (from childhood onward, including old boyfriends or girlfriends, classmates, teammates, neighborhood bullies, etc.)
- **Career** (business partners, bosses, co-workers, people who took advantage of you, owe you, etc.)
- **Church** (churches that used and abused you, including pastors, elders, church leaders, counselors, church members, and denominations, etc.)
- **Other** (governments, politicians, the military, other institutions, people of different races or countries, etc.)
- **Other** (anyone else you can think of...)

2) Praying Through the Forgiveness List:

First of all, make sure you have your trustworthy brother or sister available to pray through the list with you. Set up a time and place to meet free of distractions and interruptions. You may need to make several appointments if your list is long and the pain is deep. In cases like these I recommend you make praying through the list a matter of months; just be certain, that you actually pray through the entire list. This gives you time to work through your emotions without becoming overwhelmed or nonfunctional.

When you are ready, list in hand, pray through the following prayer.

My Father in heaven, I come humbly before you in agreement with my brother/sister and with Your Son, Jesus Christ, who is present whenever two or three of Your children are gathered together in prayer. I stand on Your promise that we indeed have divine authority to bind or loose anything in heaven and on earth in accordance with Your will. This includes the chains forged by unforgiveness, bitterness, and woundedness. I therefore obey Your command to forgive others their sins against me, no matter how vile and costly. Of my own free will I lay them down at Your Son's scarred feet because You are the only perfect Judge and vengeance is Yours, not mine to give. I also lay down my demands and expectations of You, my doubts and confusions over what You allow, and the questions on which You remain silent. I rest in the simple fact that, like Job, I cannot possibly know all that You know or understand even a fraction of Your sovereign will on this side of heaven. Nonetheless, I choose to believe in and trust You as my good Father.

I lay these wounds and sins down before You—help me not to pick them up again, even when I remember past events, feel old pain, or interact with the people who have sinned against me. This is not an easy thing to do, Father, but I ask for Your strength to remain obedient to Your command. Plain and simple, I desperately need my sins forgiven so I forgive those who have sinned against me:

(Pray the following as many times as necessary. Remember to specifically name each person being forgiven and summarize the details of what you are forgiving. During this prayer you *may or may not* experience strong emotion; either way the important thing is to pray through the list. If powerful emotions and memories surface as you pray, describe them to your prayer partner even as you take the time to acknowledge and experience them.)

I break every spiritual chain between me and _____ and forgive him/her for _____ and for making me feel _____. I give my Heavenly Father every memory associated with the event, namely, _____. And I give my Heavenly Father every emotion that rises up inside of me when I remember those moments, namely, _____.

(Pray this at the end of your list.)

Father, I have acted in obedience to Your command. I lay down these burdens I have carried for so long and receive Jesus' promised rest. I take only His Yoke upon myself for Jesus is gentle and humble in heart and I want to be like Him who eternally forgives those who hurt Him. Lord I bind and cast out any demonic oppression of unforgiveness and bitterness and instead receive the fruit of the Spirit that I may love both my friends and my enemies and practice what You preach. Protect the tender places of my memories and heart by Your perfect peace and seal up this work by Your Spirit forevermore. This I pray in the utterly authoritative name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

3) Final Counsel on Forgiveness:

In some cases it will be appropriate to communicate your forgiveness to the parties that offended you; in some cases it will actually cause more harm than good. It is beyond the scope of this book to provide such specifics, so I strongly recommend you seek wise, pastoral counsel, and possibly legal (in criminal cases) before you proceed with communication or confrontation.

Remember that it is equally important that you *ask forgiveness* of those you have offended. You should seek wise/legal counsel in cases where you caused great harm or even criminal damage. If you have harmed others you must seek forgiveness, despite the consequences to yourself. The injured parties *may or may not* grant you forgiveness, but you must ask for it and make restitution if possible.

Pureheart Group Discussion Questions

1. Set a date for writing out your Forgiveness list and then another date for when you will pray through the Forgiveness list. Hold each member of the group accountable to make it happen. I do not recommend sharing your list with the entire group—only the one or two trustworthy brothers/sisters who will pray with you through the list.
2. What was it like laying down your hurts? What surprised you about the process? What was the most difficult part? Has this experience changed you, and if so, how?