

FORGIVENESS

Not long before she died in 1988, in a moment of surprising candor in television, Marghanita Laski, one of our best-known secular humanists and novelists, said, "What I envy most about you Christians is your forgiveness; I have nobody to forgive me." John Stott in [The Contemporary Christian](#).

In "The Christian Leader," Don Ratzlaff retells a story Vernon Grounds came across in Ernest Gordon's [Miracle on the River Kwai](#). The Scottish soldiers, forced by their Japanese captors to labor on a jungle railroad, had degenerated to barbarous behavior, but one afternoon something happened. A shovel was missing. The officer in charge became enraged. He demanded that the missing shovel be produced, or else. When nobody in the squadron budged, the officer got his gun and threatened to kill them all on the spot . . . It was obvious the officer meant what he had said. Then, finally, one man stepped forward. The officer put away his gun, picked up a shovel, and beat the man to death. When it was over, the survivors picked up the bloody corpse and carried it with them to the second tool check. This time, no shovel was missing. Indeed, there had been a miscount at the first check point. The word spread like wildfire through the whole camp. An innocent man had been willing to die to save the others! . . . The incident had a profound effect. . . The men began to treat each other like brothers. When the victorious Allies swept in, the survivors, human skeletons, lined up in front of their captors (and instead of attacking their captors) insisted: "No more hatred. No more killing. Now what we need is forgiveness." Sacrificial love has transforming power. Don Ratzlaff, "The Christian Leader".

In his book, [Lee: The Last Years](#), Charles Bracelen Flood reports that after the Civil War, Robert E. Lee visited a Kentucky lady who took him to the remains of a grand old tree in front of her house. There she bitterly cried that its limbs and trunk had been destroyed by Federal artillery fire. She looked to Lee for a word condemning the North or at least sympathizing with her loss. After a brief silence, Lee said, "Cut it down, my dear Madam, and forget it." It is better to forgive the injustices of the past than to allow them to remain, let bitterness take root and poison the rest of our life. Michael Williams.

Bruce Goodrich was being initiated into the cadet corps at Texas A & M University. One night, Bruce was forced to run until he dropped -- but he never got up. Bruce Goodrich died before he even entered college.

A short time after the tragedy, Bruce's father wrote this letter to the administration, faculty, student body, and the corps of cadets: "I would like to take this opportunity to express the appreciation of my family for the great outpouring of concern and sympathy from Texas A & M University and the college community over the loss of our son Bruce. We were deeply touched by the tribute paid to him in the battalion. We were particularly pleased to note that his Christian witness did not go unnoticed during his brief time on campus."

Mr. Goodrich went on: "I hope it will be some comfort to know that we harbor no ill will in the matter. We know our God makes no mistakes. Bruce had an appointment with his Lord and is now secure in his celestial home. When the question is asked, 'Why did this happen?' perhaps one answer will be, 'So that many will consider where they will spend eternity.'" [Our Daily Bread](#), March 22, 1994.

When the first missionaries came to Alberta, Canada, they were savagely opposed by a young chief of the Cree Indians named Maskepetoon. But he responded to the gospel and accepted Christ. Shortly afterward, a member of the Blackfoot tribe killed his father. Maskepetoon rode into the village where the murderer lived and demanded that he be brought before him. Confronting the guilty man, he said, "You have killed my father, so now you must be my father. You shall ride my best horse and wear my best clothes." In utter amazement and remorse his enemy exclaimed, "My son, now you have killed me!" He meant, of course, that the hate in his own heart had been completely erased by the forgiveness and kindness of the Indian chief. *Today in the Word*, November 10, 1993.

In May 1924, a shocked nation learned two young men from Chicago, Richard Leopold and Nathan Loeb, had killed 14-year-old Bobbie Franks. What made the crime so shocking, and made Leopold and Loeb household names, was the reason for the killing. The two became obsessed with the idea of committing the "perfect murder," and simply picked young Franks as their victim. They were sentenced to life imprisonment, but Leopold was killed in a prison brawl in 1936. Claiming he wanted "a chance to find redemption for myself and to help others," Nathan Loeb became a hospital technician at his parole in 1958. He died in 1971. *Today in the Word*, October 3, 1992.

A childhood accident caused poet Elizabeth Barrett to lead a life of semi-invalidism before she married Robert Browning in 1846. There's more to the story. In her youth, Elizabeth had been watched over by her tyrannical father. When she and Robert were married, their wedding was held in secret because of her father's disapproval. After the wedding the Brownings sailed for Italy, where they lived for the rest of their lives. But even though her parents had disowned her, Elizabeth never gave up on the relationship. Almost weekly she wrote them letters. Not once did they reply. After 10 years, she received a large box in the mail. Inside, Elizabeth found all of her letters; not one had been opened! Today those letters are among the most beautiful in classical English literature. Had her parents only read a few of them, their relationship with Elizabeth might have been restored. *Daily Walk*, May 30, 1992.

In the 14th century, Robert Bruce of Scotland was leading his men in a battle to gain independence from England. Near the end of the conflict, the English wanted to capture Bruce to keep him from the Scottish crown. So they put his own bloodhounds on his trail. When the bloodhounds got close, Bruce could hear their baying. His attendant said, "We are done for. They are on your trail, and they will reveal your hiding place." Bruce replied, "It's all right." Then he headed for a stream that flowed through the forest. He plunged in and waded upstream a short distance. When he came out on the other bank, he was in the depths of the forest. Within minutes, the hounds, tracing their master's steps, came to the bank. They went no farther. The English soldiers urged them on, but the trail was broken. The stream had carried the scent away. A short time later, the crown of Scotland rested on the head of Robert Bruce. The memory of our sins, prodded on by Satan, can be like those baying dogs--but a stream flows, red with the blood of God's own Son. By grace through faith we are safe. No sin-hound can touch us. The trail is broken by the precious blood of Christ. "The purpose of the cross," someone observed, "is to repair the irreparable." E. Lutzer, [Putting Your Past Behind You](#), [Here's Life](#), 1990, p.42.

There's a Spanish story of a father and son who had become estranged. The son ran away, and the father set off to find him. He searched for months to no avail. Finally, in a last desperate effort to find him, the father put an ad in a Madrid newspaper. The ad read: Dear Paco, meet me in front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you. Your Father. On Saturday 800 Pacos showed up, looking for forgiveness and love

from their fathers. *Bits & Pieces*, October 15, 1992, pp. 13.

Chuck Swindoll reports that a seminary student in Chicago faced a forgiveness test. Although he preferred to work in some kind of ministry, the only job he could find was driving a bus on Chicago's south side. One day a gang of tough teens got on board and refused to pay the fare. After a few days of this, the seminarian spotted a policeman on the corner, stopped the bus, and reported them. The officer made them pay, but then he got off. When the bus rounded a corner, the gang robbed the seminarian and beat him severely. He pressed charges and the gang was rounded up. They were found guilty. But as soon as the jail sentence was given, the young Christian saw their spiritual need and felt pity for them. So he asked the judge if he could serve their sentences for them. The gang members and the judge were dumbfounded. "It's because I forgive you," he explained. His request was denied, but he visited the young men in jail and led several of them to faith in Christ. Chuck Swindoll.

"The man I ate dinner with tonight killed my brother." The words, spoken by a stylish woman at a PF banquet in Seattle, amazed me. She told how John H. had murdered her brother during a robbery, served 18 years at Walla Walla, then settled into life on a dairy farm, where she had met him in 1983, 20 years after his crime. Compelled by Christ's command to forgive, Ruth Youngsman had gone to her enemy and pronounced forgiveness. Then she had taken him to her father's deathbed, prompting reconciliation.

Some wouldn't call this a success story: John didn't dedicate his life to Christ. But at that PF banquet last fall, his voice cracked as he said, "Christians are the only people I know that you can kill their son, and they'll make you a part of their family. I don't know the Man Upstairs, but He sure is hounding me."

John's story is unfinished; he hasn't yet accepted Christ. But just as Christ died for us regardless of our actions or acceptance, so Ruth forgave him without qualification. Even more so, she became his friend. Albert H. Quie, President of Prison Fellowship Ministries, Jubilee, p. 5.

Corrie ten Boom told of not being able to forget a wrong that had been done to her. She had forgiven the person, but she kept rehashing the incident and so couldn't sleep. Finally Corrie cried out to God for help in putting the problem to rest. "His help came in the form of a kindly Lutheran pastor," Corrie wrote, "to whom I confessed my failure after two sleepless weeks." "Up in the church tower," he said, nodding out the window, "is a bell which is rung by pulling on a rope. But you know what? After the sexton lets go of the rope, the bell keeps on swinging. First ding, then dong. Slower and slower until there's a final dong and it stops. I believe the same thing is true of forgiveness. When we forgive, we take our hand off the rope. But if we've been tugging at our grievances for a long time, we mustn't be surprised if the old angry thoughts keep coming for a while. They're just the ding-dongs of the old bell slowing down." "And so it proved to be. There were a few more midnight reverberations, a couple of dings when the subject came up in my conversations, but the force -- which was my willingness in the matter -- had gone out of them. They came less and less often and at the last stopped altogether: we can trust God not only above our emotions, but also above our thoughts." Corrie ten Boom.

A couple married for 15 years began having more than usual disagreements. They wanted to make their marriage work and agreed on an idea the wife had. For one month they planned to drop a slip in a "Fault" box. The boxes would provide a place to let the other know about daily irritations. The wife was diligent in her efforts and approach: "leaving the jelly top off the jar," "wet towels on the shower floor," "dirty socks not in hamper," and on until the end of the month. After dinner, at the end of the month, they exchanged boxes. The husband reflected on what he had done wrong. Then the wife opened her box and began reading. They were all the same, the message on each slip was, "I love you!" Unknown.

Marie de Medicis, the Italian-born wife of King Henri IV of France, became the regent for their son Louis after her husband's death in 1610. In later years her relationship with Louis soured and they lived in a state of ongoing hostility. Marie also felt a deep sense of betrayal when Cardinal Richelieu, whom she had helped in his rise to political power, deserted her and went over to her son's side. While on her deathbed Marie was visited by Fabio Chigi, who was papal nuncio of France. Marie vowed to forgive all of her enemies, including Cardinal Richelieu. "Madam," asked Chigi, "as a mark of reconciliation, will you send him the bracelet you wear on your arm?" "No," she replied firmly, "that would be too much."

True forgiveness is hard to extend because it demands that people let go of something they value -- not a piece of jewelry, but pride, perhaps, as sense of justice, or desire for revenge. *Daily Walk*, May 27, 1992.

Rabbi David A. Nelson likes to tell the story of two brothers who went to their rabbi to settle a longstanding feud. The rabbi got the two to reconcile their differences and shake hands. As they were about to leave, he asked each one to make a wish for the other in honor of the Jewish New Year. The first brother turned to the other and said, "I wish you what you wish me." At that, the second brother threw up his hands and said, "See, Rabbi, he's starting up again!" Rabbi David A. Nelson.

This headline appeared in the Grand Rapids Press: "Convict Tells of a Torture that Time Can't Change." The article described a newspaper reporter's interview with a man who had been convicted of killing his wife. Here's how the writer described the scene: "He leans forward from his chair. For a moment he says nothing. Finally he comments, matter-of-factly, 'I'll never be the same. I have no illusions about that. I still have to live with it.'" Since he was being considered for parole, the prisoner was asked by the reporter if he deserved to be let out. He responded by saying, "Out? I lost a wife, and I can't replace her. It'll always be on my mind, because no matter what, I still bear the final responsibility. There's no amount of time I could do that would change anything. I could do 100 years or 1,000 years; how do you set a number for something like that?" Grand Rapids Press.

Jungle Aviation and Radio Service (JAARS), the flying department of Wycliffe Bible Translators--had flown thousands of hours over a 25 year span without one fatal accident before April 7, 1972. On that day, a Piper Aztec lost its right engine and crashed in Papua New Guinea, killing all seven persons aboard. The Aztec had just rolled out of the Wycliffe maintenance hangar the day before following a 100 hour inspection. The chief mechanic was stunned when he heard the news of the crash. Reviewing in his mind each step he had performed in inspecting that right engine, he suddenly recoiled in horror. He remembered that he had been interrupted while tightening a fuel line and had never returned to finish the job! That faulty connection had allowed raw fuel to spray out and catch fire while the Aztec was in flight. The mechanic's guilt at being responsible for the deaths of his companions crushed him. For days he did not know what to do. The other mechanics tried to help him, as did his own family. But when the family of Doug Hunt, the pilot who was killed in the accident, was preparing to return to their home in New Zealand, the mechanic knew he had to see them, talk with them and beg their forgiveness. He could barely get out the words as he sobbed in their presence. "That hand there," he said, looking at his right hand, "took Doug's life." Glennis Hunt, Doug's widow, embraced him. "Glennis sat by me and held the hand that took her husband's life," he later wrote, "and another JAARS pilot sat on my other side with a demonstration of love, comfort, and forgiveness. That was the most significant first step in the healing process." Max Lucado, *God Came Near*, Multnomah Press, 1987, p. 101.

In [A Forgiving God in an Unforgiving World](#), Ron Lee Davis retells the true story of a priest in the Philippines, a much-loved man of God who carried the burden of a secret sin he had committed many years before. He had repented but still had no peace, no sense of God's forgiveness.

In his parish was a woman who deeply loved God and who claimed to have visions in which she spoke with Christ and he with her. The priest, however, was skeptical. To test her he said, "The next time you speak with Christ, I want you to ask him what sin your priest committed while he was in seminary." The woman agreed. A few days later the priest asked, "Well, did Christ visit you in your dreams?"

"Yes, he did," she replied.

"And did you ask him what sin I committed in seminary?"

"Yes."

"Well, what did he say?"

"He said, 'I don't remember'"

What God forgives, He forgets. David H. Bolton.

Karl Menninger, the famed psychiatrist, once said that if he could convince the patients in psychiatric hospitals that their sins were forgiven, 75 percent of them could walk out the next day! *Today in the Word*, March 1989, p. 8.

On the Lord's day a group of missionaries and believers in New Guinea were gathered together to observe the Lord's Supper. After one young man sat down, a missionary recognized that a sudden tremor had passed through the young man's body that indicated he was under a great nervous strain. Then in a moment all was quiet again. The missionary whispered, "What was it that troubled you?" "Ah," he said, "But the man who just came in killed and ate the body of my father. And now he has come in to remember the Lord with us. At first I didn't know whether I could endure it. But it is all right now. He is washed in the same precious blood." And so together they had Communion. It is a marvelous thing, the work of the Holy Spirit of God. Does the world know anything of this? H.A. Ironside.

In a dream, Martin Luther found himself being attacked by Satan. The devil unrolled a long scroll containing a list of Luther's sins, and held it before him. On reaching the end of the scroll Luther asked the devil, "Is that all?" "No," came the reply, and a second scroll was thrust in front of him. Then, after a second came a third. But now the devil had no more. "You've forgotten something," Luther exclaimed triumphantly. "Quickly write on each of them, 'The blood of Jesus Christ God's son cleanses us from all sins.'" K. Koch, [Occult Bondage and Deliverance](#), p. 10.

Forgiveness is a funny thing; it warms the heart and cools the sting. William A. Ward.

Thomas A. Edison was working on a crazy contraption called a "light bulb" and it took a whole team of men 24 straight hours to put just one together. The story goes that when Edison was finished with one light bulb, he gave it to a young boy helper, who nervously carried it up the stairs. Step by step he cautiously watched his hands, obviously frightened of dropping such a priceless piece of work. You've probably guessed what happened by now; the poor young fellow dropped the bulb at the top of the stairs. It took the entire team of men twenty-four more hours to make another bulb. Finally, tired and ready for a break, Edison was ready to have his bulb carried up the stairs. He gave it to the same young boy who dropped the first one. That's true forgiveness. James Newton, [Uncommon Friends](#).

Opaquing fluid is the magical liquid that covers over your errors, your typos, your unfortunate slip-ups. You brush on the liquid and start all over again--hopefully this time with no unfortunate slip-ups. Opaquing fluid is forgiveness, an obliteration of a goof with no telltale traces that the goof happened at all. John V Chervokas, [How to Keep God Alive from 9 to 5](#).

The art of forgiving is a spiritual grace every Christian should develop. Because this is so difficult to put into practice, he offers the following suggestions:

- 1) Begin by assuring yourself that compared to Christ's suffering you haven't been seriously wronged at all.
 - 2) Recall the many kind deeds that have been shown to you, perhaps even by the person who has harmed you.
 - 3) List the benefits you have received from the Lord.
 - 4) Thank Him for blessing you with His love and forgiveness each day.
 - 5) Make an honest effort to pray for the one who has injured you.
 - 6) Go even further by looking for an opportunity to help him.
 - 7) If the offense is especially hard to forget, try to erase the memory by thinking gracious and generous thoughts.
 - 8) Finally, before you fall asleep at night, repeat slowly and thoughtfully that phrase from the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Roy L. Smith.
-

Some people try to punish themselves for their sins. They do not stand on the promises of forgiveness and Christ's propitiation. "Many years ago, a father and his daughter were walking through the grass on the Canadian prairie. In the distance, they saw a prairie fire, and they realized that it would soon engulf them. The father knew there was only one way of escape: They would quickly begin a fire right where they were and burn a large patch of grass. When the huge fire drew near, they then would stand on the section that had already burned. When the flames did approach them, the girl was terrified but her father assured her, 'The flames can't get to us. We are standing where the fire has already been.'" Erwin Lutzer, [Failure, The Back Door to Success](#).

Richard Hoefler's book [Will Daylight Come?](#) includes a homey illustration of how sin enslaves and forgiveness frees. A little boy visiting his grandparents as given his first slingshot. He practiced in the woods, but he could never hit his target. As he came back to Grandma's back yard, he spied her pet duck. On an impulse he took aim and let fly. The stone hit, and the duck fell dead.

The boy panicked. Desperately he hid the dead duck in the woodpile, only to look up and see his sister watching. Sally had seen it all, but she said nothing. After lunch that day, Grandma said, "Sally, let's wash the dishes." But Sally said, "Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen today. Didn't you, Johnny?" And she whispered to him, "Remember the duck! So Johnny did the dishes."

Later Grandpa asked if the children wanted to go fishing. Grandma said, "I'm sorry, but I need Sally to help make supper." Sally smiled and said, "That's all taken care of. Johnny wants to do it." Again she whispered, "Remember the duck." Johnny stayed while Sally went fishing. After several days of Johnny doing both his chores and Sally's, finally he couldn't stand it. He confessed to Grandma that he'd killed the duck. "I know, Johnny," she said, giving him a hug. "I was standing at the window and saw the whole thing. Because I love you, I forgave you. I wondered how long you would let Sally make a slave of you. Steven Cole.

Commentary

Forgiveness is hard. Especially in a marriage tense with past troubles, tormented by fears of rejection and humiliation, and torn by suspicion and distrust. Forgiveness hurts. Especially when it must be extended to a husband or wife who doesn't deserve it, who hasn't earned it, who may misuse it. It hurts to forgive. Forgiveness costs. Especially in marriage when it means accepting instead of demanding repayment for the wrong done; where it means releasing the other instead of exacting revenge; where it means reaching out in love instead of relinquishing resentments. It costs to forgive...Stated psychologically, forgiveness takes place when the person who was offended and justly angered by the offender bears his own anger, and lets the other go free. Anger cannot be ignored, denied, or forgotten without doing treachery in hidden ways. It must be dealt with responsibly, honestly, in a decisive act of the will. Either the injured and justifiably angry person vents his feelings on the other in retaliation (That is an attempt at achieving justice as accuser, judge, and hangman all in one) or the injured person may choose to accept his angry feelings, bear the burden of them personally, find release through confession and prayer and set the other person free. This is forgiveness. David Augsburger, Cherishable: Love and Marriage, pp. 141-144.

There is one eternal principal which will be valid as long as the world lasts. The principle is -- Forgiveness is a costly thing. Human forgiveness is costly. A son or a daughter may go wrong; a father or a mother may forgive; but that forgiveness has brought tears ... There was a price of a broken heart to pay. Divine forgiveness is costly. God is love, but God is holiness. God, least of all, can break the great moral laws on which the universe is built. Sin must have its punishment or the very structure of life disintegrates. And God alone can pay the terrible price that is necessary before men can be forgiven. Forgiveness is never a case of saying: "It's all right; it doesn't matter." Forgiveness is the most costly thing in the world. William Barclay in The Letter to Hebrews.

If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator; If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist; If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist; If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer; But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior. Unknown.

Humor A Sunday School teacher had just concluded her lesson and wanted to make sure she had made her point. She said, "Can anyone tell me what you must do before you can obtain forgiveness of sin?" There was a short pause and then, from the back of the room, a small boy spoke up. "Sin," he said. *Bits & Pieces*, May, 1991.