

## **Chapter 13**

### ***Forgive and Forget?***



That day in the courtroom my heart was permanently changed. I am no longer obsessed with vengeance. I no longer want to immerse myself in hatred. However, I still had to deal with seeing this boy and his family around town. I had always heard the adage “forgive and forget.” Faced with my painful memories, I knew this was impossible. In pondering this I realized that the adage was dead wrong. How could I ever forget what happened to my daughter? It would take a lobotomy to erase the memories that come to mind upon seeing this boy. And in reality, do I really want to? How many social and legal changes have come about through someone’s tragedy? Mothers Against Drunk Driving, Victims’ Rights Movement, Child Find—these and so many more groups rose up out of the ashes of someone’s painful memories.

In forgiving Spencer, I had to determine how this translated into the reality of constantly seeing him around town. Did it mean I should smile and wave and pretend nothing had happened? Did it mean I should socially interact with him when we found ourselves face-to-face? NO! While I can honestly say I wish him no harm and pray that he will put this behind him and find God’s purpose for life, I am under no compulsion to interact with him. I think forgiveness can be summed up with the phrase, “the absence of malice.” God takes us from hatred and bitterness to His rest and peace. If God wants me to minister or interact with this young man, He will prepare my heart and place this desire in me. It will then be genuine because it is of God. Otherwise, I will simply rest in His peace and avoid being in proximity to him.

I find the most warped misconception of forgiveness is found in women who were molested as children. Many families, in their misguided understanding of forgiveness, do great harm to the victim. I remember talking to one young woman named Sarah whose uncle had molested her repeatedly as a young girl. Both Sarah’s husband and her family knew about what had happened but did nothing. They didn’t even want to discuss it and urged her to “put it in her past.” Family gatherings went on like always with the uncle as a welcome guest. This young woman understandably was having a very hard time with her feelings toward this uncle. She hated to be around him and felt dirty when he looked at her, knowing they shared such sordid memories. But overriding her very valid emotions was this message: “You are a Christian. You should forgive and forget. Put it in your past and love him.” And so, she was locked in the destructive cycle of striving to change her heart, failing, and condemning herself. Sarah felt like a total failure as a Christian because she could not forgive or forget, and as a person because she was so emotionally unstable.

Her husband decided to help her healing along by suggesting that the “Christian thing to do” was to go out to a movie with this uncle—sort of a way to patch things up and get a new start. She wanted to be a good Christian. So, even though she felt revulsion and fear toward him, she went! When they got out of the car at the movies, he pinned her up against the door and gave her a passionate kiss. All of the feelings of self-loathing and guilt came rushing back with that kiss. As if in a rerun of her childhood, she pretended it didn’t happen and continued the evening! Inside, however, she was shattered. Not only did she have to deal with her hatred toward this uncle, she was bitter toward her husband who was his unwitting accomplice! When I met her, she was in a crisis that threatened her family, her marriage, and her very life.

This is a perfect example of the burden that Christians place on each other. In the name of forgiveness her husband and family had unintentionally added to her despair and victimization. Since the husband and the family refused to talk about the incident and did not allow her to, Sarah could only come to one conclusion—something was wrong with her!

She must be a horrible, awful person and a complete failure as a Christian if she had such ugly emotions about something that others saw as “no big deal.”

In Sarah’s situation there are two separate issues: Sarah’s heart and natural consequences. If Sarah had understood how to work through her abuse by being honest and opening her heart to God in surrender, she could have forgiven her uncle through God’s grace. Forgiveness did not require that she forget what he did to her, though. Restoration of the relationship with her uncle was not a requirement of forgiveness. Restoration depended upon his repentance and willingness to admit his sin. **Restoration and forgiveness are two different things.**

She would be perfectly within her right as a person and a Christian to say, “I will not attend any family function where my uncle is present.” She would be completely within her right to say, “I never want to see my uncle again.” In doing this, the uncle would be suffering the natural consequences of his actions. Even though he escaped the legal consequences, he violated the trust between an uncle and niece. Therefore, he gave up the rights to that relationship. Unless he admits to his sin and seeks her forgiveness, her continued interaction with him only continues the deceit.

The spiritual issue is Sarah’s heart. As it was, she was consumed with anger and hatred toward this uncle. The evil that was done to her in the past continued to destroy her present. Satan had done his job well. Not only did he set out to destroy the child, he knew that it would destroy the adult woman she would become. Only through the intervention of God’s grace can this destructive cycle be ended. This is what God wants to heal. He has a place of rest and peace where she can be released from the bondage of her hatred. This is God’s forgiveness. If God then asks her to go beyond this state someday to reach out to her uncle, it will be out of obedience to Him and *He will place that love in her heart!*

## **Chapter 13**

### ***Forgive and Forget?***

1. What is the difference between restoration and forgiveness?

2. One thing we do know is how important forgiveness is as a believer. It isn't an option. Have you ever been confused about what forgiveness looked like?

**Col. 3:13** *Make allowance for each other's faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.*

3. Like humility, forgiveness isn't attainable in yourself. It is a byproduct of surrendering what is in your heart. Take some quiet time and write down those people you do not forgive. People who have hurt you deeply, people who have taken from you or caused loss in your life or people who have said or done things that have offended you. This is not easy because we want to avoid facing them. But God knows our deepest thoughts. And He is not surprised. For now, just make a list.

#### **MEMORY VERSE**

*For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

Colossians 1:13-14

## Chapter 14

### *Our Strength Is in Knowing Our Weakness*

Paired with the damaging concept of self-created forgiveness is the concept of self-created strength. In this past decade, men who were perceived as paragons of Christian strength have fallen to the weakness of their flesh. Because these men were televangelists whose teachings were heard by millions, their weaknesses had devastating results. Their sins were trumpeted across the nation in the secular media. Christians reacted in disillusionment and grief. The secular world reacted with glee and finger-pointing. In the spiritual world Satan gloated at the havoc he had caused. He had convinced one more person that they were strong and righteous and were above the weaknesses of the flesh. And yet, when Paul asked for healing for his *“thorn in his flesh”* (2 Cor. 12:7), God told him that, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”*

Paul responded with this, *“Most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong”* (2 Cor 12:10–11). It is knowing and surrendering our weakness to God that brings about His strength in us. We have no claim to it. We can take no credit for it. It forces us to be brutally honest about the condition of our heart when we acknowledge our weaknesses and lay them at the foot of the cross.

Yet, in the electronic Christian culture in which we live, the condition of our heart is bypassed in favor of the “politically correct” Christian image. Christian “superstars,” surrounded by adoring fans, begin to believe in their carefully cultivated image. It is the *image* that is validated by all of their followers. But a cultivated image cannot withstand the weight of reality. When Jeremiah stated that the “heart is more deceitful than all else,” he was not referring to the general state of mankind. Rather, it is a very personal statement about each and every one of us. Our hearts can deceive us into believing

we are doing something for God when in reality our motive is very self-serving.

Our hearts can deceive us into thinking that we are strong and righteous while we



clandestinely feed our lusts and nurse our sinful nature.

I connected with a woman who came to the Lord out of an extremely promiscuous lifestyle. She was literally addicted to sex. It wasn’t the act itself necessarily, but rather the power she held over men through her body. Once they succumbed to her charm, she disdained them as weak and they were quickly discarded. After she received Christ, she deluded herself into thinking that she was now strong and could withstand temptation. Time and time again she placed herself in precarious situations, convinced that she was strong enough to overcome. Time and time again she fell. But God, in His infinite love and mercy, allowed each episode to be a stepping-stone for spiritual and personal growth. The irony is that in growing spiritually, she did not become stronger. Rather, she became more and more aware of her weakness!

Indeed, the closer we get to God, the more aware we all become of our wretchedness! It’s like seeing yourself in a mirror with ever intensifying light. We don’t become more beautiful as the light becomes brighter. Instead, every little imperfection and blemish is glaringly obvious. But it doesn’t mean we get uglier, either. It simply means that we are seeing what’s already there. As we look at our own sinful nature in the light of God’s perfection, we see how wretched our hearts are. But as we surrender each blemish and wrinkle of our heart to God, He replaces them with His beauty, His purity, His virtue, and His strength. We have no claim on it. We have no part in achieving it. We simply acknowledge what is in our hearts and give that to God.

## **Chapter 14**

### ***Our Strength Is in Knowing Our Weakness***

Have you ever made up your mind that you were going to diet? Or stop smoking? Or quit another harmful practice? You wake up in the morning feeling strong in your commitment. You can do this. You've got this girl! And then... We have all been there.

In matters of the heart, we can never overcome by strength.

**2 Corinthians 13:4** *Although he was crucified in weakness, he now lives by the power of God. We, too, are weak, just as Christ was, but when we deal with you, we will be alive with him and will have God's power.*

Imagine standing at the foot of the cross looking up at Jesus. You believed He would bring in a new kingdom of strength and power. You thought He would raise the Jews up out of Roman oppression. And there he hung, weak and helpless.

1. What emotions do you think you would have felt at this scene?

Yet we know "the rest of the story." He rose from the grave!

Read 2 Cor 13:4 again. We too need to be crucified in our weaknesses. When we do this, when we willingly surrender them at the cross, we are filled with God's power.

**Gal. 2:20** *My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So, I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

2. What are some things that are in your "old self?"

#### **MEMORY VERSE**

*My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So, I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Galatians 2:20



## Chapter 15

### *Climbing Our Way to Spiritual Pride*



The message of surrender is not readily embraced by everyone who hears it. After sharing this message at a Bible study, one young woman thought that a mutual friend had told me everything this young woman had confided to her. In fact, I knew nothing of this young woman. Yet the message I shared had described her so well that she felt her confidence had been betrayed. To this day, she will not speak with me. It was much easier to reject the messenger than embrace the message! You may be reading this now and finding yourself feeling this same thing. I don't know anything about you, either. The simple fact is, we as human beings share some remarkably similar traits. One is our total obsession with self. The other is our basic sinful nature. Our stories of anguish, sorrow, and failure are all different. But the answer is the same: dying to self that Christ might live through us. The Bible tells us in Romans 6:6 *"...knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin."* Crucifixion means death, and death to self means freedom from sin.

There was a time when I would not have received this message. My facade was too important, and the sins of my heart were too frightening to even consider. But, like

so many other women, I simply could not go on in the exhausting business striving to maintain the image. In surrender I have found freedom. In dying to self, I have found life.

Most women whom God brings across my path are like I was. They are wounded by life's circumstances and broken by theirs and other's choices, but they don't know what to do about it. Life has battered and broken them and left them with many scars. They throw themselves into church activity and do all the prescribed routines for spirituality. But it doesn't ease the nagging feeling that they are "missing the mark."

Many teachings in the Church only increase this feeling of spiritual failure. Somehow the notion that one "arrives" spiritually has embedded itself into Church teaching. Sometimes it's subtle. Other times it's blatant. I remember sitting in a Sunday school class where the teacher held up a "ladder of spirituality" and asked us to determine which rung of righteousness we were on. He placed himself at about two-thirds of the way up. The sad thing was, he really believed it. He was a deacon in the church and had worked hard to build the new church building, donating both his time and money. But in the business world he was known for something entirely different—his dishonesty. It is a sad commentary on the Church when spiritual maturity is based on performance and matters of the heart are ignored. Show me the person who says they are on the top rung of the "spiritual ladder," and I will show you someone who needs to get on their knees and repent of their spiritual pride!

The apostle Paul came to understand this. He wrote 13 books in all. In the Book of Galatians, he starts off by referring to himself as "Paul and apostle." Seven years later, as "the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle..." (Corinthians 15:9). Eight years later: "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given..." (Ephesians 3:8). In Timothy: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief (vs.15). Did Paul get worse? No, but as he got closer to the Lord and grew in the faith, he became more aware of his condition when held up to Truth of Christ.

God knows what our hearts are made of. Yet we desperately try to deceive Him and ourselves. When we start getting honest with ourselves and with God, those very things that were so threatening to us lose their power. Instead of desperately trying to convince the world and ourselves that we are *not* a certain way, we are free to admit we *are* that way—and then surrender it to God.

The Bible says, “*The truth shall make you free*” (John 8:32). In this case, no truer words have ever been spoken. So much of our lives are spent denying and deceiving others so they won’t find out the truth. The truth we desperately hide is found in those ugly thoughts that flit across the back of our minds. The wounded ego that denies it’s hurt, the unforgiving heart that feels justified, the cynical humor at others’ expense, and those countless other emotions that we exhibit yet deny. The irony is that God and perhaps other people, can see right through our facade.

The things we deny the most with vehemence are usually the most obvious in our personalities. The miser will stridently deny that he is a tightwad and the gossip will adamantly defend her virtue. They’re not fooling anyone. The more they feel exposed, the more they strive to keep the facade intact. How much easier it is to come before God and say, like the publican, “*Lord, I am not worthy.*”

How much more freeing it is to come to God and say, “God, I am a gossip. I love being the center of attention because I know something about someone that others don’t. God, I enjoy gossip, and this is what I have to offer You. Please change my heart. God, I am incapable of changing myself.” Truth is the balm for the hurting heart and the antidote to deceit.

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### ***Climbing Our Way to Spiritual Pride***

#### **Jeremiah. 17:9 -10**

- 9:       *“The human heart is the most deceitful of all things,  
and desperately wicked.  
Who really knows how bad it is?*
- 10:      *But I, the Lord, search all hearts  
and examine secret motives.  
I give all people their due rewards,  
according to what their actions deserve.”*

1. When you read verse 10, how does it make you feel?
  
2. A popular belief is that man is “basically good”. What does this verse say about that belief?

Gauging our spiritual position on the “ladder of righteousness” can only lead to one thing - comparison. If we arrive at any point, there are those beneath us who are “less” spiritual whom we look down upon. And there are those above us who are “more” spiritual to whom we feel inferior.

The good in us is Christ. Self, the “old man” is the problem. Look at the Fruits of the Spirit.

**Galatians 5: 22-23** *But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!*

4. If you set your mind to having the fruits control your life do you think you could do it?
  
5. Why or why not?

Like humility and forgiveness, there is only one way to have a Spirit-filled life that produces these fruits. It has to start in the heart and flow from the heart. The only way for this to happen is to surrender what is REALLY in our hearts and make room for Jesus.

#### **MEMORY VERSE**

*But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives:  
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,  
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no  
law against these things!*  
Galatians 5:22-23