

# Restoration THROUGH FORGIVENESS

by Doug Easterday



**W**e all have a past — a storehouse of good and bad memories that can still affect the way we live today. Even though I grew up in a godly home and had great parents, some painful things happened to me during my childhood years. I would like to snap my fingers and — poof! — all the painful memories would be gone. But I can't do that! Paul says in Philippians 3:13-14, "Forgetting what lies behind... I press on toward the goal..." Well, I wholeheartedly agree with Paul! We need to press on... but we also need

as bad as a wrong action. If someone hurts you, and you react to it in a sinful, wrong way, then you are just as wrong as the one who hurt you.

The bottom line is this: If you refuse to forgive (or say you can't) what you're really saying is that holding on to your hurt is more important to you than going on with God. It's that simple. I believe the Word of God says that if you don't forgive, **your spiritual life will stay where it is until you are able to forgive.**

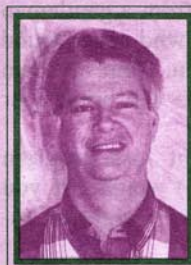
## How To Know If You've Forgiven

Many people have asked me how they can know for sure if they have really forgiven someone. The Lord has impressed upon me that forgiveness is complete if you will allow Him to use you as an unrestricted channel of His love for that person. If you are willing to obey the promptings of the Lord to bless that person in whatever way He chooses, if you will let His love flow through you to them — then you will know that you have forgiven.

I want to encourage you right now to ask the Lord to reveal any unforgiveness that might still be lurking in your heart. I never thought I had a problem in this area because I was "spiritual." And spiritual people don't have problems with unforgiveness, right? But God began to bring things to the surface and convict my heart about unresolved issues in my past.

The Lord will do the same for you if you'll just allow Him to show you specific individuals that you might need to forgive. I have learned in my 20 years as a counselor that there is no substitute for forgiveness. Forgiveness will free God to move on your behalf, and it will free the other person from the bondage your bitterness or resentment has placed them in.

Best of all, forgiveness will free **you** to continue growing in the Lord and to become the man or woman of God the Lord intends you to be.



**Doug Easterday** is the Director of Daystar Christian Ministry and is on the pastoral staff at Christ's Center Church in Junction City, Oregon. The Restoration School, at Christ's Center, aids people in overcoming problems of the past. Doug has ministered in over 15 different nations, and he's also invested much time and prayer here at Last Days to help us be "all we can be" in Jesus. He and his wife, Joyce, have two children.

"Restoration Through Forgiveness" was reprinted from an article in *The Last Days Magazine*, a colorfully illustrated publication filled with challenging articles, ministry opportunities, and more!

For additional copies of this article order Ref. #113. This teaching is also available on audio and video cassettes. For more information about Last Days Ministries, our missions training schools, or our free Ministry Materials Catalogue, send your requests to: Last Days Ministries, Box 40, Lindale, TX 75771-0040 USA.

If you want to know more about what it means to be a Christian, we have some information we'd like to send you. There is no charge or obligation. Just write to Last Days Ministries and ask for the free packet, "Walking With Jesus."

For more information, write or call:

#113

**WISE TRACKS** Another WiseTrack from Last Days Ministries  
Pretty Good Printing, ©1990  
All Rights Reserved



to be able to forget what is behind! And I think most of us have a difficult time knowing how to do that.

No matter what has happened to you in the past, God's goal is to bring you to a condition where the negative issues of the past no longer affect your present and future life in Him. In His Word, the Lord promises to restore the fullness of our lives. In Joel 2:25 (KJV) He says, "And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you." Now why did this scripture happen to list those four particular insects?

Because if we were to take these insects and release them on a plant, all four working together would eat the



leaves, the branches, the main stalk, and finally the root. Now what would be left? Absolutely nothing. The plant would be destroyed.

But God says that He will restore to you the years that have been nibbled and eaten away... **no matter what has happened to you!** Even if you feel like you've been totally destroyed, God intends for you to be restored.

## The First Step To Godly Restoration

I want to tell you about the first and most important step to godly restoration. It is the first step to freedom within ourselves and freedom in our relationships with other people. Real hurts don't come out of the ground or out of the bushes... deep hurts come from other people. And deep hurts don't heal except through the process of forgiveness.

For us to really be free from the problems and hurts of our past and to be free from the consequences that continue to plague us... we must forgive. **This is a godly absolute, and God absolutely will not change His stand on this!**

There is a portion of scripture from Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew 6:14-15



that packs one of the biggest "wallops" in the entire Bible. Every time I read these verses my knees get weak, because they contain an incredibly important message from the heart of God!

The "Sermon on the Mount" begins with: "And when He saw the multitudes, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. And opening His mouth He began to teach them, saying...." (Matt. 5:1-2)

To whom was Jesus speaking this crucial message? **His disciples!** Or to put it in modern terms — this sermon was spoken to believers! To people who knew the Lord Jesus. This is **not** a message to the unsaved. We need to understand that fact in order to fully understand Matthew 6:14: "For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."

What a wonderful promise! If we forgive, God will forgive us. But now verse 15 follows: "But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." I don't know about you, but I want to be forgiven by God! I make mistakes! I do things that are wrong, and sometimes my attitude is just not what God wants it to

*"And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you."*

Joel 2:25

be. I want to receive forgiveness at these times in my life, but God tells me that if **I** don't forgive... I'm going to be **stuck** with the consequences of my sin. And I certainly don't want that!

As I travel throughout the Body of Christ, I hear people saying, "Oh, I've forgiven — it's not a big issue for me anymore!" They want to pass forgiveness off as "no big deal," but they're not really understanding the **seriousness** the Word of God gives to the issue of forgiveness. To God — it's a very big deal!

First I want to talk about what forgiveness is **not**:

**Forgiveness is not a feeling.** If you're waiting for some lovey-dovey sensation to come over you, you're going to have a long wait — maybe forever! In all my years of counseling, I have never come across someone who really "feels" like forgiving. Pushing your hurt far back into the recesses of your mind doesn't mean you've forgiven the person who hurt you. As time passes, our memory will fade and the hurt will become more distant, but





time alone cannot heal the wounds. Only God Himself can heal the heart.

**Forgiveness is not pretending you weren't hurt.** Don't shove the incident under the carpet! Don't rationalize and pretend that what happened to you didn't really hurt you – that it isn't a real issue in your heart. Pretending and forgiveness are certainly not the same thing.

**Forgiveness is not saying what the person did wasn't wrong.** Sometimes we feel that if we forgive, we're actually declaring that what the other person did "wasn't so bad." That's like trying to say, "It really wasn't all that wrong. It must have been my fault. I must have been standing in the wrong place when that car hit me!"

If I walked up to you and punched you in the nose, then later came to you and said, "I'm really sorry," what would you say? Would you respond back and say, "That's okay"? If you say this, do you know what you've just told me? You've just given me permission to do it again! You've said, "That's okay!"

**What** was okay? Was it okay to hit you? No! It was not okay! When someone comes to you saying, "I'm sorry – I was wrong," and you respond back with "It's okay" – then I believe you're giving them permission to hurt you, and that's really giving them permission to sin.

I don't think we have a right to tell another person that it's okay to sin. Our **proper response** should be to simply say, "I forgive you."

**Forgiveness does not mean you have to trust that person again.** A

young girl came to counsel with me awhile ago. She was very, very nervous, and it took 20 minutes for her to feel free enough even to begin talking about herself. Finally she told me something she had never told another human being – that her father had raped her almost every day for the past four years.

Now do you think that I should have encouraged her to forgive her father and then go back and trust him again? No! At that point, her father did not **deserve** to be trusted.

I am not saying that she shouldn't ever trust her father again – as Christians, we need to allow those who have hurt us the **chance** to prove themselves trustworthy in the future. But forgiveness is a separate issue from trust. I believe that we can completely forgive a person, but still not have the ability to trust that individual.

Trusting comes only as we get to know someone and **believe** in that person's character. That's why I can trust God – because I am confident in His character! We develop trust for human beings only as they have proved themselves trustworthy.

When someone really lashes into you, your natural response will probably be anger, hurt, and a lack of trust. If forgiveness means you have to make yourself totally vulnerable to that person and leave yourself open for another emotional or verbal assault, you'll probably choose not to forgive.



But if you can fully understand that "forgiveness" and "trust" are two separate issues, you'll see that forgiveness is not totally beyond your grasp.

**Forgiveness is not relieving other people of their responsibility.** Our thoughts usually follow this kind of logic: "They really hurt me! If I forgive them, they're gonna walk away scot-free. They're not going to have to face up to what they did, and they're not going to have to answer for their wrong actions!"

We think that forgiveness is somehow letting people "off the hook" so they don't have to answer for their wrong actions. But God is completely capable of making sure a person is held accountable. You can't relieve anyone of their responsibility – you don't have that ability! None of us does, because we're just human beings. Only God can cleanse us by His grace.

As you accept responsibility for **your** wrong attitude and the unforgiveness in **your own heart**, you release God to work in a greater way than ever before in the heart of the person you've struggled to forgive. I'm not suggesting that God hasn't been working all along, but forgiveness will release God as never before to do His restoring work in this person's life.

### What Forgiveness Is

Well, **what is forgiveness** then? I want to give you a definition that you won't find anywhere else. I have probably spent more time studying the word "forgiveness" than any other word in the English language.

*Forgiveness is a decision I make to obey God and to walk, as a lifestyle, in a higher realm by not allowing someone else's actions or attitudes to dictate my actions or attitudes.*

*style, in a higher realm by not allowing someone else's actions or attitudes to dictate my actions or attitudes.*

First of all, **forgiveness is a decision.** Even though some decisions can be very difficult, God has given us the ability to make them. Even if our emotions are screaming "No! No!" we're still capable of making a choice to forgive. It's not really accurate to say "I can't forgive." That's not true. What you're actually saying is "I **won't** forgive."

It's a choice. A difficult one, you bet! One you don't feel like making – sure! But possible? Yes! It is possible to forgive even though there is nothing within us that feels like forgiving. It's an act of our will – not our emotions!

**Forgiveness is a decision I make.** Who makes it? I do. Even God Himself cannot make that decision for you. Only you can decide to forgive with your heart. If you don't forgive, you will have to live with the crippling consequences of your unforgiveness.

**Forgiveness is a decision I make to obey God.** Forgiveness is not a suggestion – it's a commandment. God doesn't say, "It would really be a good idea if you could find it in your heart to do some forgiving." No! He says, "You must forgive!" Forgiveness is a choice of obedience to God and it's something that can take place in the privacy of your own heart.

Even if you are angry or bitter towards someone who has already died, forgiveness is **still possible for you.** Because for-

giveness is an issue of the heart. And as you forgive, you are going to know God's freedom and liberty in your life.

**Forgiveness is getting your own heart right before God.** That's where it must begin – between you and the Lord. I don't believe we should go and talk to someone until we first have our heart right before God. Then, as the Lord specifically directs, you can communicate forgiveness, restitution, and reconciliation to the other person.

### Obedience... Or Disobedience?

The real issue is obedience to God. What's the opposite of obedience? Disobedience. So if you don't forgive, what are you doing? Disobeying. And what is disobedience? Sin. That's pretty plain, isn't it? If we choose not to forgive, we choose to sin. The Bible says in Psalms 66:18 that "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear..." Do you want the Lord to hear you? Then I believe you need to forgive.

My father, who had been a minister for 45 years, shared a valuable truth with me just before he died. He said, "Doug, I'm convinced that many Christians who stop growing in the Lord, that go through the same problems over and over again, these are people holding on to unforgiveness."

I consider that to be a classic statement from a gentleman with great experience in dealing with people who never found freedom and liberty in God. And I have seen, from my own experience as a counselor, that **unforgiveness** will bring your spiritual life to a halt.

But **forgiveness** is the greatest weight loss program known to man! Want to lose some (spiritual) weight? If you forgive, you will immediately sense the heavy weight of unforgiveness lifting.

### A Lifestyle Of Forgiveness

**Forgiveness is a lifestyle.** Forgiveness is **not** a one-time act, but rather a lifestyle that has to be maintained. The opposite of forgiveness is unforgiveness, and unforgiveness has two cousins. The first one is resentment. The second cousin is bitterness.

Resentment begins with the prefix "re." **Re-sent.** So resentment is something that happens to me, and I say, "Well, if you're going to do that to me, I'll send it right back!" That's resentment. It's an exchange.

"They never call me, so I won't call them! They never write me, so I won't write them!" So you have this stalemate. It's called resentment. If someone walks in the door, and just that person's very presence causes your blood pressure to rise, then there's an issue of resentment.

If someone mentions a name, and you get a "check" in your spirit because it reminds you of another person by the same name... that's evidence that something's still wrong. Any person or memory that makes your blood pressure rise should give you an indication of something in your past that's not resolved. The Lord may be trying to show you that you haven't forgiven.

We're not usually aware of unforgiveness in our hearts towards someone unless we're doing daily battle with negative emotions. But the issue really isn't how **often** you think about

that person – but rather what happens when you **do** think about them.

What happens when you recall a certain situation? What goes on internally? It might be something you only remember once a year, but when you do remember – your blood starts to boil! Then there's bitterness in your heart. And bitterness will kill you – spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

So we can't just forgive one time and say, "That's over with!" It's something that has to be maintained. I can't guarantee that after you've forgiven you won't be hurt again. In fact, I can almost guarantee that you **will** be! Forgiveness isn't saying, "I'll forgive... but just this once!" That's **not** forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a lifestyle of taking our rightful place in God and saying to the person who continues to hurt us, "I'm sorry you feel the way you do about me, but I'm not going to respond back to you in the same way." Taking this stand puts my emotional health and destiny in the Lord's hands, instead of letting the person who's giving me the problem rule my emotional life.

This is hard to do, but **it is possible.** And it's the only way we're going to really rise above the constant conflicts we have to deal with in human relationships. Forgiveness says, "No! In the name of Jesus, I am going to rise above that and not let your problem become my problem." **Because a wrong reaction is just**

