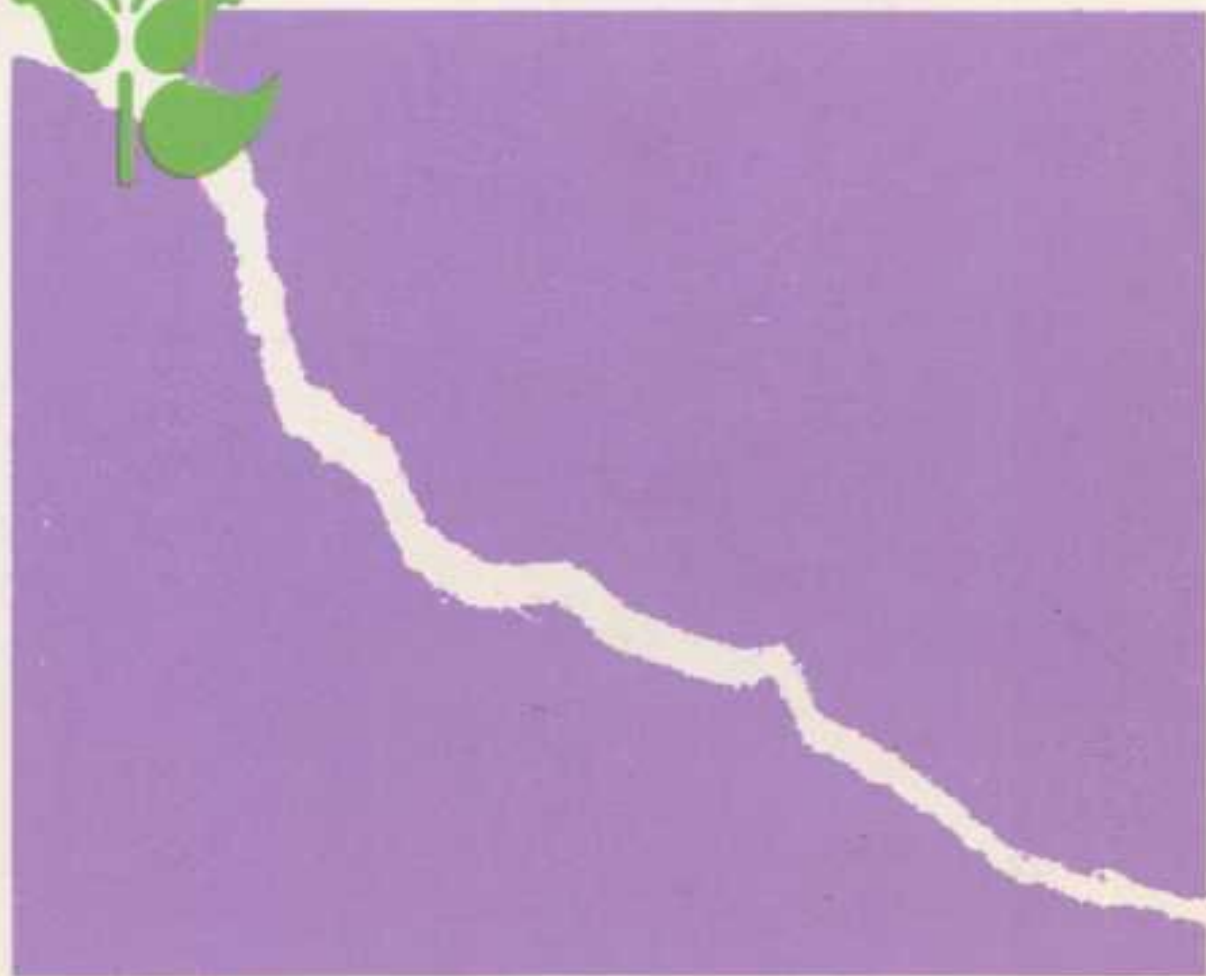


THE  
POWER  
OF  
FORGIVENESS



*Marilyn Hickey*

## The Power of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is not a one-shot experience but a way of living. Jesus gave us the *power* to forgive. We experience His power of forgiveness when we receive Him as our Savior. We experience His forgiveness for all our sins. Not only does He forgive us of our sins, but He cleanses us from all unrighteousness. There are two aspects in His forgiveness of our sins:

1. He freely forgives us when we repent.
2. He forgets our sins. He never remembers them again.

Here we see the power of forgiving and forgetting. Sometimes you and I have said, "I forgive but I will never forget." But forgiving and forgetting the sins of others are Siamese twins. They cannot be separated.

How can we forgive and forget? There is a very simple one-word answer. It is by faith! Faith is not an emotion. It is not a set of circumstances which we can see. It is acting uncompromisingly on God's Word!

The apostles learned this powerful truth in their walk with Jesus. They knew the difficulty they had in forgiving those who had seriously offended them. Jesus told them specifically how they were to behave toward offending brethren. Luke 17:3-5,

"Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.

And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith."

Please, please note the answer of the apostles: **"And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith."** They knew they could not act on their emotions or the surrounding circumstances which they could see. They must act on His spoken words. They needed increased faith to have increased forgiving. Hearing and acting on God's Word will increase your faith, and increased faith will give you increased power to forgive.

Joseph shows us by demonstration the act of forgiving and forgetting. Joseph forgave the dastardly acts of his brothers and I know that he also forgot, for he named his first child Manasseh, which means "causing to forget." Joseph named his second child Ephraim, which means "fruitful." When we forgive and forget we become fruitful in all areas of our lives—spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically. We cannot look at one area of Joseph's life which was not fruitful.

When you forgive by faith, you can also claim divine power to forget by faith. It is divine to forgive, but it is also divine to forget!

Several years ago there was a woman attending our church who had a nice, even, disposition—always nasty! She would pick at little faults or habits of other Christians, and would especially pick on my husband. She would tell me he did not preach correctly, or she would complain about the color of his suit, or the ring he wore on his right hand. I had difficulty liking her. She was a large, unattractive woman with an even more unattractive mouth. One night she stood in one of our annual church business meetings and complained about every cent that had been spent for the last year. I wanted to tell her to sit down and shut-up, but I reacted by giving her a dirty look! I didn't have to learn how to do this—it came spontaneously, and as you might guess, it did no good, **"For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."**

On the way home from that unpleasant scene, I complained to my husband about her. His reply was excellent, "Don't worry about her, Marilyn, that's God's problem." But frankly, I did not heed his advice. I mulled over the many instances of her sharp words to me. Sunday arrived and it was a beautiful, bright, shiny day. After the morning service, I went to the main door to greet our people as they departed. Who should come up to me but my razor-tongued friend! She spoke in sweet, syrupy tones, "Sister, I love you." Inside I cringed at her saccharin words, for they seemed like fake symbols of her real attitude; but I pushed my revulsion aside, shook her hand and greeted the next person in line.

Later in the afternoon I had a flashback of the incident, as her counterfeit words began to echo through my mind. Then abruptly, I was jerked into reality. This very night we would be taking Holy Communion together in our evening service! I dare not have unforgiveness in my spirit, for the Bible states boldly and clearly that we can drink damnation to ourselves. I went into the bedroom, closed the door, knelt by our bed and began to pray. "God, forgive my ugly attitude toward my sister. Help me to love her." My feelings went every direction but the right direction, for I was filled with a strong dislike for her, and extreme guilt for my own attitude. I continued to pray, but felt even more frustrated. What could I do? Since I did not feel I had forgiven her, I decided I must not take Communion. If I told my husband I could not take

Communion, what would he think of me? What would our church people think of their Pastor's wife not taking Communion? I was tormented by these

fleeting thoughts, but my feelings said, "You don't feel forgiveness— so you don't have forgiveness!"

When our church was small, we would take Communion on our knees. At the close of the preaching service the lights would be dimmed, and after singing and worshipping the Lord, we would go forward to the altars as we felt spiritually prepared. The deacons would then serve us Communion, after which we would return to our seat and continue in worship until the dismissal of the service. It was a gorgeous time and I hated to miss it. Usually, my husband and I waited until the last person had been served, then we would kneel and take Communion together. Now I had no choice, for I must tell him I wouldn't be taking Communion with him.

On the way to church, I mustered enough courage to tell him. I was concerned that our children might hear in the back seat, but they were busy talking, and when I told my husband I would not be taking Communion that night, he almost fell out of the car with shock! He queried, "Why aren't you taking Communion?" I answered fearfully, "Because I have unforgiveness in my heart, and I've prayed and prayed and just can't get rid of it!" His answer was so sweet it melted my heart. He said, "Marilyn, I'm sure you don't." I quickly responded, "I'm sure I do." (Let me insert here that I was looking totally to my "feelings.")

I was crying inside as we drove silently to the church. After the preaching service, the dreaded time arrived. The lights were dimmed, and my husband began to lead softly in worship. The altars were open for Holy Communion. I sat stonily in front, at the far right of the congregation, and I hoped no one would notice I did not take Communion. Lost in my miserable thoughts, I did not notice a friend slip in the seat beside me until she grabbed my hand and spoke warmly, "Marilyn, I feel led to take Communion with you." My heart came up into my throat. I could not believe the Lord had led her to come ask me to take Communion with her! Surely God wasn't a "tattle-tale!" I pulled my hand out of hers, for I knew that I must be honest. I spoke hesitantly, then the hard words spewed out of my mouth, "I'm not taking Communion tonight. I have unforgiveness in my heart!" She looked as shocked as my husband, but she sat silently by my side for a few moments. Then she turned and looked me directly in the eyes and absolutely unhinged my with her words, "Marilyn, are you trying to forgive by faith in God's Word, or by your own feelings?" It was as though her words had flipped a light-switch in my spirit. How simple was God's solution!

A Scripture came bubbling up out of my spirit into my understanding. Paul had said in II Corinthians 2:10 that he forgave in the Person of Jesus Christ. **"To whom ye forgive anything, I forgive also: for if I forgive anything, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the Person of Christ."** There I was, trying to forgive in my feelings, when true forgiveness takes place by our faith in His Word! I had struggled and struggled to forgive, but now I prayed such a simple prayer, "I forgive in the Person of Jesus Christ. I forgive by faith and know that my feelings will follow."

It was as though a truckload of bricks drove out of my heart! I grabbed the hand of my friend, and we hurried to get to the altar before the Communion service was over. As you might guess, it was one of the most precious services of my life, for I had learned to forgive by faith—and you can too!

There can be no better time to forgive than right now! Just take a few moments and think of anyone or everyone who may have offended you. Now pray the following prayer with me:

"Dear Father, I come to You in the Name of Jesus. I forgive (list names here) with the forgiveness of Jesus. I love (list names here) with the love of Jesus, and now by God's power, I forget the incidents which offended me. I now speak to my feelings and demand that they line up with the Word of God. Jesus said in John 8:36, 'If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.' Thank You, Father for setting me free in His Name, Amen." Thank God, you are now free of the evil and deliberate trap of Satan!

Forgiveness is a powerful force. We can loose others with our forgiveness, or we can bind them with our unforgiveness. We can loose ourselves from torment by forgiving, or place ourselves in torment by not forgiving. In the account of Matthew 18:23-25, remember the man who owed the king 10,000 talents in gold? (This amount would be worth \$290,850,000, and probably more, with the inflationary price of gold on today's market.) In order to even begin to pay his debt, that man would have to sell his wife and children into slavery, but the king had compassion and *loosed* him by forgiving his debt. How free the servant must have felt, and how overwhelmed he must have been with the compassion and goodness of the king!

But now, the roles are reversed: The forgiven servant also has a debtor who owes him \$17.00. What a contrast in the amounts of money owed! Also,

in contrast to the benevolent king, this servant becomes irate with his debtor and throws him into debtor's prison! The king hears of his servant's behavior and is greatly disappointed, so he turns the ungrateful servant over to the tormentors until his debt is paid. The end of this story is very sad. One man is bound in prison because of another's unforgiveness, and the unforgiving servant is tormented. We are living in a very dangerous condition if we don't forgive, for we too can live in torment! If we don't forgive, the King of our life will not forgive us.

If we plan not to forgive those who have wronged us, we better make plans to never sin again, for there will be no forgiveness from our Heavenly Father. But when we do forgive, we loose our forgiven offender. We have freed him by our faith, for whomever we loose on Earth is loosed in Heaven.

Heaven will begin to work on him, and our prayer power will increase. Jesus said in Matthew 18:18, "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

In my story, I did not relate the results in the life of the one I forgave after that momentous Communion service. One day my forgiven friend called me and asked if she could bring dinner to our house that evening. She wanted to help because she knew how busy I had been. Her words were warm and her actions were even warmer. What had happened? I had loosed Heaven to move in her when I loosed forgiveness on Earth. If you should someday visit our Happy Church, it would be difficult to identify my forgiven friend from my original description, for she is now a radiant, lovely lady!

We can either eradicate people with our unforgiveness, or we can edify them with forgiveness, but we must make that quality decision. Joseph made it. If he had not forgiven his brothers he could have wiped out the whole Jewish nation by refusing them food. Instead, he forgave, and edified them by giving them food. The apostle Paul said he would be accursed that his brethren might be saved. The Jews had beaten him many times and treated him cruelly; but instead of wanting to eradicate them, he chose to edify them.

Jesus could have eradicated us because of our sins, but instead His one desire was to edify us. Therefore, He forgave us! Paul said in Philippians 3:10, **"That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death."** If we are to know Jesus in His suffering, we will feel what He felt for those who offended Him. He wanted to die on the Cross for their sins because He loved

them. Paul felt these same feelings of Jesus, for he wanted to die for his persecutors.

These are truths to live by. If we take the feelings of Jesus for our offenders, it will not be the end of our forgiving—only the beginning; for forgiveness is a twin to faith, and is the Divine way of living!