

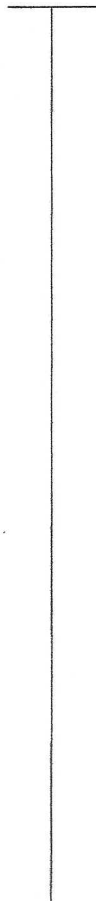
CHAPTER 7

# FORGIVE

SOAKING SESSION

*Take Up Your Spade* by Sara Watkins

*Morning Song* by Stephany Gretzinger



And the one sitting on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new!” And then he said to me,  
 “Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true.”

*Revelation 21:5 (NLT)*

As you honestly and openly tell your story, you discover your truth. And while your story is about the past, the truth you discover always points to the present reality. It speaks of who you are, and more importantly, who *you are becoming*.

In John 8:31, Jesus invites us to live our lives in and through him. He says that when you listen to his guidance “you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (vs 32 NASB). Michele faced and owned hard truths. Her story was filled with *pain, fear, self-hate, shame, and lies*, but she didn’t stop there. She brought her truth to God and presented it to him.

God is the only one with the power to right all wrongs (Psalm 45:6). When Michele presented her truth to God, he took it and did something amazing with it. He used it to set her free! He redeemed her past. Michele heard God say that her “pain becomes relief,” her “fear becomes courage,” her “self-hate becomes self-love,” her “shame becomes acceptance,” her “lies become truth,” and her “powerlessness becomes empowered.” These words about Michele are the truth with a capital “T,” and with them, she was able to start writing a new story. Your story is far from over. God wants you to step into the truth about you.

## THE TRUTH ABOUT FORGIVENESS

Stepping into the truth of who and what you are becoming involves a very important *spiritual* choice—the choice to forgive. Forgiveness allows us to let go of the past—and the negative ways it has defined us—so we can embrace the truth God speaks to us about our future. By choosing to forgive those who have hurt us, we acknowledge that ultimately, only God has the power to make all wrongs right. In his wisdom, love, and power, he can even use the evil we’ve suffered to produce something good in our lives. Like God did for Michele, he can produce strength where we’ve been weak, wisdom when we’ve been confused, real friends instead of feeling alone, and hope that overcomes our hopelessness.

One of the biggest lies we believe is that holding on to hurt and anger gives us power and control. Continuing to live with these powerful and painful emotions promises control,

but it’s an empty promise. Actually, these feelings poison our hearts and our relationships. *True and healthy control, which we all need so we can thrive, is about the ability to make choices.* In reality, holding on to anger, hurt, or revenge only leads to bitterness. Bitterness is like putting salt on an already festering wound. The powerful, toxic emotion takes control and hurts us in the deepest part—our heart. Forgiveness frees us from the bitterness that keeps us tied to a painful past. It isn’t always easy, but it is powerful.

The acknowledgement of our hurt and anger is essential to healing, but indefinitely clutching it effectively prevents our ability to heal from the past. When we’ve been wronged, everything in us cries out for justice. It is natural to feel like people owe us for what they’ve done to us. This is because all offenses create debts. For example, if someone walks into our

home and knocks our laptop to the floor and breaks it, a debt has been created. Whether we pay to have it repaired or we go without it, we bear the loss . . . we pay a price. There are options: the person who broke it can pay to repair it, we can say, "No, that's okay. I'll pay for it," or we can go without a laptop.

The desire for justice reflects the image of God in us; it's not a flaw. However, as long as we insist on *being the agent of justice* to make people pay for what they've done, we won't forgive . . . we can't forgive. But if we can trust God to be just, we can *let the person off our hook* and put him on God's hook. Paul wrote to the Romans,

Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you've got it in you, get along with everybody. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. "I'll do the judging," says God. "I'll take care of it." . . . Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good (Romans 12:17-19, 21).

Forgiveness is a different way to live: It's allowing God to absorb the debt instead of inflicting revenge. We are free to forgive because God is dealing with the debt. To illustrate the nature of forgiveness, Jesus told this story: A servant owed the king 10,000 talents. Today, we don't measure money in talents, so this needs some explanation. A talent was 50 to 70 pounds of silver or gold. A person this far in debt obviously wasn't a house servant. He was more like the Secretary of the Treasury, and the amount of money he lost or stole was equal to the gross national product of the three countries surrounding Palestine! Jesus was making the point that this servant's debt was far beyond his ability to ever repay it.

When the king ordered the servant and his family to be sold and the money applied to the debt, the servant begged for his life and promised to repay him. The king took pity on

the man and canceled his debt. He was free! But that's not the end of the story. When the servant left the king's throne, he found a man who owed him a relatively small amount of money. When the man couldn't pay him, the servant choked the man and demanded the money. The forgiven servant threw the man into debtors' prison.

When the king heard about this, he was furious. He had the servant brought into his presence, and he told him, "You evil servant! I forgave your entire debt when you begged me for mercy. Shouldn't you be compelled to be merciful to your fellow servant who asked for mercy?" (Matthew 18:32-33).

In the story, the king represents God, and the first servant represents us. Through this story, Jesus is teaching us that our willingness and ability to forgive others is a direct result of our experience of God's forgiveness. When we hear the encouragement to forgive, we may react, "But you don't know how much that person hurt me . . . abused me . . . betrayed me! How can I forgive that?" It's a logical and good question. The answer comes from the story Jesus told: If someone has the equivalent of a \$10 million debt to us because of abuse or abandonment, but we have nothing in the bank, we can't possibly absorb the debt, set the person free, and be free ourselves. We can forgive others only to the extent we're convinced God has forgiven us. If we have a trillion dollars in the bank, we can afford to absorb the \$10 million debt. The grace of God, the forgiveness Jesus bought for us at the cross, deposits more in our spiritual accounts than any debt others owe us. When we begin to grasp the full measure of God's amazing grace toward us, our bank account becomes full and overflowing!



How would you explain the point of Jesus' story of the king and the two servants?

Does the idea of forgiving those who hurt you seem totally unfair and unreasonable? Or can you imagine drawing on the immense wealth of grace you've experienced to help you forgive them? Explain your answer.

What would your life be like without the bitterness that comes with unforgiveness?

## FALSE GUILT

Forgiving others is hard, but sometimes, we have even more difficulty forgiving ourselves, and we carry the shame of false guilt. False guilt is the shame we take on when we wrongly take the blame for someone else's actions (ex. *Who I am is wrong. I am bad*). We may feel responsible for letting someone abuse us, or we assume it's our fault if someone we love abandons us. In these cases, we need help to become objective about who is responsible.

Here is a helpful rule of thumb: A person is responsible for *his/her* behavior and the consequences of that behavior (debt). If it was someone else's behavior (ex. abuse), then it is not a reflection on you, but it does tell you something about that person (ex. *This person is not safe.*). If you were not the one behaving badly, you don't need to forgive yourself. Instead, you hold the choice to forgive the abuser and grieve the hurts and losses.



Someone else's behavior is a reflection on him/her, not you. Recall a situation where you felt false guilt (shame) for someone else's behavior.

His/her action/behavior in the situation:

What this behavior tells me about him/her is:

I took on false guilt/shame by thinking:

(ex. I am a horrible person. The abuse was my fault.)

Instead, the loss I need to acknowledge and grieve is:

I can choose to forgive him/her for this behavior instead of remaining powerless in false guilt.

## DENIAL OF GRIEF

Wounds create debts, and they also create loss. Sometimes, unforgiveness is about our own refusal to admit how badly we've been hurt. The pain makes us feel too vulnerable, so we excuse the offender: "He/she couldn't help it." Or we minimize it: "It really didn't hurt *that* bad." Or we deny any damage at all: "It didn't really affect me. I'm fine." None of these are forgiving the person who hurt us. This only leaves us powerless. Author and pastor, Lewis Smedes observes, "When we forgive evil we do not excuse it, we do not tolerate it, we do not smother it. We look the evil full in the face, call it what it is, let its horror shock and stun and enrage us, and only then we forgive it."<sup>12</sup>



How is forgiveness different than excusing, minimizing, or denying?

Someone else may have inflicted the wound, but ultimately, we are still responsible for dealing with it (remember the laptop) and grieving the losses associated with it. Forgiving always makes us more honest about the losses, so grief is always a part of the process. Grieving doesn't happen in an instant. We choose to forgive as much as we can, as soon as we can, but we invariably go through deeper layers of hurt. The reality of each new layer of pain doesn't mean we haven't forgiven; it means we aren't finished with forgiving. We're making progress! Facing our fears about our vulnerability enables us to acknowledge that even the people who love us the most can and will hurt us at some point. We can't control that.

What might happen if we try to forgive without truly grieving the losses?

## MAKING AMENDS FOR TRUE GUILT

Unforgiveness does not protect us from a related fear—the fear of owning up to how we have hurt others. Hurting people hurt people. In our attempts to protect ourselves from being hurt, we’ve hurt others in many different ways. Admitting fault can feel threatening. If we admit we’ve wronged someone, we feel vulnerable because that person can decide *not* to forgive us. He/she may condemn or even reject us. So instead, we remain defensive or silent, or we project our true guilt onto others.

The emotions surrounding true guilt are healthy. 2 Corinthians 7:8–10 (NIV) explains, “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.” True guilt compels us to do the right thing, admit our wrongs, and make amends. Making amends allows us to live a life with no regrets.

## RECONCILIATION

Some of us have been taught that if we forgive, we must reconcile and trust the person again. Trust and forgiveness are two very separate things: God commands us to forgive unilaterally—whether the person is sorry and whether the person ever changes. But trust takes two. The person must prove he or she is trustworthy over time. We are under no obligation to trust untrustworthy people. That would be foolish! How do we know someone is trustworthy and we can enter the relationship again? Three things must happen:

- » The person has to admit what he/she did was wrong. This is more than a quick, “I’m sorry.” The person needs to describe the wrong and the hurt he/she caused.
- » The person has to enter into our pain. There needs to be evidence of empathy for how his/her behavior has damaged us, and we need to see his/her genuine sorrow.
- » The person has to make a commitment not to hurt us again . . . and consistently follow up on that commitment. This doesn’t demand the person to be perfect, but it requires him/her to treat us with genuine and consistent respect, honesty, and honor.

# FORGIVE AND BE FORGIVEN: TWO STORIES

## ALI'S STORY

You were first introduced to Ali in chapter five. Here is her healing story:

I've been a dancer almost my whole life. I love ballet. When I was 14, I felt a lot of pressure to be prettier, which meant being thinner. About this time, other girls were becoming very interested in boys, and being attractive seemed very important to them . . . and to me. I wanted to fit in, and I wanted to be popular. Being thinner, I was sure, would make more people like me. I worked out every day in dance, so I got a lot of exercise. I also started restricting my eating. By the end of my freshman year of high school, I had lost so much weight that I was very thin—which looked exactly right to me. I'm a perfectionist, so I wanted to do everything just right: my appearance, dancing, school, friendships, and boys. My eating habits became part of my daily regimen to be perfect. Being thinner was the thread that tied all those desires together.

My family didn't talk—at least, we didn't talk about anything that was important, like our relationships, our hopes and fears, or any other emotions. My parents, my older brother and I didn't have a lot of conflict, but we didn't have meaningful talks either. If my parents noticed that I had become very thin and wasn't eating, they never mentioned their concern to me. In fact, when my doctor told my mom he was concerned about my weight, she insisted, "Oh, she's in ballet, and all the girls are really thin." I'm sure the doctor was trying to say, "I'm very concerned about Ali's health, not just her weight. If her eating problem continues, she may develop very serious health issues. She may die of a heart attack in a year or so." But my mother didn't want to hear anything like that. It was too much for her to handle. She preferred to think everything was just fine.

The next year, my parents suddenly announced they were getting a divorce. It came out of nowhere. Everyone was shocked. No one, even my aunts and uncles, had any idea they were having any problems at all. Now, in an instant, their marriage was over.

I always had a very good relationship with my dad, but I'd felt distant from my mom. When the divorce happened, my brother, who is four years older, had already moved out of the house. Soon after the announcement, my dad moved out, which felt like he was abandoning me. That left just my mother and me at home. We were like two strangers living together. We had never talked about important things, and she didn't want to talk about the divorce—the biggest thing that had ever happened in our lives. My world fell apart. I couldn't make sense of it; I felt completely lost and alone.

I started drinking with my friends, and I began drinking more than casually. I was still dancing, and I was still obsessed with being thinner. When I ate, I hated myself for being weak. Every bite felt like failure.

By the time I was 16, my depression, self-hatred, and obsession with my body image were too much to take, so I started cutting. I was completely disconnected from my emotions. I was like a robot. The pain from cutting made me feel alive . . . it made me a person . . . it validated my feelings.

When I was a junior, I was attracted to a guy who seemed to be very attentive to me. At first, he was charming, but he became violently abusive. His kindness turned to intimidation and threats. I was terrified of him. He trafficked me out to other men. He threatened

to kill me if I told anyone. He said he would hurt my family if I reported him, so I didn't tell a soul. Day after day I lived under his anger and control. He told me no one would ever love me, and I believed him. Who would love someone who was so completely messed up?

I stayed with him for two years. People might ask, "Why did you put up with him so long?" My self-confidence was already shattered before we started dating, but under his domination, I was completely lost and helpless. I didn't think I was worthy of anyone better than him. My parents had divorced, I was lonely, and at least he was giving me attention. Strangely, his family was very kind to me. I became very close to his mom, and she became a mother figure I longed for. During all this, I was going to high school, dancing, and working at a daycare facility. And I was starving myself, drinking and cutting every day.

But I knew that if I stayed with him, I was going to die.

After high school, I went to college in my hometown of Omaha, Nebraska, but I didn't tell my boyfriend where I was. I wanted to start over, and I wanted to make something of my life. I hoped he would just vanish. I changed my phone number so he couldn't call me, but he found out I was living in the dorm at school. He came to see me, and he was furious. He yelled and screamed at me. I grabbed my phone and called the police. They escorted him from my dorm, but they didn't arrest him because I didn't report the abuse and press charges.

For the next four years at school, I changed my phone number several times, and I made sure I never walked by myself on campus at night. I was always aware that he could show up any place at any time. I didn't tell my friends the whole story, but they knew he wasn't a safe person to have around—for me or for them. They were very supportive, but I still felt like trash. To everybody who knew me at school, I was a normal student, but I had a secret life I didn't share with anybody. I was living two very different existences. I tried to balance all this so I'd look normal and no one would ask any questions. I was still dancing, but I was obsessed with my weight so I starved myself, I was drinking to numb the pain, and

I was cutting to feel something. And of course, I was majoring in psychology.

I graduated with honors. My studies were the glue that held my crumbling life together. They gave me a purpose, and they let me do something I could do well. Studying and succeeding in college gave me a sense of identity . . . at least for a while.

When I left school, my life fell apart. All my secret behaviors took full control of me, and I didn't have anything to give me purpose, or even to distract me. My moods were all over the place. I'd never talked about the pain of my parents' divorce, and I'd never told anyone about the sexual abuse and emotional oppression I'd experienced from my boyfriend.

I became suicidal, and I was admitted to the psych ward at the hospital three times in only a few months. The last time, I had attempted to kill myself. When I was in that time, I told my dad, "This isn't working. I need to go somewhere for a long enough time to deal with what's bothering me. I need someone to help me figure this out and give me the help I need."

My dad found a treatment center in Southern California. He flew with me so I could be admitted. For the first time, I told someone about the trauma with my boyfriend. The facility treats people who struggle with alcohol and drugs. I needed that, but I also needed help with a lot more they didn't really address. While I was there, my eating disorder got completely out of control. Maybe I wasn't ready, or maybe it wasn't a good fit. Or maybe I'm just stubborn and resistant. Whatever the cause, treatment didn't make much of a dent in my problems.

About a year later, I attempted suicide again. The physician who treated me said there was no medical reason I was still alive because the amount of drugs I'd taken were enough to kill a horse. At this point, the doctors recommended a number of other treatment centers. My dad chose Timberline Knolls. We drove from Southern California to Chicago. They treated everything I was dealing with, but it was really hard to expose the truth I'd kept hidden so long. All my coping strategies were gradually stripped

from me, but I didn't know how to live without them. For the first time in my life, I felt safe, and I began to learn how to trust people. I realized they couldn't help me if I wasn't willing to trust them.

Trusting others was a really big hurdle for me. I hadn't even been able to trust my family when I was a child, and the guy who said he loved me trafficked me to other guys and threatened to kill me. I had no idea what love was, so I didn't have any idea what safety and trust were all about. I had seen my friends experience loving, honest, supportive relationships with their parents, and I'd seen them have meaningful relationships with guys they dated, but I had a big deficit in both of those areas of my life.

When I started at TK, they assigned me a male therapist. I thought, No way! This isn't going to work for me! I'm not going to talk about my sexual trauma with him! But it turned out to be an amazing relationship—a much needed positive experience with a man. He really cared, with no hidden agenda and no manipulation. He was genuinely invested in helping me.

It took time for me to trust my therapist enough to be completely honest. It was really hard, and I fought against him. But I'm so glad I was in that place with that kind and wise man.

While I was at TK, Kara came to tell her story to those of us in treatment. I met her after her talk and we quickly became friends. We talked on the phone almost every day I was in treatment. She is the person who told me about the grace of God.

My family wasn't religious or spiritual, so I didn't have much of a concept of God. Actually, if there was a God, I was really mad at him. If he was so loving and powerful, how could he let all those terrible things happen to me? Kara told me about the love and kindness of God. She shared passages of Scripture with me and prayed for me. For a while, I didn't get it. I appreciated Kara being so nice to me, but I wasn't too sure about what she was saying about God. But Kara told me the story of her life—the pain and the recovery—and I saw God's love and peace in her. If God could do something that great in Kara, maybe there was hope for me, too. I asked Kara a million questions about how God communicated with her and how he changed her life. She answered each one with incredible patience and love.

**Ali shares more of her story. She found forgiveness to be a difficult but necessary process:**

I had a lot of unfinished business with God. Forgiveness was a foreign concept. In my addiction, disorder, and fear, I did things I thought were totally unforgivable. How could God possibly forgive all that? Gradually, I learned that Jesus' sacrifice is for all of our wrongs—even mine, all of mine. No one is beyond his grace, love, and mercy. Gradually, these truths became more than concepts. I believed them. I experienced his forgiveness. His grace really is amazing!

As I sensed God's forgiveness for all I'd done, I began to find a way to forgive those who hurt me. First, I had to forgive myself for the lies I believed, the damage I inflicted on my body, and the choice to run away from God for so long. I experienced a tremendous amount of shame and self-blame for letting myself get caught up in an abusive relationship. I needed to forgive myself for these things the same way God had forgiven me—completely, gladly, and with no reservation. I'm still going deeper into God's

love and forgiveness, and I'm still finding deeper levels where I need to forgive myself.

Long ago, in the middle of all my pain and shame, I had written my mother off, and I assumed I would never have a relationship with her. But forgiveness works miracles. God has brought redemption, healing, and love to my relationship with my mom. I forgave my mother for not being there for me, and she took a few steps toward me. As we drew a little closer, I realized how she had been devastated by the broken marriage, and she had nothing to give me. Instead of anger and resentment, I felt compassion for a woman who had lost everything. Both of us are flawed and broken, and both of us need God's love and forgiveness. Many wonderful people were extending grace to me, so I could extend the same grace to my mother. I'm so glad God has restored our relationship. We talk almost every day. We've become best friends.

I'm still working on forgiving the guy who abused me. I've learned that forgiveness is a process, and I still have a way to go to forgive him. Each step I take to experience God's forgiveness for my sins helps me forgive him a little bit more. For years, I was haunted by memories of what he did to me and the way he looked at me. God is healing those wounds, so the memories aren't as vivid or as frequent any more.

## KARA'S MEMORIES

Kara also experienced the healing power of forgiveness. She struggled to deal with all the pain, but God was gracious to set her free from haunting memories. And he restored a dream she had almost forgotten:

When we trust in Jesus, the terrible memories of the past don't just vanish. Our minds store them until God prepares us to deal with them. In the kindness of God, he doesn't bring them up until we're strong enough . . . or, at least, until he thinks we're strong enough. After I'd been clean and sober for several years, a flood of painful memories came back. I hadn't been able to even think about the abortion, but now it haunted me. I had memories of being molested as a little girl. And I thought of all the people I'd used, lied to, and let down over the years.

I felt completely overwhelmed. I had self-destructive urges to get rid of all the pain. I began to address the deep wounds from the past, my terrible choices, and all the ways I'd damaged myself and those I love.

In the middle of God surfacing these painful memories, I reached out to Margaret Nagib. I told her that I still felt overwhelmed by the pain. In fact, in some ways, it was getting worse. I had been holding myself like I'd hold a little girl who is afraid, and I was drawing pictures of being molested. She took me through a loving process of forgiveness. For two hours, she gently asked important questions and patiently listened as I talked and cried over each memory. I needed to be forgiven, and I needed to extend forgiveness to those who had hurt me. God was present in the room that day. He gave me a deep well of his forgiveness to draw from. All of the therapy over the years had led me to that moment and prepared me to be open to Margaret and Jesus. I experienced God more fully that day than ever before.

The old fears and urges didn't completely go away, but they lost a lot of their power. I surrounded myself with strong, loving, healthy people who didn't judge me when I was down but

celebrated every step forward. These people reminded me often (because I need it often) of the unconditional love of God. His grace and acceptance isn't based on what I've done or not done; it's entirely based on what Jesus has done for me. I can never hear that too much.

I wanted to go back to school to finish my bachelor's degree and earn a master's, but I was afraid to even try because failure had eroded my confidence. God assured me, though, that we would do it together. This was going to be different: God was going with me to do something I didn't believe I could do on my own. But I had to go backward before I could go forward. To finish my bachelor's degree, I had to take some courses to get my GPA up. Then I applied to graduate school and was accepted at Pepperdine University in Social Entrepreneurship and Change.

As God worked in my life, I wondered if I'd ever have a healthy relationship with a man—I wondered if I'd ever be married. God told me, "Just live your life and leave that to me. When you're ready, I'll bring someone to you." I was leading a support group at a church in 2013 when a young man walked in. I secretly prayed, "Oh great, Lord. You bring a really cute guy on the night I don't have any make up on!" We talked and seemed to get along pretty well.

Later, he told me what he was thinking that night. He said, "I thought you were the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen!" That was the last lie God was casting away from me. I had always thought I had to look perfect to win approval from a man, but he thought I was beautiful when I looked far from perfect. He saw me—he saw into my heart—not just my appearance. He saw me the way Jesus sees me. As you can probably guess, we fell in love and got married. He is a precious gift from God.

## FORGIVENESS SKILLS

When you are ready to make the choice to forgive, remember that it's a powerful spiritual process. The most harmful effect of a wound is the web of distorted beliefs and lies that form as a result. Forgiveness begins the process of healing the wounds and replacing the lies with truth. This clears the way to seeing God and ourselves more clearly so we can relate to him in trust instead of fear. It also opens our hearts so we can receive the love, provision, protection, companionship, comfort, and guidance God has for us.

The forgiveness process starts with acknowledging your limits as an individual and the limits of others (including the fact that people *will* hurt us). It's about compassionately attending to the wounds and lies that were created in the process of being hurt and then releasing the past. There are three steps in the spiritual practice of forgiveness. This process can be used for each person God shows you to forgive:



**Invite God and a trusted person (it could be a friend, mentor, or therapist) to join you as you begin the process of forgiveness. Start by asking God if there is anyone you need to forgive. Also ask what you need to forgive him/her for. Then, audibly, in the presence of God and the other person, choose to forgive each person for what he/she did and how it affected you.**

### **Sample prayer:**

Father God, who do I need to forgive?  
What do I need to forgive him/her for?

Be specific and forgive him/her for anything and everything that God brings to mind. Acknowledge the depth of the wounds and compassionately attend to all the hurt feelings and the consequences.

### **Sample prayer:**

Today, I choose to forgive \_\_\_\_\_ (person)  
for \_\_\_\_\_ (action).

I forgive him/her for how this made me feel  
\_\_\_\_\_ (emotion)  
and \_\_\_\_\_ (emotion).

I forgive him/her for how this made me think I was  
\_\_\_\_\_ (ex: worthless).

And how it made me think God is  
\_\_\_\_\_ (ex. not to be trusted).

Forgive the person for the painful events and for the many losses you suffered as a result, including your unmet but real needs. Forgive him/her for the physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational effects of what he/she did.

For example, losses and effects:

- » I forgive my father for how his act caused me to lose my sense of innocence.
- » I forgive my husband for how his criticisms negatively affected my ability to trust myself and others.
- » I forgive my parents for how they caused me to distrust adults and authority figures—including God.
- » I forgive my teacher for how worthless and scared I felt in his/her class.
- » For example, unmet needs (safety, security, love, honor, being cherished and protected) and effects:
- » I forgive my dad for not loving me and how this caused me to distrust others.
- » I forgive my mother for not keeping me safe and how this left me scared.
- » I forgive my sister for not being the support I needed and how alone I felt.

**Identify the lies that were created about yourself, others, and God as a result of how each person affected you.**

Ask, "God, is there a lie I'm believing because of him/her?"

Listen carefully to what God shows you and write the lies. Then forgive each person for contributing to the formation of these lies and audibly renounce them.

For example:

I forgive my father for communicating the lie that I'm damaged goods.

**Sample prayer:**

I forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for teaching me the lie

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Then, ask God to replace these lies with the truth.**

For example:

God, I renounce the lie that I'm damaged goods. Please, show me your truth about me.

**Sample prayer:**

I renounce the lie that \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

God, what is the truth?

Listen for his response with all your senses. God may speak to you in a thought. Or, he may remind you of passages of Scripture. He may bring an image or picture to mind that represents his truth to you. Or, you may feel something like peace or his delight. In this "truth swap," restoration and wholeness return, and we are filled with the courage, relief, and hope to reclaim what was once lost and move forward.

Have the person you are with write down all the truths for you.

Now, take the time let God speak to you. Ask:

» Father God, how do you see me? What is your truth about me? (Write down the truth.)

» What do you love about me? What special qualities do you see in me? (Write down the qualities.)

» Father God, is there anything you want to tell me or show me about the person I'm forgiving?

How do you meet my needs? (Write down the perceptions.)

**When you feel like you have finished the process of forgiveness with a particular person, close out the time with this prayer:**

I choose today to break off any ungodly body, soul, and spirit tie with \_\_\_\_\_.

I take back everything that belongs to me washed in the blood of Jesus, and I give back anything that belongs to \_\_\_\_\_ washed in the blood of Jesus.

I bless \_\_\_\_\_ in Jesus' name. Amen.

Author Philip Yancey once called forgiveness “the unnatural act” because everything in us cries out for revenge, but as long as we deny the offenses or let resentment poison our hearts, we suffer the effects of the harm we’ve suffered. When we find the courage to choose to forgive, we begin a journey into truth, healing, and hope. The journey won’t be easy or quick, but it’s essential. Thankfully, we aren’t alone, and we have an incredible resource. The more we *experience* God’s forgiveness, love, and acceptance, the more we can *extend* forgiveness, love, and acceptance to others.

The process of forgiving the people who shattered our lives is never easy, but it draws us deeper into the heart of God as we allow him to heal the losses, meet the unmet needs, and replace the lies we once believed with his truth. Forgiveness is the beginning of true freedom from the past. The choice to forgive releases us from the negative body, soul, and spirit connection with those who have wronged us. It frees us to heal from past wounds, especially those inflicted by others in which we had no choice.