

FORGIVE  
NESS

Johns Hopkins psychiatrist Karen Swartz offers a good reason to forgive.

Studies have found that the act of forgiveness can reap huge rewards for your health, *lowering levels of anxiety, depression and stress.*

And research points to an increase in the forgiveness-health connection as you age.

There is an enormous physical burden  
to being hurt and disappointed.



Chronic anger puts you into a fight-or-flight mode, which results in numerous changes in heart rate, blood pressure and immune response.

Those changes, then, increase the risk of depression,



heart disease and diabetes, among other conditions.

***Forgiveness, however, calms stress levels, leading to improved health.***

Studies have found that some people are just naturally more forgiving. Consequently, they tend to be more satisfied with their lives and to have *less depression, anxiety, stress, anger and hostility.*

People who hang on to grudges, however, are more likely to experience *severe depression and post-traumatic stress disorder*, as well as other health conditions.

But that doesn't mean that they can't train themselves to act in healthier ways.

In fact, 62 percent of American adults say they **need more forgiveness** in their personal lives, according to a survey by the nonprofit Fetzer Institute.



## ***Forgiveness is a choice***

You are choosing to offer compassion and empathy to the person who wronged you.

***Once you make that choice, seal it with an action.***

If you don't feel you can talk to the person who wronged you, write about your forgiveness in a journal or even talk about it to someone else in your life whom you trust.

Simply forgiving someone because you think your religion requires it may be enough to bring some healing.

But one study found that people whose forgiveness came in part from ***understanding that no one is perfect*** were able to resume a normal relationship with the other person, even if that person never apologized.



# Unforgiveness Is Classified In Medical Books As A Disease

Table 1

*Omnibus Effect Sizes and Heterogeneity Tests With Forgiveness as a Dependent Variable*

Comparison	<i>k</i>	$\Delta_+$	95% CI	<i>Q</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>I</i> <sup>2</sup>
No treatment	53	0.56	[0.43, 0.68]	188.91	<.0001	72%
Alternative treatment	22	0.45	[0.21, 0.69]	72.39	<.0001	77%

*Note.* Studies were modeled as random effects. *k* = number of studies;  $\Delta_+$  = effect size (standardized mean difference controlling for preintervention scores; Becker, 1988); CI = confidence interval; *Q* = homogeneity test; *p* = probability value for *Q* statistic under  $H_0$  ( $df = k - 1$ ); *I*<sup>2</sup> = percentage of variance in effect sizes that is attributable to systematic variation.

According to Dr. Steven Standiford, chief of surgery at the Cancer Treatment Centers of America, refusing to forgive makes people sick and keeps them that way.



# *Forgiveness Therapy*



*Forgiveness  
Therapy is now  
being used to help  
treat diseases,  
such as cancer.*

**It's important to treat emotional wounds or disorders because they really can hinder someone's reactions to the treatments, even someone's willingness to pursue treatment.**



**Chronic anxiety very predictably produces excess adrenaline and cortisol, which deplete the production of natural killer cells, which is your body's foot soldier in the fight against cancer.**



**Of all cancer patients, 61 percent have forgiveness issues, and of those, more than half are severe, according to research by Dr. Michael Barry, a pastor and the author of the book, *The Forgiveness Project*.**

# THE FORGIVENESS PROJECT



The Startling Discovery  
of How to Overcome Cancer,  
Find Health, and Achieve Peace

MICHAEL S. BARRY



**Harboring these negative emotions,  
this anger and hatred,  
creates a state of chronic anxiety.**

The first step in learning to forgive is to realize how much we have been forgiven by God.

When a person forgives from the heart [which is the gold standard we see in Matthew 18, forgiveness from the heart,] We find that they are able to find a sense of peacefulness. Quite often patients refer to that as a feeling of lightness.

Most people don't realize what a burden anger and hatred were until they let them go.



In Matthew 18, Jesus uses a story to show us how to handle these situations: There was a wicked servant who owed his master a large amount of money. The master demanded that the servant pay him, but the servant begged for more time to repay it. The master had mercy on him and forgave the huge debt. Unfortunately, this wicked servant went away and found a man who owed him a small amount of money; he choked the man and insisted that he pay him immediately.

When the master's other servants saw how this wicked servant treated the man who owed him so little, they reported it to their master. The "master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. 'So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses'" (Matthew 18:34-35).

Jesus was teaching people that if we don't forgive others, then we'll be in torment.



Because of unforgiveness, we will experience turmoil and suffering.

When we act out in anger or hold on to bitterness or unforgiveness, we open the door to the enemy to torture us with anxiousness and resentment.

An iceberg floating in dark blue water. The tip of the iceberg is visible above the water line, while the much larger, jagged portion of the iceberg is submerged below the surface. The text is overlaid on the image, with the top part above the water and the bottom part below the water.

*The Public View  
of Unforgiveness*

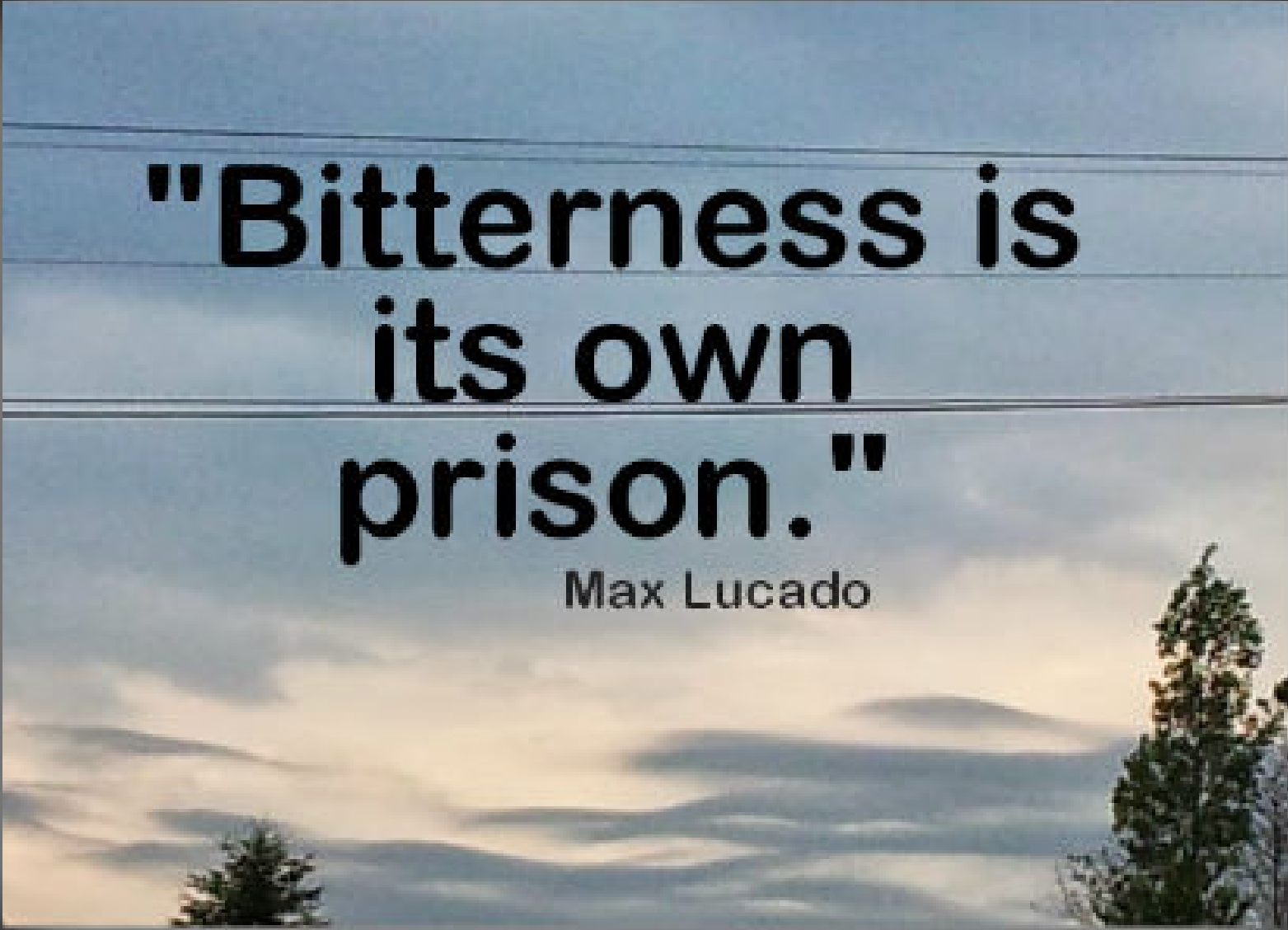
*The  
Hidden  
Torment of  
Unforgiveness*



# The Matthew 18 Principle

Wounded people wound others.

Our unwillingness to forgive  
leads to self-destruction beyond  
what the perpetrator did.

A scenic landscape featuring a range of mountains in the background, partially obscured by soft, white clouds. In the foreground, there are silhouettes of evergreen trees on either side. The sky is a mix of light blue and white, suggesting a bright but slightly overcast day. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

**"Bitterness is  
its own  
prison."**

Max Lucado

A weathered blue wooden door with a metal padlock and a keyhole. The door has a rustic, aged appearance with visible wood grain and some peeling paint. A metal padlock is attached to a horizontal metal bar across the door. A keyhole is visible to the left of the padlock. The text is overlaid on the door in a black, serif font.

Forgiveness is unlocking the door  
to set someone free

and...

realizing you were the prisoner!

-Max Lucado-




If you lie down to try to rest but cannot find peace, examine your heart to be sure that you don't have unforgiveness toward someone.

God wants to set us free from torment, but we have a part to play: we must release everyone from wrongs they have done to us or to those we love.

# Have You Accepted The Forgiveness Offered?

Sometimes our anxiety is caused **not** by our unforgiveness of another, but because **we have not fully accepted forgiveness of our own sins.**




"Shame is a soul eating emotion."  
– C.G. Jung

TO BE A  
**CHRISTIAN**  
MEANS TO  
**FORGIVE**  
THE INEXCUSABLE  
BECAUSE  
GOD HAS  
FORGIVEN THE  
INEXCUSABLE  
IN **YOU**

*C.S. Lewis*

**For if we confess our sins  
He is faithful and just to  
forgive us our sins, and to  
cleanse us from all  
unrighteousness.**

**1 John 1: 9**

A silhouette of a person standing on a beach, facing away from the camera with their arms outstretched horizontally. The background is a sunset or sunrise over the ocean, with a gradient from dark blue at the top to bright yellow near the horizon. The person's shadow is cast on the sand in the foreground.

AS FAR AS  
THE EAST  
IS FROM  
THE WEST,  
SO FAR DOES  
HE REMOVE OUR  
TRANSGRESSIONS  
FROM US.  
PSALMS 103:12

## Isaiah 1:18


Come now, and let us reason  
together, saith the Lord: though  
your sins be as scarlet, they shall be  
as white as snow; though they be red  
like crimson, they shall be as wool.



I, EVEN I, AM HE  
WHO BLOTS OUT  
YOUR  
TRANSGRESSIONS,  
FOR MY OWN SAKE,  
AND REMEMBERS  
YOUR SINS NO MORE.

ISAIAH 43:25



A photograph of a person's legs and hands in a desert setting. The person is wearing light-colored trousers and sandals. Their right hand is reaching down towards a small, grey rock on the sandy ground. The background is a vast, arid landscape under bright sunlight.

**Everyone says  
forgiveness is a  
lovely idea,**

**until they have  
something to  
forgive.**

**- C. S. Lewis**

“Be kind and  
compassionate  
*to one another*  
forgiving each other  
just as in Christ  
*God forgave you.”*

Ephesians 4:32

In Luke 6:28, Jesus says “bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.”

We’ve all experienced someone using or betraying us. Jesus commands us to bless and pray for those people – not for their good – but for our good – so that we will be free from bitterness, resentment and bondage.

When we want revenge and hold onto unforgiveness and anger, we are actually putting ourselves in the position as judge.

Yet unforgiveness doesn't hurt the other person as much as it hurts us; we are the ones who suffer the most when we harbor unforgiveness.

Not forgiving is  
like drinking rat  
poison and then  
waiting for the rat  
to die.

*Anne Lamott*

But when we  
choose to  
forgive, we  
break out of  
the prison of  
bitterness and  
resentment.



- Forgiveness Sets Us Free!

Jesus said in Luke 6:37, “Give, and it will be given to you”

One way we can understand this is if we give forgiveness, then others will be more likely to forgive us.

Everyone makes mistakes and falls short sometimes – each of us needs forgiveness. And we need to be quick to forgive so that others will do the same for us.



# What is forgiveness exactly?

First – let's discuss what forgiveness is not:

Forgiveness does not equal trust. You can choose to forgive someone, but you don't have to trust them. Trust is earned, so if someone has stolen from you or abused you, you don't have to trust them in order to show forgiveness. Trusting someone who's robbed or abused you isn't wise! You can choose to let go of the hurt and anger, but trust must be rebuilt over time.

Forgiveness is not a feeling. Forgiveness doesn't come on us in an overwhelming wave of emotion. Forgiveness is a choice. It doesn't matter what anyone has done to us – we can choose to forgive just like Jesus forgave the people who nailed Him to the cross. “Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do’” (Luke 23:34). The truth is, sometimes people don't even realize they are hurting us!

Forgiveness is not condoning someone's actions. Someone may have done something horrible to you or somebody you love; forgiveness isn't saying that what they did is okay. It's just releasing them.

Forgiveness isn't forgetting. If you've been deeply hurt or abused, you don't suddenly have a memory lapse when you forgive. You will still remember what happened to you, but God can heal you of the pain attached to those memories. Forgiveness frees you from the burden of carrying the hurt.

The bottom line is this: when we choose to forgive, even in the middle of our pain and hurt, Jesus will bring healing and freedom to our souls and emotions. Jesus would never tell us to forgive others if it were impossible for us to do. In fact, Jesus gives us the power and strength to forgive so that we can be free from the bondage unforgiveness puts us in.

# So what is forgiveness?

Forgiveness is taking control over your own life by releasing another person and taking responsibility for your choices. When we acknowledge that the anxiety inside us isn't caused by a spouse, a friend or a situation, we take ownership of it, and then we can do something about it. We cannot change others or make choices for them; we can only make decisions for ourselves. And when we make the decision to forgive, we sever the hold unforgiveness has on us, and we open the way for freedom to come flooding in.

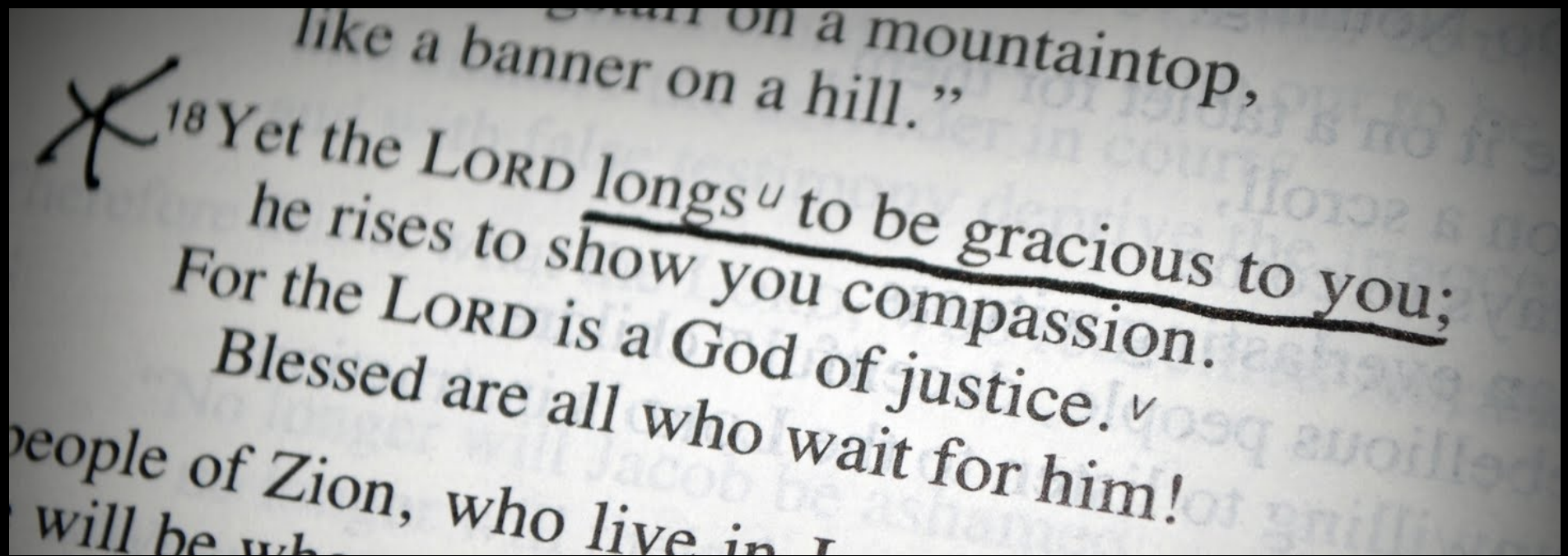


Forgiveness is letting go of revenge. We stop looking for a way to get even with someone for what they did or what we think they did. We need to ask ourselves: are we more concerned with getting free or with getting even?

Forgiveness is letting go of shame. Especially if you have been sexually abused or misused, you need to seek God for healing from shame and understand that what happened to you was not your fault. You'll find that God's peace is available to you when you let go of anger and bitterness toward those who have hurt you.

Forgiveness is trusting that God will make everything right for you.

God loves justice; trust that He will work on your behalf as you wait for Him.



*Give others the gift  
of a blank page.*

LOVE  
KEEPS NO  
RECORD  
OF  
WRONGS

*1 Corinthians 13:5*





The End