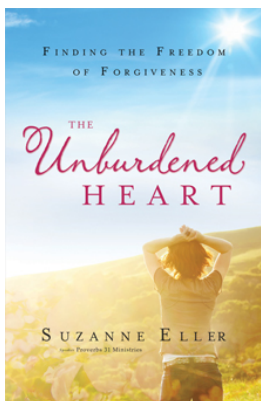


FINDING THE FREEDOM
OF FORGIVENESS

THE
Unburdened
HEART

SUZANNE ELLER
Speaker Proverbs 31 Ministries



For more information and
special offers from Regal Books, email us at
subscribe@regalbooks.com

Find this and other great resources at regalbooks.com and
gospellight.com

Published by Regal
From Gospel Light
Ventura, California, U.S.A.
www.regalbooks.com
Printed in the U.S.A.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2010 by International Bible Society.
Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Other versions used are

AMP—Scripture taken from the *Amplified*® Bible, Copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

KJV—*King James Version*. Authorized King James Version.

THE MESSAGE—Scripture taken from *THE MESSAGE*. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

NASB—Scripture taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

NKJV—Scripture taken from the *New King James Version*. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

NLT—Scripture quotations marked *NLT* are taken from the *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

© 2013 Suzanne Eller. All rights reserved.

Represented by Rachele Gardner, Books and Such Literary Agency

For privacy, some of the names of the people profiled have been changed. Permission has been granted for personal stories used throughout.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Eller, T. Suzanne.

The unburdened heart : finding the freedom of forgiveness / T. Suzanne Eller.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8307-6512-6 (trade paper : alk. paper)

1. Forgiveness. I. Title.

BJ1476.E44 2013

234'.5—dc23

2012042128

Rights for publishing this book outside the U.S.A. or in non-English languages are administered by Gospel Light Worldwide, an international not-for-profit ministry. For additional information, please visit www.glww.org, email info@glww.org, or write to Gospel Light Worldwide, 1957 Eastman Avenue, Ventura, CA 93003, U.S.A.

To order copies of this book and other Regal products in bulk quantities, please contact us at 1-800-446-7735.

Contents

Foreword by Renee Swope, Proverbs 31 Ministries	11
Introduction.....	13

PART 1

WHAT IS FORGIVENESS?

1. What Does It Mean to Forgive?.....	19
---------------------------------------	----

PART 2

WHAT WE GAIN WHEN WE FORGIVE

2. You Leave One Place to Go to Another	35
3. God Moves In.....	49
4. You Move Past What You Cannot Change.....	67
5. You Receive Your New Identity	83
6. You Start Fresh.....	97
7. You Experience a Role Reversal.....	115
8. You Find a Safe Place.....	129
9. You Get Over the Little Stuff.....	143
10. You Exchange Your Anger for His.....	159
11. You Live in Grace.....	173

PART 3

WHAT'S NEXT?

12. Live as a Forgiver	191
Q&A	201
About Suzanne Eller	207

Introduction

Jesus says to forgive.

Have you ever heard those words? Scripture instructs us about forgiving others, over and over again; and forgiving *is* foundational in living free from bitterness, deep-rooted anger or hurt. But living a forgiving lifestyle is an uneven journey at best. We accept God's grace and then stumble over giving it.

Can I be honest? Forgiveness is hard. It's also complex. Forgiveness requires different levels of effort—from forgiving the neighbor who said those not-so-nice things about your family to forgiving a spouse who cheated, an abusive parent or someone who intentionally harmed you or a loved one.

This is where Christ comes in. Throughout the Bible we see Jesus meeting people right where they are. He met Nicodemus under the stars, in the middle of the night. The conversation began at a point where Nicodemus could ask his scholarly questions and find truth. Later, we see Jesus kneel in the street beside a broken woman crouched in the dust. Even as her accusers aimed stones in her direction, He quietly showed her a new way to live. He began that conversation at the critical point of her greatest need.

As you and I study this topic of forgiveness together, you'll discover that same approach. Rather than toss out a blanket statement of "just forgive," you'll discover how forgiveness can grace you right where you are and unburden your heart so that you can heal and live free.

The word "forgive" has many meanings in Scripture, and it also offers diverse benefits for those who are willing to live as a forgiver. Each meaning offers us significance. One may show us how to forgive injustice or move past the marks of neglect or abuse. And yes, there's even a definition that shows us how to forgive that not-so-nice neighbor.

But it doesn't stop there, because forgiveness offers dignity when it has been stripped away. It allows you to climb up and out of the past and live fully today. It shows you how to accept who

and what you cannot change, all the while allowing God to transform you.

Are you surprised that there is not a one-size-fits-all definition of forgiveness? I was too. What remains consistent, however, is that forgiveness is key to God-sized healing. That's why it comes up in Scripture over and over again. Forgiveness matters to God, because you matter to God.

How do I know that?

I've been there. I was once a broken girl raised in a fractured family. One parent struggled with suicidal thoughts that often escalated into scary rages or sank into depression, sweeping me and my siblings, into the current. But it also swept her into that same tide while her husband hid behind a newspaper or spent long hours at a job, oblivious to the cries of help from his hurting wife and children.

One of my earliest memories is of lying in a hospital bed after an emergency appendectomy surgery. It was late at night. I was alone and frightened. I wrapped my tiny arms around my five-year-old body and started singing to soothe myself. I learned early that if anyone was going to take care of me, it was me. This is only one of many unhealthy beliefs I embraced early on.

Later, I became a believer, and God began to alter my way of thinking. For the first time, I realized I didn't have to be tough or put a wall around my heart. But I still struggled. It was hard to trust. It seemed impossible to let down my guard and be myself. I was self-sufficient to a fault, pushing away those who could have shown me an easier path. And I was angry. Deep-down angry. It showed up in surprising ways. Most people didn't realize how hard I worked to keep it at bay.

I began to ask God to help me. As I prayed and read my Bible, I kept running into the word "forgive." I knew this was something God was asking—commanding—me to do. But I ran into mountain-sized questions like:

What about the feelings that won't go away?

What if the person who hurt me is still in denial or destructive?

If I forgive, does it say that his or her behavior was acceptable?

I see joy in the life of others. Will I ever find it?

Over time, I found my answers, and forgiving was not only key but was essential to moving beyond my feelings into a life that God had for me—regardless of my past or whether anyone else changed.

I intentionally pursued forgiveness. I began the process of letting go. Seeing my parent from a viewpoint of compassion changed me, and years later it changed both of us. Let me make you a promise: There *is* incredible freedom in living a life of grace and mercy. But it's not something you just find along the way. Forgiveness is a choice, and it's a journey.

Forgiveness is often tricky and messy because it involves people. It may require digging deep into issues you would rather leave buried. You may hesitate over forgiving when it seems like you are the only one who desires change.

Can I tell you something? You are not alone in this process. Christ comes to you right where you are, even if you are at the place where forgiving someone seems impossible; or when you are willing but unsure of where to begin; or when you've tried over and over again, only to pick those feelings back up, and you are sick of them.

In this book you will meet real people who understand what you are feeling; and yet, most have forgiven under extraordinary circumstances. Each of them started at a point where forgiving someone seemed overwhelming, if not impossible. They desired to climb out and from under the heavy burden that unforgiveness placed on their thoughts, their relationships and on the way they interacted with people and even with God.

Like you, they may have had no idea of what God could or would do as they took that first step; they simply started the journey.

As I wrote this book a few women, in all stages of forgiving, came alongside. They read chapter by chapter and courageously asked questions and shared their honest thoughts. Some of those questions deepened my study, and you'll find some of the questions later in the book.

As you go through this study, keep in mind that you and I will never be perfect (is there such a thing?). But self-discovery, especially when performed under the gentle prodding of the Holy

Spirit, is a courageous act. The journey to an unburdened heart involves risk. Each new step presents the possibility of learning a truth about yourself that may feel uncomfortable; but it also presents the possibility of growth and real change.

Only God encompasses all the many meanings of the word “forgiveness.” Yet, there are riches to be found within the pursuit. My prayer is that as time passes, this study will become less about the theory and more about an intimate, personal discovery with your heavenly Father.

PART 1

What is Forgiveness?

What Does it Mean to Forgive?

*Forgiving is more like writing a book than writing a letter.
When I write a letter, I put my thoughts on paper, sign it,
seal the envelope, and send it. Writing a book involves what seems
an endless cycle of writing and rewriting.*

Gary D. Preston, *Character Forged from Conflict*

“Do you want to live free?” I asked the crowd.

Though it was a rhetorical question, one woman stood. She waved her hand in the air. “I do,” she said. “I want to be free.”

Afterward, we sat together and she told me her story. Twelve years earlier, her husband had left her and moved in with another woman. She felt constantly irritated, physically ill and, on most days, her thoughts centered on his betrayal, despite the years that had passed.

In her mind, forgiving him was an act he didn’t deserve. She realized how unforgiveness toward her ex-husband had trapped her, but it seemed impossible to move on, despite the fact that the results of unforgiving were just as debilitating as the original offense, and the offender was nowhere in sight.

I asked her if she was willing to offer her emotions, her pain and her ex-husband to God. She was more than willing. She was ready. God’s presence was tangible as she lifted up the burden that had kept her stuck for 12 years.

Since then, we have stayed in touch, and she continues to live a forgiving lifestyle. The major benefit is that she is tuned in to what God has for her today instead of what was taken from her yesterday. Her ex-husband has no idea of her transformation.

He's been out of the picture for a long time. But this wasn't about him . . . not really; because none of us have the power to change another human being.

Perhaps you are also struggling with the concept of forgiveness. Have you ever said or asked,

Why should I forgive? I did nothing wrong.

Doesn't forgiveness let the offender off the hook? How is that fair?

I forgave someone and he or she was not remorseful.

I will change when he or she does.

These are compelling statements, and they are understandable in situations that require forgiving someone. But do you notice that these words center on the actions of others? At some point, we recognize our own need. Whether anyone else is willing to change or not, we are tired of feeling stuck emotionally and spiritually.

In Mark 10:51-52, we read of a blind man named Bartimaeus who heard a crowd approach. When Bartimaeus realized who was within reach, he wouldn't be silenced. He began to call out the name of Jesus.

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.”

Jesus stopped everything to open the eyes of this man, and his life was so changed by that encounter that he followed Christ alongside the road.

Are you crying out to God today? Are you shouting, “I want to be free of these feelings . . . I want to forgive”?

God hears that cry.

Where do you begin your journey toward freedom? Let's start with an understanding of the foundation of forgiveness.

חָלַס translated *salach* [Hebrew]: (1) to give up resentment of or a claim to requital for; (2) to pardon; (3) to grant relief from payment of; (4) to cease to feel resentment.

WHAT IS FORGIVENESS?

Forgiveness is an intentional act to let go of the burden and restrictions of bitterness, anger, rage or unresolved emotions connected to a person or event. In other words, forgiveness is surrender. It's offering up resentment. It's giving up the desire to punish. It's letting go of anger. It's getting out of the "debt collection" business.

In Luke 5:18-26, we read of a full house of people who had come from all around the region to hear Jesus teach. A paralyzed man's friends carried him on a mat to that location. They had heard that Jesus was a healer, and they trekked across Galilee to find Him. The crowd was so huge that the men carrying the paralyzed man couldn't push through. So they climbed onto the roof and took off some tiles. Ingenious, right? They lowered their friend through the roof, right in front of Jesus.

The man's physical need was apparent, but Jesus said something surprising: "When Jesus saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven'" (Luke 5:20).

Were the friends confused by Jesus' words? Maybe. The Pharisees sitting there certainly were. They could only see the obvious physical impairment.

On hearing that his sins were forgiven, the paralyzed man could have called it a day. "Take me home, this guy hasn't got a clue." But he surrendered to Jesus. Even though he could have argued that the real problem was his legs, he followed Jesus' instructions. In faith, he jumped to his feet, picked up his mat and danced all the way home as he praised God.

Jesus saw the whole man. He started from the inside out.

How many times do we bring the obvious to God?

Lord, she hurt me.

God, I can't sleep.

I'm angry and I yell at my kids. Make it stop.

I don't feel like a Christian.

How many times does God look beyond what is in plain sight to the heart issue? He does it every time.

People don't do this. In most cases, they define you as broken or point out your anger issue or tell you to get on with it.

Seeing the whole person is a compassionate act of a Savior who knows us best. When He reveals the root of our problem, we have a choice. We can continue to plead with Him about the obvious problems, or we can surrender.

In a sense, we pick up our mats. Instead of letting unforgiveness keep us tethered and sick, we allow God to begin the process of making us whole.

HOW DO YOU FORGIVE?

To surrender is to offer God a willing heart. You don't offer the issue, the other person, the obvious symptoms.

You offer yourself.

You offer up your thoughts, your feelings and your woundedness to God and acknowledge that you can't do it on your own. This is an ultimate act of surrender. In James 4:7-8, we are instructed, "submit yourselves, then, to God" (v. 7). That is a vulnerable act as you give God access to every area of your heart. You hold up the past; you trust Him with today; and you have hope for tomorrow.

Surrender to God is an active form of spiritual warfare, because you are no longer battling alone. With God's help, you are resisting the enemy who desires nothing more than to rob you of purpose and joy. The enemy has no choice but to step back when you follow this precept: "Come near to God and he will come near to you" (v. 8).

Are you willing to surrender?

Think about what Jesus told the lame man.

Stand: Put down all your beliefs that you can do it on your own. Put down your excuses and your failed attempts. Stop waiting for someone else to change first.

When you stand, suddenly things are different. You are no longer mired in a crowd of sick people. You see a new horizon and recognize the possibilities beyond the limited view of just a few moments before.

Pick up your mat: Mentally hold up your heart to God. Hold nothing back. Invite Him into every chamber. Every thought.

Every hurt. He's not afraid of your true feelings. He's seen them all along.

When you pick up your mat, you pick up those things that seemed like protection. Yes, the mat kept you off the cold, hard ground, but you can only go as far as the mat will take you. Resentment, anger, perfectionism, fear, addiction, control—these are only a few things that can comprise your mat.

When you pick up your mat, you are saying to God that you desire to go where He wants to take you rather than stay limited. That you trust He'll be your protector rather than a defense mechanism.

Walk: It's not about how strong you are. It's about His love for you, and the power of God that is so tangible that He offers His "glorious, unlimited resources . . . [to] empower you with inner strength through his Spirit" (Eph. 3:16, *NLT*). We walk as we follow Jesus. Step by step. Hour by hour. Day by day.

When you first stand after being crippled by unforgiveness or anger or hurt, it won't feel natural at first. It may even feel painful. You may want to reach for your mat. You might even plop down on that mat for a moment.

Instead of giving in to those feelings, just walk.

Like my granddaughter, Elle, your first steps might be tentative. She took forever to walk. She *could* walk, but she didn't know it yet. She walked with confidence when she held on to objects like the coffee table, the wall or even just the fingertip of an adult. But the moment her safety net was out of reach, she swayed. Suddenly, everything was different. Scary. She plopped to her diapered bottom and wailed. She had tasted freedom, but she also wasn't ready to let go and walk solo. Twelve months passed. Fourteen. Sixteen. Seventeen. Honestly, there were times that we wondered if she'd ever take her first solo step. We cheered on each small move toward independence, all the while knowing that one day she would have to let go and walk. It was up to her.

That's what it looks like when we start to doubt.

If I were strong, I wouldn't feel this way. I wouldn't waver. Why can't I do this?

Like my beautiful blonde, blue-eyed grandbaby, it's not how well you walk from day one, but that you took the first step. Just as I held my arms out, and my face lit up with joy at her courage, God sees those painful first steps. He also knows with certainty that one day you will walk with skill and even run.

It was nearly 17 months when Elle took her first steps alone. We were celebrating Christmas with family. She stood beside me, her tiny fingers pinching my jeans. Then she released the fabric. She looked toward the dining room where all her favorite people laughed around the table. She took one step. Then another. I held my breath and tried not to rejoice out loud as she walked across the room like a shaky old man.

It was a beautiful sight.

Once she experienced what freedom really felt like, she pushed away our hands when we tried to help her over a raised step or as she transitioned from hard floor to carpet. She had figured it out! Yes, letting go seems impossible until you actually do it and discover what is beyond your comfort zone.

Praise: When you are willing to forgive, you are not only allowing God to see the junk inside, but you are also in the process of being “made complete” (Eph. 3:19, *NLT*). You are surprised when you turn a corner and realize that a part of your heart has been unburdened, or you start to see a person or event in a different light.

The obvious healing may not yet be apparent to the world, but on the inside you know that God is at work.

Praise is a choice when you feel wobbly or fall down. It's the words that come out of your mouth even on those days when the mat beckons and calls you to return to familiar territory. You praise God because healing isn't a single act. It's a series of miracles as you choose to stand, to pick up your mat, to walk and to worship Him as Christ delves below the obvious impairment to lead you in a new direction.

WHY DO WE FORGIVE?

Sometimes I want to wave a flag with the word “freedom” blazed on it to share with those who are in a rut of anger or hurt, or who

continue in damaging patterns that keep wounds fresh and open, that there's another way.

Forgiveness is liberty. It cuts all the ties that prevent you from discovering who you were intended to be from the very beginning. It lightens the baggage you've been carrying. It opens your eyes to the opportunities around you.

Living a forgiving lifestyle doesn't change the past; that's impossible. But it absolutely transforms you and alters the story of your future and those you love.

Now that we know what forgiveness is, let's explore what forgiveness is not.

FORGIVENESS IS NOT ALLOWING ABUSE TO CONTINUE

Perhaps you have been told that forgiving means that you turn the other cheek (it does, and later we'll explore what this powerful verse in Scripture means), or you are encouraged to remain in a situation that leaves you or your children open to abuse because "if you forgive, you won't leave" or "you are supposed to submit."

As believers of the Bible, it's key that we quote and live out Scripture within its context. This means that we study God's Word in light of when it was said, where it was said, why it was said and to whom it was said, taking into consideration the cultural nuances of that time, and then apply the spiritual and practical implications for today. We study the whole Word of God, not just scraps and pieces. We compare Scripture with Scripture to ensure that we are holding it in the proper light. We do this so that we don't build standalone doctrines that contradict the heart and majority of biblical teachings.

For example, let's look at the character of Jesus, using His own words to reveal His heart toward abuse.

In John 8:3-9, Jesus held back the men from striking an adulterous woman with stones, saying, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her" (v. 7).

In Luke 18:15-17, Jesus held children in His lap when they ran to Him, and He scolded the disciples for trying to push them away,

saying, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (v. 16).

In Matthew 25:35-45, He taught His disciples to feed the poor, give water to the thirsty and visit those who were in shackles, saying, “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (v. 40).

These are only a few of the numerous Scripture passages that reveal a Savior who stood up for those who are abused or at the mercy of others.

We also find Jesus pointing out how narrowly defined religious interpretations can keep us from understanding the full intent of the law (see Matt. 12:1-13).

This can also happen when Ephesians 5:22-23 is quoted out of context, and women are instructed to remain in abusive situations, labeling it as forgiving. “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord” (v. 22) completely changes in tone when you leave out verses 25-31 of Ephesians 5, where Paul encourages men to love their wives as Jesus loved the Church, giving Himself up for it, and to love their wives as their own bodies. This is a sacrificial love that never demands its own way or bends another to its will through abuse.

In the case of abuse, too many have remained in a situation where a spouse is repeatedly unfaithful or where they or their children were physically harmed because a well-intentioned person said, “Just forgive,” and offered Scripture taken out of context or too narrowly defined.

If a person is destructive, abusive or his or her actions put you or your family in harm’s way, there *is* hope for forgiveness and even reconciliation. However, forgiveness that transforms, in this instance, begins as you set appropriate boundaries that allow you to work toward the healthiest relationship possible.

BUT DOESN'T GOD CALL US TO LOVE UNCONDITIONALLY?

The answer is yes. The Father loves us so much that He led Christ to the cross where He bore our sin—the weight of every murderous

thought, every treacherous act, every transgression, every sin that was and is to come. Afterwards, He sought us with intent, drawing us to the cross to find forgiveness and a relationship with the Father.

Soon after Jesus began His adult ministry, it was reported that “from that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near’” (Matt. 4:17).

From that time on . . .

That means from that moment until now, repentance was Jesus’ message. The word “repent” in its truest sense means to “change your mind.” This change of mind leads to a change of heart, which takes you down a new road. It is at the cross that you acknowledge your sadness over wrongs inflicted. It is at the cross where you begin to see your relationship with God in a new light. You respond differently. You listen with renewed insight because a relationship has been forged.

Often, Christians focus on the unconditional love of God, yet fail to pair it with the call to repentance. This can lead them to counsel the abused to try to out-forgive God as they offer the unrepentant free license to continue to harm, violate, abuse or inflict injury, and deem it scriptural.

Leslie Vernick, a licensed Christian counselor and speaker, wrote:

Jesus tells us that there is nothing more important than to learn how to love God and others well (see Matt. 22:36-39). Because people are so important to God, He warns us about the painful consequences of destructive relationship patterns.¹

Vernick goes on to describe the damage to relationships, like a house slowly destroyed due to termite or mold damage, producing relationships that are crushed, stifled, suppressed, shattered, demolished or broken by the sinful relationship patterns, and opposite of God’s plan according to Scripture of how to love and treat each other.²

Let's balance this. It's not saying that a person has to conform to our way of thinking, or apologize or change according to the way we think they should.

It's not saying that we withhold forgiveness until a person meets our standards of righteous living, or even until they change.

It doesn't mean holding forgiveness like a carrot on a stick, demanding that a person earn our love or say the right words, or pay back word for word or action for action what he or she has done wrong.

We read in Colossians 3:13, "Forgive as the Lord forgave you." God's grace is immeasurable. God's gift of the cross and transformation is unmatched. We *do* heal as we forgive and let go, whether that person desires to repent or not. But just as God calls each of us to repentance (see Col. 3:5-10), He wants the same for the person who has offended you. He loves that person, right where he or she is—stuck in sin or mixed-up thinking.

In the case of abuse, when it is allowed to continue, or when we allow evil to run rampant and call it forgiveness, there is little chance for transformation unless that person hits a brick wall of his own making.

How, then, do you forgive like Jesus?

You forgive like Jesus by living at peace with all, so far as it depends on you (see Rom. 12:18). We forgive like Jesus by praying for that person; by loving him or her, if even from a distance; and by keeping a door open to reconciliation as repentance occurs.

We also get rid of malice and anger in our own heart. We let the Holy Spirit examine our life for those areas where God wants to move in (see Rom. 12:7-21).

READY TO TAKE THIS DEEPER?

Now that we know what forgiveness is and what it is not, let's begin to explore in the next few chapters the diverse meanings of forgiveness found in Scripture. I studied the word "forgive" for months. At that time, I did so for my own benefit. I had struggled with the concept of a one-size-fits all forgiveness for some time.

What if someone dings your car door with a shopping cart?
Just forgive.

How do you live a normal life when a relative has molested you?
Just forgive.

What if a controlling parent refuses to let go and it's hurting your marriage?
Just forgive.

I understood the power of forgiveness and that God commands us to do it. I embraced the concept of forgiving as a gift both received and one that I could offer others. But what I hoped to discover was more . . . and I did.

Nestled under the umbrella of the word “forgive” in both the Old and New Testaments is a host of rich words and meanings that lead to deeper knowledge of why it is so important to God, as well as practical application that you and I can put into effect in real life. These meanings help us understand why we forgive and how we forgive and what it means to forgive, and what forgiveness really means in all types of relationships and situations. Scripture shows us that it is possible to forgive where we cannot forgive in our own power. It reveals the treasures we receive as we apply forgiveness in our everyday lives.

I discovered that in the Old Testament, forgiveness is primarily focused on God's need to forgive (pardon) those He loves. In the New Testament, grace is introduced, and the focus shifts to include our need to receive forgiveness and to give it to each other. Jesus placed great emphasis on forgiving as a result of a changed heart and knowing God in a personal manner.

As we study forgiveness together, you'll discover that every meaning may not apply to you or your situation today, but forgiving is not a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. This teaching will help you when you encounter that person, that word, that situation, and you need to remind yourself of what God offers you so that you can live free.

In addition, though a story may be about infidelity, and that is not exactly your story as well, we all experience unfaithfulness at some point, whether through a broken friendship or a relationship we trusted that let us down. The story simply introduces a

real person who has struggled through a real problem to find resolution or hope.

Now, before we begin our deeper study, you have an opportunity to take what you've learned so far and get alone with God to consider it. Take your time. There are no right answers. This is simply your first act of surrender as you invite God to join you in the process.

JUST YOU AND GOD

1. Which of the following definitions define the burden that you currently carry?
 - a. resentment
 - b. a need for justice or revenge
 - c. thoughts and actions tied to the past that affect me and my current relationships
 - d. a desire to change whether anyone else changes or not

2. Read Matthew 11:28-30. In this invitation, Jesus offers a promise. Write a prayer that reflects your desire to rest from your burden.

3. What obvious impairment resulting from unforgiveness in your life can you or others see? (It can be anger, or the inability to trust, or perfectionism or a host of other symptoms of unforgiveness.)

4. God sees beneath the obvious to the heart of the daughter He loves. What do you believe He sees that needs to be made whole?

5. The first step to living in forgiveness is to surrender. Forget charting a success strategy or starting a to-do list; you simply give to God what is bigger than you. What are you willing to surrender in this moment?

6. “Surrendering is an active form of spiritual warfare, because you are no longer battling alone. With God’s help, you are resisting the enemy who desires nothing more than to rob you of purpose and joy.” What were your thoughts as you read that statement? How does it apply to you today?

7. Read 2 Corinthians 3:17-18. The word “transformed” in this passage means a spiritual inner change. If no one but you changes in this journey to forgive, what do you stand to gain regardless of any other person’s inability to change?

8. In what ways did this chapter change your definition of forgiveness?

SALACH PRINCIPLE

Surrender to God the burden and restrictions of unforgiveness.

TO SALACH FORGIVE

Surrender

PRAYER

*Father, I offer every wounded place in my heart and my thoughts.
I thank You that Your strength becomes mine as we walk this path
together. I am excited to see where an unburdened heart
will lead me with Your help.*

Notes

1. Leslie Vernick, *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2007), p. 12.
2. Ibid.