

A silhouette of a person with long hair, arms outstretched, standing on a wooden pier or deck. The background is a sunset over the ocean, with the sun low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The sky transitions from a deep orange near the horizon to a lighter, hazy pink and purple at the top.

Forgiveness:

7 Truths  
That Will  
Free You

## Find the Freedom in Forgiveness!

Dr. John Townsend and Dr. Henry Cloud offer insights from a biblical perspective on the topic of forgiveness. Each day of this 7-day plan will help bring you closer to God and the emotional growth He desires for you.

# Table of Contents

Day 1: How Forgiveness Frees Us

Day 2: Forgiveness Doesn't Allow Abuse

Day 3: Our Treatment of Others Affects How We Live

Day 4: The Surprise of Forgiveness

Day 5: Forgiveness Brings Freedom

Day 6: The Truth About Forgiveness

Day 7: Dealing with Pain

# Day 1: Scripture

But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept. <sup>5</sup> Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children.

“Who are these with you?” he asked.

Jacob answered, “They are the children God has graciously given your servant.”

<sup>6</sup> Then the female servants and their children approached and bowed down. <sup>7</sup> Next, Leah and her children came and bowed down. Last of all came Joseph and Rachel, and they too bowed down.

<sup>8</sup> Esau asked, “What’s the meaning of all these flocks and herds I met?”

“To find favor in your eyes, my lord,” he said.

<sup>9</sup> But Esau said, “I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself.”

<sup>10</sup> “No, please!” said Jacob. “If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me.

For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably. <sup>11</sup> Please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need.” And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it.

Genesis 33:4-11 NIV

# Day 1: How Forgiveness Frees Us

The last time they had seen each other, Esau was plotting to murder his brother, Jacob (see Genesis 27:41–45). As the years passed, Esau learned to embrace forgiveness. And once he had forgiven his brother, he no longer demanded repayment or restitution. Esau had made the choice to set Jacob free from any remaining debt.

Nothing promotes reconciliation more than forgiveness. To forgive someone means to let him or her off the hook or to cancel a debt owed. When we refuse to forgive someone, we still want something from that person, and even if it is revenge that we want, it keeps us tied to the person forever.

Refusing to forgive a family member is one of the main reasons people are stuck for years, unable to separate from their dysfunctional families. They still want something from their family. It is much better to receive grace from God, who has something to give, and to forgive those who have nothing with which to repay their debt. This ends the suffering because it ends the wish for repayment that is never forthcoming, and which makes the heart sick because the hope is deferred (see Proverbs 13:12).

If we do not forgive, we are demanding something our offender does not choose to give, even if it is only confession. This “ties” the person to us. If we come from a toxic family situation and have been waiting for something before we can forgive, we need to let go. If we cut loose the ties, we will be free. We will be free in forgiveness.

# Day 2: Scripture

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, “Have everyone leave my presence!” So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. <sup>2</sup> And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh’s household heard about it.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still living?” But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

<sup>4</sup> Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! <sup>5</sup> And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. <sup>6</sup> For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. <sup>7</sup> But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

<sup>8</sup> “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. <sup>9</sup> Now hurry back to my father and say to him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don’t delay. <sup>10</sup> You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. <sup>11</sup> I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.’

<sup>12</sup> “You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. <sup>13</sup> Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly.”

<sup>14</sup> Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. <sup>15</sup> And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

<sup>16</sup> When the news reached Pharaoh’s palace that Joseph’s brothers had come, Pharaoh and all his officials were pleased. <sup>17</sup> Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Tell your brothers, ‘Do this: Load your animals and return to the land of Canaan, <sup>18</sup> and bring your father and your families back to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you can enjoy the fat of the land.’

<sup>19</sup> “You are also directed to tell them, ‘Do this: Take some carts from Egypt for your children and your wives, and get your father and come. <sup>20</sup> Never mind about your belongings, because the best of all Egypt will be yours.’”

<sup>21</sup> So the sons of Israel did this. Joseph gave them carts, as Pharaoh had commanded, and he also gave them provisions for their journey. <sup>22</sup> To each of them he gave new clothing, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five sets of clothes. <sup>23</sup> And this is what he sent to his father: ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and other provisions for his journey. <sup>24</sup> Then he sent his brothers away, and as they were leaving he said to them, “Don’t quarrel on the way!”

<sup>25</sup> So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. <sup>26</sup> They told him, “Joseph is still alive! In fact, he is ruler of all Egypt.” Jacob was stunned; he did not believe them. <sup>27</sup> But when they told him everything Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. <sup>28</sup> And Israel said, “I’m convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.”

Genesis 45:1-28 NIV

## Day 2: Forgiveness Doesn't Allow Abuse

Joseph's own brothers had attacked him, thrown him into a cistern and sold him into slavery (see Genesis 37:12-28) causing him to be separated from his loving father for over 20 years. And though Joseph had much to forgive, he did not dwell on the offenses. He gained grace from God and let go of what others had done to him. His response is a healthy model for us when we've been hurt or sinned against: we need to let it go and then get what we need from God and people who can give. That is a better life. Unforgiveness destroys a good life. Forgiveness creates it.

Forgiveness is not denial. We need to name the sin against us to forgive it, as Joseph did (see Genesis 45:4-5; 50:20). He worked through it. He named it. He expressed his feelings about it. And then he let it go. We need to watch out for the resistance that will want us to stay in the past, trying to collect a debt that will never be paid.



# Day 3: Scripture

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" <sup>16</sup> So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: <sup>17</sup> 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

<sup>18</sup> His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

<sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup> You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. <sup>21</sup> So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

Genesis 50:15-21 NIV



# Day 3: Our Treatment of Others Affects How We Live

How we treat others will affect our own lives as well. Joseph had every reason to be bitter and angry with his brothers, but instead of anger, he chose forgiveness. To the extent that we surrender our tendencies to condemn others, and are able instead to forgive, we will experience the fullness of forgiveness from God.

God freely forgives us and gives us eternal life (see John 3:16). But he also expects us to extend that same mercy to others (see James 2:12–13), with strict warnings to us if we don't. A life of judgment, condemnation and unforgiveness is a prison. We find ourselves focusing not on the good we have—our spiritual lives or joyful relationships—but on the failings of another. It brings resentment and emptiness. When we let go of judgment and live in the grace that has also freed us, we move past the demand that everyone pay us back; as a result, our own quality of life increases.

# Day 4: Scripture

So Moses cried out to the LORD, “Please, God, heal her!”

<sup>14</sup>The LORD replied to Moses, “If her father had spit in her face, would she not have been in disgrace for seven days? Confine her outside the camp for seven days; after that she can be brought back.” <sup>15</sup>So Miriam was confined outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on till she was brought back.

Numbers 12:13-15 NIV

# Day 4: The Surprise of Forgiveness

Moses was an advocate for mercy for Miriam. He asked God to heal her, even though she had turned against him. Moses could have supported Miriam's punishment and rightfully have insisted on "eye for eye" (Exodus 21:24). However, having been a murderer and fugitive himself (see Exodus 2:11–15), he had personally experienced the power of God's grace and forgiveness.

Our natural tendency is to treat others the way they treat us. We are kind to the kind and often unloving to the unloving. However, Jesus' words, thousands of years after this event, still provide the higher ground for us: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:43–44).

When we are not treated well, we need to ask God to give us the attitude of Moses, who had compassion on the hurts of one who had not treated him well. This type of attitude releases us from a life of keeping emotional score cards and insisting that everything be fair and leads to a life of love, grace, freedom and forgiveness.

# Day 5: Scripture

Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven <sup>23</sup> and said:

“LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way. <sup>24</sup> You have kept your promise to your servant David my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it—as it is today.

<sup>25</sup> “Now LORD, the God of Israel, keep for your servant David my father the promises you made to him when you said, ‘You shall never fail to have a successor to sit before me on the throne of Israel, if only your descendants are careful in all they do to walk before me faithfully as you have done.’ <sup>26</sup> And now, God of Israel, let your word that you promised your servant David my father come true.

<sup>27</sup> “But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built! <sup>28</sup> Yet give attention to your servant’s prayer and his plea for mercy, LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day. <sup>29</sup> May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which you said, ‘My Name shall be there,’ so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place. <sup>30</sup> Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.

<sup>31</sup> “When anyone wrongs their neighbor and is required to take an oath and they come and swear the oath before your altar in this temple, <sup>32</sup> then hear from heaven and act. Judge between your servants, condemning the guilty by bringing down on their heads what they have done, and vindicating the innocent by treating them in accordance with their innocence.

<sup>33</sup> “When your people Israel have been defeated by an enemy because they have sinned against you, and when they turn back to you and give praise to your name, praying and making supplication to you in this temple, <sup>34</sup> then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel and bring them back to the land you gave to their ancestors.

<sup>35</sup> “When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray toward this place and give praise to your name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them, <sup>36</sup> then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live, and send rain on the land you gave your people for an inheritance.

<sup>37</sup> “When famine or plague comes to the land, or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers, or when an enemy besieges them in any of their cities, whatever disaster or disease may come, <sup>38</sup> and when a prayer or plea is made by anyone among your people Israel—being aware of the afflictions of their own hearts, and spreading out their hands toward this temple— <sup>39</sup> then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive and act; deal with everyone according to all they do, since you know their hearts (for you alone know every human heart), <sup>40</sup> so that they will fear you all the time they live in the land you gave our ancestors.

<sup>41</sup> “As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your name— <sup>42</sup> for they will hear of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm—when they come and pray toward this temple, <sup>43</sup> then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name.

<sup>44</sup> “When your people go to war against their enemies, wherever you send them, and when they pray to the LORD toward the city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name, <sup>45</sup> then hear from heaven their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause.

<sup>46</sup> “When they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you become angry with them and give them over to their enemies, who take them captive to their own lands, far away or near; <sup>47</sup> and if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captors and say, ‘We have sinned, we have done wrong, we have acted wickedly’; <sup>48</sup> and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies who took them captive, and pray to you toward the land you gave their ancestors, toward the city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name; <sup>49</sup> then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause. <sup>50</sup> And forgive your people, who have sinned against you; forgive all the offenses they have committed against you, and cause their captors to show them mercy; <sup>51</sup> for they are your people and your inheritance, whom you brought out of Egypt, out of that iron-smelting furnace.

<sup>52</sup> “May your eyes be open to your servant’s plea and to the plea of your people Israel, and may you listen to them whenever they cry out to you. <sup>53</sup> For you singled them out from all the nations of the world to be your own inheritance, just as you declared through your servant Moses when you, Sovereign LORD, brought our ancestors out of Egypt.”

<sup>54</sup> When Solomon had finished all these prayers and supplications to the LORD, he rose from before the altar of the LORD, where he had been kneeling with his hands spread out toward heaven. <sup>55</sup> He stood and blessed the whole assembly of Israel in a loud voice, saying:

<sup>56</sup> “Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses. <sup>57</sup> May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us. <sup>58</sup> May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in obedience to him and keep the commands, decrees and laws he gave our ancestors. <sup>59</sup> And may these words of mine, which I have prayed before the LORD, be near to the LORD our God day and night, that he may uphold the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel according to each day’s need, <sup>60</sup> so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God and that there is no other. <sup>61</sup> And may your hearts be fully committed to the LORD our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time.”

1 Kings 8:22-61 NIV

# Day 5: Forgiveness Brings Freedom

A recurring theme in Solomon's prayer of dedication for the temple is forgiveness. He asks God to hear the prayers of the people and forgive their sins. This emphasis on forgiveness is a key element in all our relationships.

To forgive is very difficult. It means letting go of something that someone "owes" us. But forgiveness brings freedom from the past; it brings freedom from anyone who has hurt us. To forgive means to write it off. Let it go. Tear up the account. It is to render the account canceled. "[God] forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross" (Colossians 2:13–14). He asks us to forgive others in the same way that he has forgiven us (see Matthew 18:21–35).

To forgive means we will never get from that person what was owed us. What is done is done and can't be undone. But the result of forgiveness is freedom from that reality and the chance to have a future unfettered by resentment and grudges from the past. It takes the power away from others, and we get our lives back. It is an arrangement that cannot be matched.

# Day 6: Scripture

Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

Peter at Cornelius's House

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. <sup>24</sup>The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. <sup>25</sup>As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. <sup>26</sup>But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."

<sup>27</sup>While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. <sup>28</sup>He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. <sup>29</sup>So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"

<sup>30</sup>Cornelius answered: "Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me<sup>31</sup> and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. <sup>32</sup>Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.' <sup>33</sup>So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."

<sup>34</sup>Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism <sup>35</sup>but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. <sup>36</sup>You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. <sup>37</sup>You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— <sup>38</sup>how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

<sup>39</sup>"We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, <sup>40</sup>but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. <sup>41</sup>He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. <sup>42</sup>He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup>All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

<sup>44</sup>While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. <sup>45</sup>The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. <sup>46</sup>For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, <sup>47</sup>"Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." <sup>48</sup>So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

Acts 10:23-48 NIV

# Day 6: The Truth About Forgiveness

As Peter shared the gospel with Cornelius and Cornelius' relatives and close friends, he referred to God's forgiveness of sins (see Acts 10:43). At that moment, all the people who heard Peter's words believed and received the Holy Spirit (see Acts 10:44–47). What is so significant about the forgiveness of sins? It is significant because we have all gone our own way and fallen short of God's standards (see Psalm 14:3; Romans 3:23). Our sin alienates and disconnects us from God, his love and his care. Our sinful nature puts us in an isolated and hopeless state.

Forgiveness through Jesus' death is God's solution; it rescues us from our hopelessness and restores our connection with God. As the psalmist put it, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has [God] removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12). Or as Hebrews puts it, "Their sins and lawless acts [God] will remember no more" (Hebrews 10:17; see also Hebrews 10:22).

If we ask God to forgive us, he will (see 1 John 1:9). He then sees us as completely new people. We are clean, washed with pure water; whatever we might have done is forgotten and put away "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12). Paul said that "there is now no condemnation" for those who have been forgiven and are "in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

The knowledge that we are forgiven and have a clean slate is powerful. We can stand upon that solid ground. We can live from a place of growth instead of brokenness. We can ask Jesus for that forgiveness now. If we do not know him, we can ask him to be our Lord. If we turn to him in faith, he will cleanse us and we can walk in a guilt-free state. It is a strong state indeed.



# Day 7: Scripture

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup> ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

<sup>5</sup> He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

Revelation 21:1-5 NIV

# Day 7: Dealing With Pain

Our tears and pain were never part of God’s original plan for us, nor will they be part of eternity. However, we live in a sort of parenthesis in the timeline of the universe, a “present age” (see Mark 10:30) between the garden (see Genesis 2:8) and the new heaven and new earth (see Revelation 21:1).

At the end of time, God will wipe away every tear (see Revelation 21:4). We will not experience this suffering forever. But during these present times, we see the results of sin’s contamination of the world: death, mourning and pain. We fail and let ourselves and others down. Others do the same. Instead of denying these negative aspects of our present life, we need to accept and deal with them in preparation for the time when God ends all the suffering. The Bible teaches us three keys that can help: forgiveness (see Ephesians 4:32), grief (see James 4:9) and healing (see Psalm 30:2). We must arm ourselves with these three things. They will help us grow, recover and move past the difficult times. The good news is that the pain is not the end of the story. God will give us current healing and future paradise. Our job is to be involved in the journey with him.

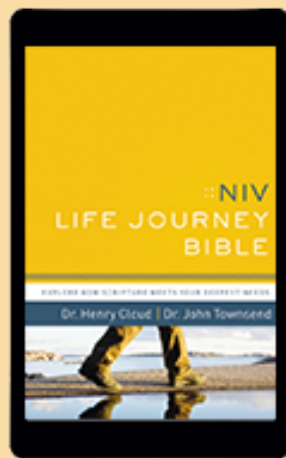
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