



# FORGIVENESS

THE **FREEDOM** TO LET GO

June Hunt



HOPE  
*for the Heart*

# **FORGIVENESS**

The Freedom to Let Go

JUNE HUNT



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# CONTENTS

Definitions .....	8
What Is Forgiveness? .....	9
What Is Forgiveness Not?.....	12
What Does It Mean to Forgive Others? .....	15
Is Forgiveness the Same as Reconciliation? .....	18
What Is Divine Forgiveness? .....	20
Characteristics of Unforgiveness .....	25
Why Should We Get Rid of Unforgiveness? .....	26
What Does the Forgiving Heart Look Like? ....	33
The High Cost of Unforgiveness versus the High Reward of Forgiveness .....	38
Causes of Unforgiveness .....	41
Why Is It So Difficult to Forgive?.....	42
How Does the Need for Justice Contribute to Unforgiveness? .....	45
How Is a Spiritual Stronghold Developed? .....	47
Can You Be Totally Forgiven by God? .....	50
What Is the Root Cause of Unforgiveness? .....	56
Steps to Solution .....	58
Why Should We Forgive? .....	59
What Are the Four Stages of Forgiveness? .....	63
How Do You Truly Forgive? .....	75
How Do You Sustain a Forgiving Spirit? .....	76
What Will Protect Your Heart from Bitterness? .....	80
How Do You Lighten the Scales of Blame? .....	84
The End of the Story.....	87



Dear friend,

Have you ever had a serious struggle with forgiving someone? In the hidden recesses of your heart, have you wanted to see those who have wronged you receive severe judgment rather than forgiveness? If so, I understand.

I know all about harboring an unforgiving heart. For a number of years, I felt totally justified in harboring unforgiveness toward my father. He was an unbeliever who lived a lifestyle of infidelity.

At the same time, my mother was my “soft spot.” If you had known her, you would wonder, *How could anyone want to hurt her?* She was compassionate, kind, and caring. Consequently, I would try to protect her from his cruel treatment ... but no matter how hard I tried, I failed. The truth is, whenever she hurt, I hurt.

I remember how easy it was for me to focus on my father’s faults! I would look for areas where he was wrong. Of course, since he never admitted to wrongdoing, I felt absolutely justified in my hatred. I would never have *called* it hatred. I didn’t see myself in that light—as bitter. Why? Because the fact that I could still see his faults proved I was right.

I later became a Christian and learned about the forgiveness, mercy, and grace of God. Yet, I still felt justified in my hatred and unforgiveness. Why? Because my father had not changed. In

order for me to forgive him, he had to change ... that was my requirement.

I never will forget the day I came face-to-face with a passage that changed my perspective. It's found in 1 John 2:9–11: *“Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.”*

I suddenly realized I had been blind to anything good that my father had done. All I could see or wanted to see was the negative. I remember asking my mother, “How can you be so nice to him?” Her answer was telling! “Oh, honey, if only he had the Lord, he wouldn't be that way.” That was the key. She looked beyond his faults to see his need—He needed the Savior. She and her friends were praying for him to have a changed heart.

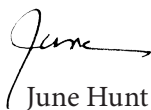
Six months before my father died, he was willing to pray a prayer of salvation. I am convinced that this occurred because my mother had nurtured the soil of his heart with compassion and forgiveness—the hardened ground had become soft—so that when the seed of truth was shared, it actually took root.

No matter what your circumstances, it's never too late to choose the road of forgiveness.

My hope is that through this book, God will speak to your heart and deepen your desire to walk the road of forgiveness every day of your life.

How I pray that you will experience the freedom that comes from embracing a heart of forgiveness!

Yours in the Lord's hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "June". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right from the end of the word.

June Hunt

# **FORGIVENESS**

## **The Freedom to Let Go**

The year is 1944. Nazi Germany occupies Holland. An elderly watchmaker and his family are actively involved in the Dutch Underground. By hiding Jewish people in a secret room of their home, members of the Ten Boom family courageously help Jewish men, women, and children escape Hitler's roll call of death.<sup>1</sup>

Yet one fateful day, their secret is discovered. The watchmaker is arrested, and soon after being imprisoned, he dies. His tenderhearted daughter Betsie also cannot escape the jaws of death at the hands of her cruel captors. In the Nazi concentration camp, she perishes. And what about Corrie, the watchmaker's youngest daughter? Will she live ... and, if so, will she ever be able to forgive her captors, those who caused the death of her father and her sister? While she is trying to survive the ravages of Ravensbruck, one of Hitler's most horrific death camps, can anything sustain Corrie ten Boom? To what can she cling? Indeed, Corrie does survive. Her God sustains her. She lives the truth of these words:

**“False witnesses rise up against me,  
breathing out violence. I am still confident  
of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in  
the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be  
strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.”**

**(Psalm 27:12–14)**





# DEFINITIONS

## THE MANY FACES OF FORGIVENESS

Two years after the war, Corrie is speaking at a church in Munich. She has come from Holland to a defeated Germany, bringing with her the message that God does indeed forgive. There in the crowd, a solemn face stares back at her. As the people file out, a balding, heavysset man moves toward her—a man in a gray overcoat, a man clutching a brown felt hat. Suddenly a scene flashes back in her mind: *the blue uniform; the visored cap with its skull and crossbones; the huge room with its harsh, overhead lights; the humiliation of walking naked past this man ... this man who is now standing before her.*

“You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk. I was a guard there,” he says. “But since that time I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well.”

He extends his hand toward her and asks, “Will you forgive me?”<sup>2</sup>

Corrie stares at the outstretched hand. The moment seems like hours as she wrestles with the most difficult decision she has ever had to make. Corrie knows Scripture well, but applying this passage seems to be too much:

**“If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.” (Luke 17:3–4)**

## **WHAT IS** Forgiveness?

Assume you need to borrow one hundred dollars to help pay a medical bill. You ask a friend for a loan and promise to pay it back at the end of the month. But when the time comes for repayment, you don't have the money. In fact, for the next three months, you still don't have the money. Then unexpectedly, out of the kindness of his heart, your friend *chooses* to “*forgive*” *the debt*! This is one facet of forgiveness.

**“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another”  
(Romans 13:8).**

► ***Forgiveness*** means dismissing a debt.<sup>3</sup>

In the New Testament, the Greek noun *aphesis* denotes a “dismissal” or “release.”<sup>4</sup>

- When you ***grant forgiveness***, you ***dismiss*** the debt owed to you.
- When you ***receive forgiveness***, your debt is ***dismissed***. (You are ***released*** from any requirement for repayment.)
- When you ***grant forgiveness***, you ***dismiss*** the debt from your thoughts.

Jesus expressed the heart of forgiveness when He said, “*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you*” (Luke 6:27).

- ▶ **Forgiveness** is dismissing your demand that others owe you something, especially when they fail to meet your expectations, fail to keep a promise, and fail to treat you justly.

Jesus said, “*If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also*” (Matthew 5:39).

- ▶ **Forgiveness** is dismissing, canceling, or setting someone free from the consequence of falling short of God’s standard.

- The holy standard of God is perfection, yet we all have sinned.
- The penalty for our sins is spiritual death (separation from God).
- The penalty for our sins (our debt) was paid by Jesus through His sacrificial death on the cross. Therefore, instead of being separated from God, we can have our debt dismissed by God and experience eternal life in heaven.

**“Everyone who believes in him [Jesus]  
receives forgiveness of sins  
through his name.”  
(Acts 10:43)**

**QUESTION: “Is it possible to sin beyond God’s ability to forgive?”**

**ANSWER:** No. God promises to purify us from *all* unrighteousness, not just specific sins, but we need to first confess our sins. (*Confess* means literally “to agree”—to agree with God.)<sup>5</sup> And if we agree with God about our sin, we not only admit we have sinned, but we also turn from our sins and turn to Jesus, entrusting our lives to the One who died for our sins.

**“I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD’—and you forgave the guilt of my sin.”**  
**(Psalm 32:5)**

## WHAT IS Forgiveness Not?<sup>6</sup>

Misconceptions abound when the word *forgiveness* is mentioned. Some think forgiveness is the equivalent of *excusing* sin, saying that what was wrong is now right. Yet this is not the example of forgiveness that Jesus displayed. When He encountered the mob of men eager to stone a woman caught in adultery, He chose not to stone her; however, never did He *excuse* her. Instead, He said, “Go, and sin no more” (John 8:11 KJV). To help correct any confusion, you need to know *what forgiveness is not!*

- ▶ ***Forgiveness is not*** circumventing God’s justice. It is allowing God to execute His justice in His time and in His way.
- ▶ ***Forgiveness is not*** waiting for “time to heal all wounds.” It is clear that time doesn’t heal wounds—some people will not allow healing.
- ▶ ***Forgiveness is not*** letting the guilty “off the hook.” It is moving the guilty from your hook to God’s hook.
- ▶ ***Forgiveness is not*** the same as reconciliation. It takes two for reconciliation, only one for forgiveness.
- ▶ ***Forgiveness is not*** excusing unjust behavior. It is acknowledging that unjust behavior is without excuse, while still forgiving.

- ▶ ***Forgiveness is not*** explaining away the hurt.  
It is working through the hurt.
- ▶ ***Forgiveness is not*** based on what is fair.  
It was not “fair” for Jesus to hang on the cross—  
but He did so that we could be forgiven.
- ▶ ***Forgiveness is not*** being a weak martyr.  
It is being strong enough to be Christlike.
- ▶ ***Forgiveness is not*** stuffing your anger.  
It is resolving your anger by releasing the  
offense to God.
- ▶ ***Forgiveness is not*** a natural response.  
It is a supernatural response, empowered by God.
- ▶ ***Forgiveness is not*** denying the hurt.  
It is feeling the hurt and releasing it.
- ▶ ***Forgiveness is not*** being a doormat.  
It is seeing that, if this were so, Jesus would  
have been the greatest doormat of all!
- ▶ ***Forgiveness is not*** conditional.  
It is unconditional, a mandate from God to  
everyone.
- ▶ ***Forgiveness is not*** forgetting.  
It is necessary to remember before you can forgive.
- ▶ ***Forgiveness is not*** a feeling.  
It is a choice—an act of the will.

“Let the wise listen and add to their  
learning, and let the discerning get  
guidance.” (Proverbs 1:5)