

HOW TO FORGIVE SOMEONE WHO MURDERS YOUR CHILD

On September 17, 2015, my wife, Dori, was notified by phone that the younger of her two sons, Robby, was dead. It would be at least two more hours before she would learn that he had been murdered almost two full days before. Just moments before being notified, she had been praying for Robby—something she often did throughout her day.

Returning to her office from a business luncheon, she had been sitting in her car when she received a call from Robby's friend Kate who told her of Robby's death. Kate, who was in Pennsylvania, had just been notified by a policeman in Billings, Montana. She had no other details.

Dori's first two attempts to reach me by phone were unsuccessful as I was on my cell phone talking to someone out of the country and did not even notice that she was trying to reach me. She realized she needed to get back to her office quickly as remaining in that parking lot would not be good. She drove the couple of miles back to her office and, while driving, and after parking the car, just sat in the front seat and screamed to and for Robby so loudly that she thought she had seriously damaged her vocal cords.

Upon entering her unoccupied office, she screamed loudly again and began crying uncontrollably, attracting the attention of those in the adjoining business office. She called my number again and upon reaching me, attempted to get the words out while still crying, "Gene. Robby is dead! Can you come?" Of course, I said that I would be there as quickly as possible and left within a minute or so to make the 20-25 minute drive to her office. She was in great anguish, as one might imagine.

Meanwhile, a couple of ladies from the adjoining business rushed over to see what Dori was screaming and crying about. When I arrived, one lady was still with Dori, determined to stay with her until I was there to help comfort her.

Let me insert some quick background information. Dori and I have been married almost 20 years. Robby had just turned six when we married and he left our home on his 18th birthday. Even though some seem to doubt whether a stepfather can really love his stepchildren, I know I demonstrated a love for Ben and Robby and they knew it also, especially during those initial several years. Ben was almost 28 months older than Robby. He had also left home soon after his 18th birthday.

Our contacts with Robby were infrequent during the years after he left and often we did not even know Robby's location. He had traveled the country, primarily by jumping freight trains with one or more friends. He came to see us a few times, the next to last time on January 7, 2013, as a surprise visit for Dori's 57th birthday. The last time was on New Year's Day in 2014. That time, he stayed with us for two days before having to scratch his itch to get moving again.

We received a surprise call from him on Thanksgiving Day in 2014 as he excitedly informed Dori that he, for the first time in his adult life, actually had an apartment. He had rented one in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and asked if we would come for a visit. Dori assured him we would be more than happy to do so and soon thereafter, we purchased our tickets to go to Milwaukee for a three-day visit in early December.

That visit would be the last time we would see Robby. Now, nine months later, all we have left are pictures and memories.

The woman who murdered him is 32-years old whom he had just met about three weeks before. She offered him a ride from the state of Washington to North Dakota, where he was going to work the sugar beet harvest, something he has done for the previous few years. She had just weeks before gotten out of the military after ten years of service. She testifies that she has long wanted to kill someone with her bare hands. She found what she believed was the perfect target.

Now we cannot say exactly how it happened as we have only her word for that. Her lawyer is claiming she is only guilty of an assisted suicide. Of course,

we wonder – Would a person who kills another actually lie?

What we do know from her own testimony is that she killed Robby by getting behind him in her SUV and getting him in a chokehold. They were in a Wal-Mart parking lot. After making sure he was dead, she drove around looking for a place to dump Robby's body. Not finding an acceptable place, she drove into another parking lot and supposedly tried to revive him.

We are so glad that she did not dump his body in a place where it would never be found. Can you imagine what it might have been like for us to spend the rest of our lives wondering where Robby is? How horrible that would be!

Actually, we have friends whose adult children have been missing for many years. It has only been by God's grace that they have been able to endure their loss.

As I rushed to be with Dori, I called at least four or five friends, including our pastor, and asked for prayer, especially for Dori. Each time, after telling them that Robby was dead, they replied, "What?" I would then attempt to repeat those words and could hardly do so. The emotion was so difficult, especially as I thought about how much Dori was hurting.

As I parked in front of her office, I knew I had one main objective—to change her focus as quickly as possible from what had happened to where Robby now is! The Bible tells us to set our affections on things above and not on things on the earth. We are also told that, for the believer in Jesus, it is even better to be absent from the body and present with the Lord.

So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

(2 Corinthians 5:6-8)

For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless, to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.

(Philippians 1:23-24)

Obviously, focusing on the truth of God's Word expressed in these verses is far superior to focusing on the suffering our son experienced.

About ten months before this happened, we had booked a very nice rental house on top of a mountain in North Carolina for the period of September 19-26 for a couples' retreat for ourselves and three couples among our friends. This proved to be perfect timing as we were scheduled to leave only 39 hours after Dori received the news. We were so glad to have received the tragic news when we did instead of after we arrived for the retreat. The setting proved to be a perfect getaway to deal with the initial grieving process. We were with six precious friends.

One of the first nights while on the retreat, I told Dori that we needed to forgive all those, including ourselves and Robby, who might have had anything to do with Robby's life having gone as it did. Although he had just died a week before, he had been on the road to destruction for a long time. She agreed and we compiled the list which ultimately consisted of many names, including, of course, the woman who killed him. Then, as that midnight approached, we took that piece of paper, prayed over the names, gave our grievances to God, and placed the piece of paper in the fireplace.

We both have been Christians for more than 45 years and have experienced life enough to know that harboring resentment and bitterness towards anyone only hurts us and our ability to have an impact on others.

Perhaps, because we have been involved in the prison ministry for at least 12 years, or that our son Joel himself spent about six years in prison long ago, we know that almost nobody goes to prison by himself. The woman who killed Robby also ruined her life that day and greatly hurt her 14-year old son and her mother, both of whom are still alive and undoubtedly grieving their loss also. We feel a sadness for all three of them and know God wants us to forgive her.

It should be noted that forgiveness does not mean forgetting or condoning. Nor does it mean that she will not suffer great consequences for what she has done.

The question remains, however, "How can we forgive her?" We can forgive her because we have been forgiven our sins! We are taught in James 2:10 that "whoever offends the law in one point is guilty of all." We are also told that we ought to forgive others as we have been forgiven. So, perhaps the question should be, "How can we not forgive her?"

I reckon it all boils down to whether or not we believe God. Do we believe He is an all-knowing, all-powerful God who is worthy of our adoration, worship, and obedience? Let's examine what God tells us regarding forgiving others.

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:14-15)

Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.
(Ephesians 4:31-32)

We forgive, not because it is easy, but because it is the right thing to do. We forgive because we have been forgiven and want to be obedient to our Heavenly Father.

Ultimately, we must recognize that Robby is dead due to many of the choices he had made over the past several years. He desperately needed help and there are many who could have helped but never gave him that help. Those who encouraged him to get on the road of destruction, or to remain on it, share part of the blame as well. We have forgiven them also.

If you are reading this and don't yet know the joy of experiencing God's eternal forgiveness for your sins, why not believe on Jesus now and receive this along with the gift of God—eternal life!

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. (Jn. 6:47) See Acts 13:38-39

**(NOTE: All quoted scripture is from the New King James Version of the Bible, published by Thomas Nelson Publishers) (Scripture emphases mine.)*

For more information, contact

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Written by Gene Greeson
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Tragedy can either make us bitter or better. We can decide to be better, and God can give us the strength to carry out that decision.

[This is a pamphlet we handed out at Robby's memorial service](#)

IMPORTANT NOTE:

“To fail to forgive someone and instead harbor bitterness is like drinking poison and hoping the other person will die.”