

## THE JOY OF FORGIVENESS

If you have ever committed a crime or terrible act and received forgiveness for doing so, you already know the joy of forgiveness. If you have received God's eternal forgiveness and have the assurance of spending eternity with Him, you already know the joy of forgiveness. If you've been badly hurt or offended and have forgiven the offender, you already know the joy of forgiveness.

Sadly, not everyone does, for not everyone has been forgiven and/or has become a forgiver.

On June 7, 1970, when I was 22 years old, I learned the joy of receiving God's eternal forgiveness for my sins—all of them! When I say "all," I mean past, present, and future. How amazing is that?

Until that day, I had no thoughts that I might someday go to heaven, nor could I believe that God, if He did exist, could love and forgive me. Imagine my delight when I realized He not only exists but He loves us all and offers to all who will believe Him for it, eternal life—based on the payment Jesus made on the cross for our sins!

It has been said that the gospel (good news) changes everything! That has certainly been true in my life. Not only did it change my eternal destination (heaven instead of hell) but it gave me a new life! I now have both purpose and the means by which I can fulfill that purpose. Because I have become a believer, the Holy Spirit of God resides

inside me to both guide and empower me to do God's will. His will is always best!

The joy I've experienced in being forgiven by God has given me a freedom to live life to the fullest. Because we are not really prepared to live until we are prepared to die, having that issue settled gives me great peace and comfort. I've also recognized that there is nothing on earth that I might wish to do that can compare to living life the way God wants me to live it.

God is trustworthy. In fact, He alone is. He tells us that "all things work together for good to those of us who love Him and are called according to His purpose." We are told to be thankful in everything and to count it all joy when we fall into various trials. It seems to me that it would be difficult to do these and still remain bitter towards someone.

Admittedly, it took me a while to adopt this kind of thinking. I've been so angry before that I've wanted to kill, believing I would be doing the world a favor. I'm not proud of that, but the truth is the truth. Being robbed or mistreated, or watching those you love suffer due to another's poor treatment can make one's blood boil. In the end, however, God tells us how to handle this and His answer includes forgiveness.

"But how does one forgive an evil act?" you ask. Sometimes it seems impossible and perhaps it is—in our own strength! In fact, if you think about it, the Christian life is impossible to live in your own strength. This is why God empowers us with the Holy Spirit to strengthen us. He can help us do

things we could never do without Him. Let's remember: He is God and we are not!

God's Word, the Bible, gives us numerous examples of those who were forgiving. One of the earliest recorded includes the forgiveness of Joseph toward his ten brothers who had sold him into slavery. How he must have hated that and thought about it during those years he spent in slavery. Yet, because he trusted God and honored Him with his lifestyle, God raised him up to be the second most powerful man in Egypt. He had the power to exact vengeance on his brothers, yet he wept and received them, granting them their request for food. He said to them, "You meant it for evil but God meant it for good."

Stephen was stoned for his uncompromising faith and as he lay dying, his words were, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."

David showed a type of forgiveness when he searched for relatives of King Saul (who had tried to kill David numerous times) so he could show kindness. Mephibosheth, Saul's crippled son, was found and was given all of Saul's former property. David even hired a family to farm it for him and had Mephibosheth eat at David's own table for the rest of his days. This was so contrary to what normally happened as many new kings would have killed the entire family of the previous king.

The story of the prodigal son is really the story of the forgiving father. What an example the father was to welcome his wayward son home, with outstretched arms,

and kill the fatted calf to throw a banquet for him!

While the Bible doesn't go into detail as to what all forgiveness entails, we do see some examples and can read between the lines to see the attitude of the forgivers.

Each recognized that God was involved and what had happened was under His control. Each knew that God was working in the situation to bring about His purposes and therefore, felt no malice towards the person or persons who needed forgiving.

Forgiveness includes no longer holding the offense or debt against the person being forgiven. It doesn't include, as some suggest, that we forget the offense, but that we no longer hold them accountable for it. We will not hold it over their head anymore.

Neither does forgiveness necessarily include restoration. That may take place but that will depend on one or more additional factors. An employee who stole from his employer may, for example, be forgiven but not be able to get his job back. Restoration often depends on whether or not a bond of trust can be reestablished. Additionally, there may be a penalty that will need to be paid regardless of the forgiveness.

I have known since 1970 the joy of being forgiven but it was only in 2016 that I began to really understand the joy of being a forgiver. Our son was murdered in 2015 and, although within three days we forgave the person who killed him, it would be ten months before we communicated that forgiveness to her by letter. Once we did that, and perhaps more specifically, once we

saw the change it made in her life, we began to experience a joy we could not have imagined. In fact, with the joy came a love for her that we absolutely could not have predicted! We have forgiven her and we love her. For that, we thank God.

Letters passed between us for 10 months before we traveled to Billings, Montana to meet her face-to-face on June 10, 2017, almost 21 months after Robby was killed. Through a plea bargain deal, Lindsay was sentenced to 60 years and will be eligible to go before a parole board in 15 years. While we continue to think that prison has been good for her and desire that she continue growing and become a giant for God, we look forward to her one day being released and serving God on the outside. At present, we are extremely impressed at how God is using her to encourage and introduce others to Him on the inside.

The bottom line is this. We obeyed God in forgiving Lindsay and He has rewarded us with a precious relationship and a joy that cannot be defined with mere words! It is very true that Father, our Heavenly Father, knows best! To Him be the glory.

Is there anyone in your life, present or past, whom you need to forgive to be obedient to Him? If so, there is no better time than today to do it.

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

**For more information, contact:**

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## **IMPORTANT NOTE:**

***It is more blessed to give than receive. Strangely, this is also true with the giving of forgiveness.***