

- Forgiveness leads to celebration.
- Forgiveness has a ripple effect, impacting the lives of others.
- Forgiveness reflects God's own creative, sacrificial love.

## On the Way to Forgiveness

Perhaps you picked up this tract because you need to forgive someone who has wronged you. Maybe it's been hard for you. Maybe you've delayed. You may even be waiting for the other person to take the first step toward reconciliation.

Throughout the Bible, one truth about forgiveness is clear: its time is now. Forgiveness can't wait. The price is too high. Life is too short.

Since you've already taken a first step in reading this tract, consider these further steps on the way to forgiveness:

1. Pray for the will to forgive. Pray, "Heavenly Father, as you have forgiven me in Christ, so bless me with a spirit of forgiveness. Grant me such grace that I will move beyond my resentment and forgive wholeheartedly and completely. In the name of Jesus. Amen."
2. Place yourself in steady contact with God's forgiveness in Christ. Attend worship. Go to Communion and hear "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." Read and listen to the Scriptures. Again, the driving force for our forgiveness will be God's forgiveness of our sins in Christ.

3. Take the initiative. As Christ readily sought forgiveness for those who crucified him ("Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" [Luke 23:34]), grant forgiveness freely and unconditionally. Step up and give forgiveness as a genuine gift.

How did the father in the story put it? "This creation is better than the first, for this one is born of forgiveness." You're on the way to a better creation born of forgiveness.



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A beautiful story of forgiveness comes from a pastor of a small church who made pottery as a hobby. For weeks he had carefully worked to design a new set of vessels for the church's Communion celebrations: a cup for the wine, a holder for the bread, and a flagon. Then, time and again, he worked his potter's wheel until the pieces were perfect. He glazed and fired the set and loved it.

At services the next Sunday he announced that he would display the Communion vessels in the church lobby the following Sunday morning before dedicating them in worship. Saturday came. He carefully displayed the set on a table for the next morning.

Now the pastor's family lived in the parsonage next to the church. That Saturday night, the pastor's young son and a friend snuck into the dark church. Though his dad had warned them against it, they ran through the church in a game of chase. In the dark lobby, the son ran into the table. The new pottery pieces shattered on the tile floor. The son was devastated. Even in the dark, he knew what he had done, but he could not bring himself to tell his father.

The next morning the father-pastor found the Communion ware. "There will be no dedication today," he announced at the service as tears rolled from his eyes. (His son's eyes were no less tearful.) "If anyone knows who did this, please come and speak with me."

Later in the day, the son finally told his dad what had happened. "Can you ever forgive me?" he asked.

"I can do more than that," his father said. And for the next weeks father and son worked the wheel together. The son learned

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the art of pottery, and together they fashioned a new Communion set.

On the day of dedication, the pastor, with his son beside him, told the story to his parishioners. He said, "This creation is better than the first, for this one is born of forgiveness."

## Forgiveness Begins with Christ

Sometimes it's hard to forgive. It is possible, however, when we focus on Christ rather than on the sin or the sinner—or even our hurt self.

We forgive because we have been forgiven. In order to gain our forgiveness, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, lived a perfect life, sacrificed himself on the cross, and rose to life again. Forgiveness didn't come easy for Christ; it cost him his life.

Inspiring and driving our forgiveness of another is God's forgiveness of our sins in Jesus Christ. Forgiving Christians are born of forgiveness. As Scripture says, "Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13).

## The Unforgiving Spirit

When we refuse to forgive another, we nurse our anger inside. We let resentment have its way in our lives. Bitterness takes hold. No wonder the Scriptures counsel, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger" (Ephesians 4:31).

What's more, when we withhold forgiveness, we leave another person "in the dark" with their sins. David in Psalm 32 describes

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to God what it's like to be unforgiven:

"For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer (Psalm 32:4). Living without forgiveness is exhausting for both the unforgiving and the unforgiven.

Even worse, an unforgiving spirit has us living far from the heart of God. No wonder Jesus says powerfully in the Sermon on the Mount, "But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:15). The unforgiving spirit has lost touch with God. Stated positively, forgiveness is a sign of a genuine Christian faith.

## The Power of Forgiveness

As in the story of the pastor-father and his son, forgiveness works wonders in relationships. Here are some of the results of forgiveness present in the opening story. See if you can find evidence of each in the story:

- Forgiveness frees us of anger, resentment, bitterness, and disappointment.
- Forgiveness brings another person out of the dark and into the light.
- Forgiveness not only mends a broken relationship, it even strengthens it.
- Forgiveness opens us to growth in our faith and life. When Jesus forgave Simon Peter in John 21:13–19, He gave Peter something to do. He said to Peter, "Feed my lambs."

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