

# The Incredible Lesson Anne Graham Lotz Learned About Forgiveness

“Just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you” (Col. 3:13, NASB).

Guilt is our friend. If you are like me, it’s a friend you don’t want showing up on your doorstep. But, more than likely, without it you and I would go on in wrongdoing until becoming dominated and defeated by it.

Guilt is an alarm system that points us to our own misconduct. Yet instead of heeding the alarm, we ignore it, rationalize it, deny it, excuse it, drown or drug it. What we rarely do is to use our guilt for good, letting it redirect and thus transform us into better people. We tend to let it consume and destroy us. Much like drinking poison, guilt and the inability to forgive ourselves can slowly eat away at who we are, rob us of our inner peace, and ultimately shatter our spirits.

The dictionary definition of “forgive” is “to stop blaming.” The benefits of forgiveness are gifts to both the giver and receiver. Because to stop the blame game, and to forgive, ultimately releases us from resentment and allows us to experience freedom and peace. Despite this, we still struggle with forgiveness, finding that the hardest person to forgive is often our own self.

Have you ever done or said something that was so horrific—something that you so regretted doing or saying—that you couldn’t forgive yourself? Have you relived whatever it was over and over again, each time thinking of a different “if only”? Has the unforgiveness turned to a deep bitterness and even self-hatred? I understand.

For three years I was my husband's full-time caregiver. I loved the role. But on the date I'm writing this, two years ago—Aug. 17, 2015—I found him unresponsive in our pool. Three days later, my beloved husband of 49 years, Danny, went to heaven. On my watch.

And thus began a difficult journey of forgiveness. Of myself. If I kept blaming myself and wallowing in the guilt, I knew I would spiral down into bitterness and self-hatred. I could actually feel the downward pull into that black hole from the moment I found Danny.

My journey to forgive myself began with a simple prayer. *God, I am so sorry. Danny's death is my fault. I have failed to obey Your calling to care for him. I'm so sorry.* For two days, that's as far as I got on my journey. *God, I am so sorry. God, I am so sorry.*

God, who loved my husband, and who loves me, used doctors, nurses and friends to comfort me. I was told that there was no evidence Danny had drowned or had a heart attack. It seemed that he had simply gone to sleep in the water. But I was still left with the stinging self-flagellation ... blame ... guilt ... and all the "what ifs" and "if onlys."

Then God seemed to whisper to my broken, grief-stricken, guilt-ridden heart ... *Anne, I forgive you. The blood of Jesus is sufficient for the forgiveness of any and all sins, including your temporary neglect of Danny and his subsequent death. You have said you were sorry. You have asked Me to forgive you. And I have. Now accept My forgiveness and My timing. I called him home when his life was complete. I had numbered his days. Trust Me. And forgive yourself.*

As I thought about it, I reasoned: *If God says He forgives me, who am I to say, "God, thank You, but I just can't forgive myself?"* Am I greater than God? Are my standards of righteousness higher than His? If He forgives me, I really

have no option but to accept His forgiveness and forgive myself. So I did. With humble gratitude and thanksgiving. Then the peace came.

Once we tell God we are sorry for our sin and failures and accept His forgiveness, then forgiving others—including ourselves—is an act of worship. It's a decision we make not only in obedience to God's command, but also in response to His own love, grace and mercy extended to us. Pure and simple. How can you—or I—accept God's forgiveness, then turn around and withhold our forgiveness of someone else? So ...

Would you make the decision to forgive, now? Tell God you're sorry for whatever it is. Ask God to forgive you. Then turn around and forgive that other person, especially if that other person is yourself. Why? For the simple reason that God *has* forgiven you. And living in His forgiveness is where peace is found.

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## **How You May Be Denying Christ and Not Even Know It**

So many of God's people have this backwards. Instead of lifting up the name of their Healer, Yeshua, they exalt the name of the sickness or disease that the enemy, Satan, is using to destroy them with. Philippians 2:9-11 clearly says,

Therefore God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

The name of Jesus is higher than cancer, diabetes, Lyme disease, HIV and all other disease, and yet God’s people continue to declare how powerful these wicked weapons of spiritual warfare are and deny the highest power of the greatest One, Jesus the Messiah.

Listening in on some Christians’ conversations, one would surmise that Jesus is the lesser power, powerless or even worse, careless towards His followers, when in reality, He is Jehovah Rapha, the God who heals disease.

If God’s people would truly humble themselves and bow before their Creator, they would come into the presence of His greatness and know firsthand the wonder of His name and the power behind His name.

All creation, including that which is in a fallen state, must bow before Jesus Christ. Sickness and disease are microscopic organisms that get into the human body and make people ill, but when put in their rightful place, they too bow at the mention of His name, and obey His command, “Leave them at once!”.

So what name are you going to glorify? Cancer? Are you going to magnify Lyme disease? Will you continue to praise the mighty power of diabetes in your life? Or will you humble yourself, bow your knee and declare that Jesus is Lord? Will you do as your Lord Jesus tells you to do?

What does He tell us to do? He tells us to remember all of His benefits, who pardons all iniquities, heals all disease, redeems our lives from destruction, crowns us with lovingkindness and tender mercies, satisfies our mouths with

good things and renews our youth like the eagles (see Ps. 103:1-5).

It is time for God's people to glorify the name of Jehovah Rapha, who heals all disease, gives sight to the blind, opens up deaf ears, strengthens the weak, causes the paralytics to walk, releases those afflicted with demons. Glorify the name that is above all names, Jesus.

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## **Vital Tip for Moms of Kids Starting College**

There are only a few days left. Until *it* happens.

The day I've dreaded for almost 18 years, but also looked forward to with a heart of hope and excitement. The day we've been preparing for and counting down to for months, but one I secretly hoped would never arrive.

In just over a week, my little-blond-headed-blue-eyed-boy-turned-handsome-incredible-young-man moves into a dorm room and officially becomes a college freshman. He'll be attending the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, my alma mater (Go Niners!), which is not far from our home. Yet he will no longer be living with me but on his own. He will officially be a young adult. Mercy.

When my oldest daughter, Morgan, started college five years

ago, I'll admit I didn't handle it well, as explained in today's Proverbs 31 devotion. It was so hard as a mom to let go and let God take over. When my daughter Kaitlyn started college a couple years later, it was a little easier (but not much, I'll confess) and anxieties and emotions still seemed overwhelming. Plus, I missed both of them terribly.

But now this. The baby of the family. My precious baby boy. The last one to be born, the last one to leave the nest. The one I've spent time with every single day for almost 18 years, and every day for the past several years when it was just he and I living at home. This is compounded with the reality that, as a single mom, I won't be skipping off into retirement with a husband and traveling together in these empty-nest years as I once thought. Instead, I am facing the reality of embarking on this new phase of life all alone—girlfriend, I'll confess, emotions are running high.

The truth is, even the third time around, I still don't have this whole "dropping your kids off at college" thing figured out. But I know God does. And knowing that calms my nerves and fills me with peace.

I am still going to have to pray for the supernatural ability to hold back tears, ugly cries and overflowing emotions, at least until I am in the car driving away from the dorm after move-in day. And honestly, I might need to ask God for an extra dose of sanity to prevent me from acting a little (or a lot) cray-cray in the coming weeks.

But if there is one thing God has taught me over the years, and especially over the past year, is that I can trust Him with all things. Literally *all things*. Countless times He has proven Himself faithful, leaving me in awe and thankfulness, and these are the memories I cling to when worry, self-pity or loneliness try to rear their ugly heads, especially when on the cusp of a new season of life, yet again. Maybe today, you need to be reminded of that promise as well—and also reminded

to trust Him with all things, including your children.

If you're dropping part of your heart off at a college campus, might you make an intentional commitment to change your thinking from worrisome thoughts to positive, optimistic thoughts today? For your sake, but also your child's?

When we focus on our faith instead of our worries, letting go of our kids and trusting God to be their new guardian makes letting go seem a little less stressful. There is one thing we all need to remember to do no matter what, especially during emotional seasons with our children and seasons of letting go, and that is to *trust God*. And then:

- Trust that you have spent all these years raising your child to the best of your ability and teaching them to love the Lord. Don't listen to the lies of the enemy who wants to convince you otherwise.
- Trust that you've taught them right from wrong, but know they're going to make their own mistakes and learn from them just as we have learned from ours.
- Trust God loves them and will never leave them. Even if they stray, He'll always be by their side, calling them back.
- Trust God to protect them. He can always be there, when we cannot.
- Trust God will calm your fears and help you grow in faith as you learn to accept this new phase of life.
- Trust your child loves you even if you don't talk to them every day. They will need some time to figure out who they are and where they fit in, but they will always love you, love home and know whose they are and whom they belong to.
- Trust God has an incredible and beautiful plan, purpose and future for your child just as you believe He has for you.
- Trust you can survive this in faith, because all moms go through it at one point or another.

- Trust God will give you strength you can't muster up on your own and the ability to hold back mama-tears if needed.
- Trust He will catch every tear that does fall and help you put your child's excitement and happiness above your own anxieties and fears.
- Trust He can help you overcome the pull towards sadness and ask Him to fill your heart and life with laughter instead.
- Trust you can find peace and joy through faith, even if all you really want to do is curl up in a fetal position and cry. (But if you do need to curl up in a fetal position and cry, it's OK! Sometimes us mamas just need to let it all out, especially when it comes to matters of the heart regarding our children. Just try not to do it in the middle of a dorm room.)
- Trust in the people God has placed in your life and don't be afraid to ask for support or hugs when you need it. This is an emotional time, and those who love you will be blessed by being there for you when you need them most.
- Most importantly, trust God has a plan for this new chapter of your life and for this new chapter in your child's life as well. And believe with your whole heart it is a good, good plan.

Even though as moms, our lives have revolved around our kids for 18 years before they move out and go to college—and their absence makes not only our house feel empty but our hearts feel empty too—we can stay fulfilled, joyful and hopeful if we put our full trust in God alone. Remember to look for the positives that lie ahead. Focus on the good things this new phase of life will bring for all of you.

When we think positive, we feel positive, equipping us to share that positivity with our kids.

Let's commit to intentionally choose to think positive about

what is yet to come and trust in the One who holds all our futures in His hands while praying for sovereign protection and provision over the ones we love most.

And all the mamas out there said Amen!

What is your biggest fear, worry or emotion that is making it hard for you to be positive while on the brink of a new phase of life for you and your child? If not for college, for another new season that seems scary, unknown or full of change? {eoa}

*To learn more about how you can begin experiencing this transformation in your life too, purchase a copy of Unsinkable Faith: God-filled Strategies for Transforming the Way You Think, Feel and Live by **Tracie Miles**.*

*This article originally appeared at .*

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## **What Character Qualities Do Teens Value Most?**

In early June, it was my privilege and joy to teach hundreds of seventh graders about their identity. Because, I wanted them to understand how multi-faceted they are. I wanted them to choose to invest in all of themselves. It matters partly because identity controls behavior.

Consequently, if children only know a part of themselves, they'll struggle greatly if that part fails them. For instance, last Monday, I wrote about children's social identity. If that's all they have to depend on, what will they do when they feel only negative about it? Isolate. Separate.

Treat peers and others badly. And more.

### **What Your Teens Are Saying:**

When I asked these young teens to tell me a high compliment they could receive if someone described their character identity, groups listed these qualities:

- Kind, encouraging
- Trustworthy, kind
- Charismatic
- Good, kind-hearted
- Honest, truthful
- Sweet, loyal, integrity
- Humble
- Perky, always happy, encouraging, bubbly, friendly, peppy, humble, helpful, careful, kind, loving, compassionate heart
- Loyal, respectful
- Easygoing, positive, problem solver
- Open-minded
- Hardworking
- Diligent, respectful, responsible
- Courageous
- Good role model

### **What Do You Think?**

I think these are great kids! Can you imagine if all of us consistently exhibited these qualities? Seriously!

So be grateful with me that these teens want to be known as having these qualities. Perhaps ask your children the same question. What character qualities do they highly value? Then, let's ask ourselves how we can help them. Picture yourself talking with them about these. Which ones will we be better at modeling? Will accountability help us model those that aren't natural strengths of ours? How can we teach these character qualities?

Teaching is a key. It's absolutely essential that we talk about the character qualities we want our kids to choose. While modeling them prevents the hypocrisy that angers children. But, teaching matters because these qualities aren't easy to embrace 24/7.

#### **4 Ways You Can Help Your Children:**

- Starting with the old-fashioned dictionary might be wise. Definitions often reveal fine differences between qualities.
- Since contrasting the qualities with their opposites is effective teaching. Share an example of someone being courageous and an example of someone not being brave. Teach about loyalty vs. someone giving up quickly on a friend. Also, contrast kindness with rude behavior. What does encouragement sound like and look like? What about discouragement? You get the idea.
- Would role-playing or making up dramas with your kids help them understand why and how to live out these qualities? Especially if they're body smart and people smart, this could be great fun and very effective. What about watching favorite movies or shows and looking for examples of positive and negative character qualities? We could do the same thing with stories they're reading.
- Since there are numerous examples of many of the qualities these teens mentioned in the heroes we know from the Bible. I imagine the same thing will be true regarding qualities your children identify as important. Look for examples together. Did Jesus use that quality? When was He courageous? Encouraging? Respectful? Responsible? Was Paul hard-working? Who can you think of who demonstrated loyalty? How does a study of significant men and women from Scripture inform our ideas about humility?

#### **So What Can You Do as Parents?**

If you engage your children in discussions like these, I'd love to know how they go.

Most of all, let's not just expect our kids to wake up another day with better character. Children tell me they don't want us to "tell and yell." They want to be taught. They need to be taught. It honors them. I pray God blesses you as you persevere.

**Dr. Kathy Koch** is the author of *Screens & Teens: Connecting with Our Kids in A Wireless World*.

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## **This Classic Story Inspires Powerful Perseverance**

At the end of a long day, they gathered all of us kids around a huge fireplace at Quaker Ridge Camp in Colorado. It was the middle of summer, but this was a camp high in elevation that looked out over Pike's Peak, so we came to the gathering place with our sweatshirts and wrapped in sleeping bags.

One of the counselors would open to his bookmark in *Little Pilgrim's Progress* and read several chapters to us every night.

I don't need to tell you that this was my favorite part of camp, do I? The book reading? Those people really got me.

If you haven't read John Bunyan's story of little Christian's journey to the Celestial City, I urge you to do this and especially to read it to your kids. (Choose the more readable kid's version.)

In Bunyan's allegory, Christian leaves the City of Destruction and begins his dangerous journey. He meets up with characters like Obstinate and Pliable, and he struggles through the Slough of Despond until Help comes along. He faces the Hill of Difficulty, fights a dragon and gets captured in Vanity Fair. It's an action-packed story.

I've faced my own draw toward Vanity Fair as of late, but I have seen the peril and have been resisting with all my heart.

The journey toward the Celestial City is hard and dangerous for the soul. Lately I've been feeling it more than usual, but one of my students at school dressed up as a ninja for spirit week. That got my imagination going.

If John Bunyan were alive now and were writing his story, maybe he would paint Christian as the next contestant on the ninja game show. We would hear Christian's backstory and how hard it was for him to get to the place of finally standing at the beginning of the American Ninja Warrior gauntlet of challenges.

Bunyan would have a microphone and call out Christian's obstacles as he came to them. We would hear about the level of difficulty of each. Every slip of the hand or foot would be announced to the crowd.

Bunyan would describe the strength and skill required to get through each part of the course. The dangers of failure would be detailed along the way. But Help would be there, spotting.

We would hold our breath and pray for Christian to keep going, keep going.

Huge cheers would erupt after near misses.

We would admire his perseverance despite his obvious fatigue.

Everyone would watch for him to finish well and to ring the bell at the end. The crowd would go wild.

All of which sounds super-thrilling, until it sinks in that Bunyan is telling a story about my own soul, my own Tuesday mornings, my own hands almost slipping off the rope, after a hard setback or a discouraging circumstance.

In Hebrews, we get a look at real people on a real pilgrimage.

I want to live by faith, making it past the real obstacles that came up every day.

Maybe you feel like your days are drudgery and full of pitfalls, but step back today and think about your *story*. It's about you and your great pilgrimage toward a fantastic city. You're going somewhere important, and you are having adventures and coming through dangers. You're tired, the way travelers on an epic course get tired.

But you'll keep going, warrior. We're all cheering for you.

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## **Jonathan Cahn Reveals Prophetic Elijah Paradigm**

"The days of Elijah weren't just days of miracles." Find out what Rabbi Jonathan Cahn means as he unpacks what he calls "the Elijah Paradigm" (below). What do you think? Let us know!

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# Third Temple Heralds Christ's Return

Some scholars believe the rebuilding of the Jewish temple must take place before Christ's return. Via this video, you'll travel to the site of the Temple Mount to hear about plans for building a third temple. Check it out!

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## James Goll: Healed of Cancer, Given Spiritual Gift

God healed James Goll of cancer in what he calls "an amazing encounter, a God-encounter." But he also received a special gift. Watch as he shares with Sid Roth and his audience.

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## How Do We Hear From God?

Jennifer LeClaire gets up close and personal as she shares from her book *Mornings With the Holy Spirit*. She encourages believers through the words He shares with her and reminds them that He wants to speak to them in the same intimate way. Watch, and see if you agree!

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# **This Dangerous Theology Has Now Infiltrated the Church**

Replacement theology is becoming more and more popular, but is it biblical? In this interview with Mark Stengler of Please Tell Me the Truth Ministries, Dr. Michael Brown discusses this theory, its origins and its implications for believers today.