

# How to Recognize God

✘ I can think of nothing worse in the world than for something that God is in to be happening and I not recognize it.

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” -Genesis 28:16

The most wonderful thing that can happen to anybody is for God to turn up. The problem is that we don't always recognize Him at the time, and we only see later that it was God.

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## A Grateful Nation

God loves a grateful nation. Just as an individual cannot “out-thank” the Lord-for God pours out His blessing more than ever, so a nation cannot out-thank God either.

Just as those individuals who praised God on Palm Sunday possibly did so selfishly, even ignorantly and for the wrong reasons—and God accepted their praise, so God accepts the praise of a nation that attempts to show gratitude to Him. It does not necessarily matter that every single person who participates in such thanksgiving is a faithful servant of God in his or her private life; God just notices a nation overall that makes any attempt to show gratitude to Him.

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# God's View of Marriage

Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. ... "I hate divorce," says the Lord God of Israel. –Malachi 2:15-16

Here we meet one of the most important things God has said in relation to the family: "I hate divorce." Why is this so relevant? We are living in a time when some newscasters, politicians, and many people who make headlines laugh at the family. The nuclear family, a husband, wife, and children, is God's institution. God loves the family, and His Word teaches the sanctity and permanence of marriage. This is something Dad drummed into me, and it is something that we should be drumming into our children. I thank God for a father who used to say to me, "Son, marriage is for life." Sometimes it made me afraid to go out with a girl, for I would find myself wondering if I wanted to marry her and be with her all my life. The idea of divorce was out of the question.

And that is what Malachi is saying here. Jesus allows divorce in the case of infidelity, and the apostle Paul adds the case of desertion. What God is saying here through Malachi is what pleases Him best.

In Malachi's day this divine institution was being threatened just as it is today. It is my belief that the only hope for Britain, America, and the West at the present time, when marriage breakdown is bringing about a disintegration of the family and children grow up lacking sexual identity, is for fathers to be as strong as mine was. They would make a big difference, both as role models and through teaching. I believe that the lack of strong parenting, especially strong fathering, is one of the reasons for the ever-increasing homosexuality in the West, where it is even being taught in schools as a valid option. How that must grieve the heart of God. There is no hope for the family if this continues, and

the only thing that will stop it is a massive turning to Christ. God's way is right. It is integrity.

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## When God Shows Up

☒ Perhaps God spoke to you at a particular time or was present on a particular occasion. At the time, it didn't seem as if it was God who was doing the speaking or even if God was present at all. You underestimated, if not rejected, what He did or what He said. Only years later did it become clear to you that you had failed to recognize His presence.

I remember many years ago, when Louise and I had moved away from Fort Lauderdale, Florida, for only 18 months, we came back and found that Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church had been started. Before we went away, it had been a vacant lot with a big sign on it that read, "Future home of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church." That sign just stayed there month after month for a couple years. We wondered: *What is happening here? When will that church start?*

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# Steps to Totally Forgiving Others

*Since forgiveness is a choice, what is the next step? If we are persuaded that it is right and have decided to do it (and not look back), what next?*

## **1. Make the deliberate and irrevocable choice not to tell anyone what they did.**

You may need to do this for therapeutic reasons, but only to one person who in turn will never reveal your heart. Jesus also said that the one who is faithful in the least thing is faithful also in much, and this is the first thing. Do not mention it; refuse to tell anybody.

This isn't necessarily easy sometimes, but when our motive is to hurt another person by telling on them, there is sin on our part. So do not tell it at all or in part; keep it quiet.

## **2. Be pleasant to them should you be around them.**

Do not say or do anything that would make them anxious. Put them at ease. This can be hard to do, certainly harder than the first step. It is we who are afraid when we can't forgive. When we pass our fear to them, it is utterly the opposite of what Jesus would do. He would say, "Fear not." Josif Tson says that there are 366 statements of "Do not fear" (or the equivalent) in the Bible—"One for every day of the year and one for leap year!" he says. God does not want us to fear; we must not do or say anything to cause others to fear. Be nice. Put them at ease. This is what Jesus did when He turned up after His resurrection to 10 disciples behind closed doors. (See John 20:19).

## **3. If conversation ensues, say that which would set them free**

## **from guilt.**

Guilt is most painful, and we can easily punish people by sending them on a “guilt trip.” Never do that. Remember that Jesus doesn’t want us to feel guilty. When we are going to be Jesus to another, then we will not want them to be angry with themselves.

This is a hard one. We get some satisfaction when we think they feel really, really bad. That defuses us and eases our anger somewhat. But if we want to be valiant and utterly magnanimous—thus showing true godliness—we will say whatever is the equivalent of Joseph’s words: “Do not be angry with yourselves” (Gen. 45:5). Joseph would not allow his brothers to feel guilty, and this is a choice we too must make. It’s hard, but it is what we would want if things were reversed and we needed forgiveness. “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:31).

## **4. Let them feel good about themselves.**

Not only does this mean never reminding them of their wrong and your hurt, but it also means helping them through any guilt they may have. This can be done without any reference to what they did. If it is not in the open, as with Joseph’s situation, that is of course different; he let his brothers save face by showing God’s sovereign strategy in their sin. But in many cases you will not be able to talk about anything specifically. You can still let them save face, because you know that they know what they did.

You therefore must behave as though you don’t even think they did anything wrong! That is hard for all of us, but it must be done. Say whatever you can (as long as it is true) that will give that person a sense of dignity. That is the point of Galatians 6:1: “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.” As long as there is a trace of self-righteousness and pointing the finger, your attempt at total forgiveness will backfire.

## **5. Protect them from their greatest fear.**

If you are aware of some deep, dark secret and fear they have, they will probably know that you know. If they can tell by your graciousness that their secret will never be revealed—ever—to anyone, they will be relieved. You only tell them when you know they know what you know, and you are convinced this would make them feel better. If by reminding them it would obviously not make them feel better, don't even come close!

Remember that Joseph knew his brothers' greatest fear was that their father, Jacob, would learn the truth of their evil deed. Joseph never mentioned this directly but suggested they speak to Jacob in such a way that they wouldn't have to tell him after all. (See Genesis 45:9-13.) It must have given the brothers incalculable relief to know that they were not obliged to tell Jacob. But that is what total forgiveness is all about: setting people free.

## **6. Keep it up today, tomorrow, this year and next.**

Total forgiveness is a lifelong commitment. Some days will be easier than others. There will come a time when you think you are completely over it and have won a total victory—only to find the very next day Satan reminds you of what they did and the utter injustice that they will be unpunished and never exposed. The temptation to bitterness will emerge. After all, we're not perfect! If we say we have no sin—that we are incapable of the same old bitterness—we are deceived (1 John 1:8).

This is exactly why I read Luke 6:37 every day: "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven." All commitments to forgive need renewal. In my case, daily. I am not telling you that this is what you must do, but be warned: the devil is cunning. He will come through the back door unexpectedly and try to upset you for forgiving. When you forgave your enemy, you then and there removed that open

invitation to the devil to get inside. Satan's favorite rationale is bitterness—he therefore will keep trying to get back into your thought life.

Whether it be Luke 6:37 or another way forward in your case—even if you aren't required to keep it up each day—I can tell you right now that it is only a matter of time before your commitment to forgive will need to be renewed.

## **7. Pray for them.**

“But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:44). When you do this from the heart—praying for them to be blessed and off the hook—you're there. It is not a perfunctory prayer, not a “We commit them to You” prayer, and certainly not an “Oh God, please deal with them” prayer. It is praying that God will forgive them—that is, overlook what they have done and bless and prosper them as though they'd never sinned at all.

But as John Calvin said, doing this is “exceedingly difficult.” As Chrysostom said, it is the very highest summit of self-control. “Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city” (Prov. 16:32).

Praying for the one who has hurt you or let you down is the greatest challenge of all, for all three reasons:

1. You take a route utterly against the flesh.
2. Nobody will every know you are doing it.
3. Your heart could break when God answers that prayer and truly blesses them as if they'd never sinned.

And yet Jesus's word to pray for such people is not a polite suggestion; it is a command—and one that may seem so outrageous that you want to dismiss it out of hand. Some see it as a lofty but unrealistic goal.

I remember a church leader turning to me to pray about his

son-in-law who had been unfaithful to the leader's daughter. He said to me that his own prayer was only this: that God would "deal" with this man. "This is where I have to come to," he said to me, "that God will deal with him."

I understood what he meant, and I felt for him. I find what people do to our own offspring the hardest things to forgive. I therefore understood what he was feeling. A few days later it was reported that this leader's son-in-law had been in a serious accident. This same church leader was on the phone, glad that the accident had happened. Now in this particular case there was nothing sinister in this euphoria. He simply hoped that the accident would wake up his son-in-law to put his marriage back together. It was so understandable.

But this is not what Jesus means. He is commanding us to pray that our enemy will be blessed. If, however, you should pray that they will be cursed or punished instead of being blessed, just remember that is how your enemy possibly feels about you. After all, have you ever been someone's enemy? Have you ever done something that brought a fellow Christian to tears and brokenness? If so, how would you like that person to pray for you? That God will deal with you? That God will cause you to have an accident? Yet how would it make you feel if they prayed that you would be blessed and let off the hook? That you would prosper as if you'd never sinned? Would you not like that? "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31).

Jesus wants a sincere prayer from us. It is like signing your name to a document, having it witnessed, and never looking back. You are not allowed to tell the world, "Guess what I did? I have actually prayed for my unfaithful spouse to be blessed." No. It is quiet. Only the angels witness it, but it makes God very happy.

After all, every parent wants their children to get along with one another. No parent likes it when one child comes and

squeals on the other and demands that they be punished. The poor parent is put on the spot. What gladdens the heart of every parent is when there is love and forgiveness, and the parent is not put on the spot to have to take sides and punish anyone. That is what we do for God when we ask that He bless and not curse. He told us to pray for our enemies, “that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteousness” (Matt. 5:45).

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## The True Princess



While walking through the Publisher’s Outlet in the lobby of our building where we sell all the items we publish here at Strang Communications, I was surprised to see a book I had bought a copy of about 14 years ago at a Christian bookstore. I found that our company had secured the copyright to this wonderful book.

When I had first seen the book, my daughters were 5, 13 and 15, so I was always looking for something that might be of interest to them and at the same time, make a positive impact on their lives. The book, *The True Princess* by Angela Elwell Hunt, looked like something the girls may want to read, and the pictures were beautiful.

I picked it up and started reading the story, which was about a King who had a beautiful little girl whom he loved very much. She had everything any little girl could ever want. Poets wrote poems and musicians sang songs about her. There

were maids to dress her and jokers to make her laugh. And she had a caregiver, Nana, who took care of her, and her father, the king, who loved her.

Her father suddenly had to go away and was leaving her in the care of Nana. The princess was worried because she didn't know who would feed her, dress her, sing for her or make her laugh. The king explained that one day she would help rule the kingdom but she had to learn many things first. He comforted her by telling her that Nana would be with her and that because Nana was following his wishes, the princess would never be out of his care.

The King and Nana knew the princess had to be kept safe so they put her in regular clothes and hid her away from the palace in a little bakery house because "no one would expect the child of the king to be living as a servant."

Nana taught the princess how to dress herself and sing songs from her heart, and when the little girl put too much yeast into a loaf of bread and the dough exploded all over the kitchen, the princess learned to laugh at herself.

One day, news reached the kingdom that the king would be returning soon. Everyone had looked all over for the princess, but she could not be found. Many girls in the kingdom thought they could take her place so they spent hours making themselves ready.

When the king returned and was ready to receive his daughter, the guards opened the door and the king surprisingly found 25 little girls waiting for him, 24 beautifully dressed and one in a patched dress at the back of the crowd.

The king smiled at the crowd and asked the first little girl to help his servant put on his cloak. The little girl refused and said, "A true princess has maids to do that." The king stopped in front of the second little girl and asked her to sing a song for the kitchen helpers. That little girl frowned



There are people who are just simply nice. They are sweet, friendly and cheerful. They are the type of people you want to be around all the time. At times their pleasant personalities can put Christians who have been saved for years to shame.

However, sometimes in their case an aspect of God's common grace is substituting for the Spirit's manifestation. Their pleasantness may have nothing whatever to do with the fruit of the Spirit. Actually, they acted the same way before they were converted.

It can be difficult to convince people like this of their own need to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit. But sooner or later their self-righteousness will surface if they haven't been convicted of sin. If you recognize this problem in yourself, I urge you to do two things:

\* Thank God for giving you your pleasing temperament.

\* Pray harder than ever to be sensitive to sin and to the Spirit.

**Emotional maturity can look like spiritual maturity.** Some people grow up faster than others, and some develop spiritually more quickly than others. There are many explanations for this.

If a person has developed emotionally in a manner that shows fewer psychological problems, it should not be surprising that he or she appears spiritually mature as well. A person like this may or may not be strong in private prayer, worship and Bible reading but will nonetheless appear levelheaded and responsible compared with a neurotic Christian.

Regeneration and sanctification do not necessarily eradicate damaged emotions that come from abuse or neglect as one was growing up. For this reason a Christian who had severely damaged emotions as a child may struggle in areas in which a relatively unspiritual person does not. The latter may appear

to be more godly when this is not really the case.

For some people, then, the appearance of the Dove may not be the explanation for their apparent maturity. Yet these same people are often the ones who get voted into positions of church leadership and who go into full-time ministry.

They are not unlike King Saul—they have the influence but not necessarily the anointing. Pigeon religion is widespread in the church.

The problem becomes even more complicated when ordinary Christians—beset with emotional difficulties but nonetheless consumed with a love for God and His Word—think that their church leaders aren't very spiritual. A poll showed that the average church leader spends only four minutes a day in quiet time.

**Cultural and intellectual tastes can look like theological maturity.** Some people have a head start when it comes to upbringing. They are brought up with poise, elegance and a certain aptitude for intellectual things. They go to the better schools. They have a cerebral framework that others do not have.

When people such as this become Christians, they may take to Pauline theology like a cat chasing a mouse. Does this mean they are more spiritual? Possibly, but not necessarily. There could be a natural explanation.

People who are theologically minded are not necessarily more interested in the things of the Spirit. They often think it is far more important to articulate the implications of justification by faith alone than to be personally filled with the Spirit.

At the other end of the spectrum are people who are more interested in things of the Spirit than they are in the intricacies of theological orthodoxy. But these people are not

necessarily more spiritual. They may lack theological training and are therefore drawn more naturally to experiential knowledge than to doctrine.

We must resist the temptation to be judgmental about things that are opposed to our own interest levels. Often what appeals to a believer can be explained in natural terms rather than by Holy Spirit-motivated explanation.

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## **Remedy for an Unhappy Marriage**

An unhappy marriage hardly needs defining. We are talking about when you are stuck with spending the rest of your life with someone with whom you are not happy. It is a thorn in the flesh; it is painful. Paul said he prayed three times for his particular situation to be resolved. Perhaps you have prayed 33 times, or even 3,033 times, for your situation to improve. In your dreams, you saw only marital bliss. But, no, it has been anything but bliss. You have watched others separate, and you have envied them. Others get divorced and you think, I wish that could happen to me, but you have stuck it out. You are not happy.

Can this actually describe a Christian? Yes. Does God truly want this in a Christian marriage? No. Have you said to

yourself, Is this all there is? It is like going to that place on vacation when you say, “Is this it? I have looked forward to this?” So it is with marriage. Yet, if you put Jesus Christ first, this nightmare of a marriage can be the greatest source of blessing.

A wife must submit to a husband who is not very nice, and a husband must love his wife even if she, at the moment, may not seem lovable. This is the pattern. Husbands, love your wives. That means you must respect her, build her up, and care for her. This is the challenge to see whether you are a real man. Do you think you are a man merely because you can attract women? Or because of how strong or how good-looking you are? Do you want to be a real man? Then love your wife! That is what builds character.

No marriage is perfect. Most marriages can be saved, and you can fall in love all over again. Love Jesus Christ more than you love each other. Don't wait for the other person to get it right, and you may one day realize that that thorn is part of a rose, beautiful and fragrant.

*Excerpted from The Thorn in the Flesh (Charisma House, 2004).*

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## Let Go of Your Hurts

- ✘ Jesus commands us to forgive, yet most of us treat His words as suggestions. We must learn to release all offense.

All of us have been wounded at some time in our lives, many of us deeply. And it's not something to take lightly. People experience real pain when they or those they love are hurt by another person. Yet we know that the Bible commands us to forgive—and that extending total forgiveness to our offenders

is the only way we will ever find true freedom and release.

Certainly if our offenders would put on sackcloth and ashes as a show of repentance, it would be much easier to forgive them. But remember, at the foot of Jesus' cross no one seemed very sorry. There was no justice at His "trial"—if you could even call it that. A perverse glee filled the faces of the people who demanded His death: "'Crucify him!'" they shouted (Mark 15:13, NKJV). Furthermore, "those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, 'Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!'" (vv. 29-30).

What was Jesus' response? "'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do'" (Luke 23:34).

This must be our response as well.

Jesus could have said, "I forgive you." But such words might have been misinterpreted and wasted, like casting His pearls before swine (see Matt. 7:6). Instead Jesus asked the Father to forgive them, a far more grand gesture.

Asking the Father to forgive them showed not only that Jesus Himself had forgiven them and released them from their guilt but also that He wanted His Father to refrain from punishing them. It was not a perfunctory prayer; Jesus meant it. And it was gloriously answered! These offenders were among those who were converted after Peter's address on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:14-41).

God has given us a mandate in His Word regarding forgiveness: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32). "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Col. 3:13, NIV).

It's not a suggestion. We must totally forgive those who hurt

us.

Totally forgiving someone doesn't necessarily mean you will want to spend your vacation with him or her, but it does mean that you release the bitterness in your heart about what the person has done. We can take our example from the way God treats us.

How does He forgive? Unequivocally and unconditionally. He never holds our sins, which are many, against us or tells others what we did. In practical terms, total forgiveness encompasses all of the following aspects:

**1. Being aware of what someone has done, and still forgiving.**

Total forgiveness is not being oblivious to what an offender did; it is not covering up, excusing or refusing to acknowledge what happened. Total forgiveness is achieved only when we acknowledge what was done without any denial or covering up—and still refuse to make the offender pay for his crime.

Total forgiveness is painful. It hurts when we kiss revenge goodbye. It hurts to think that the person is getting away with what he did and nobody else will ever find out. But when we are able to fully acknowledge what he did and still desire in our hearts that God bless him in spite of his wrong, we cross over into a supernatural realm. We begin to be a little more like Jesus; we begin to change into the image of Christ.

**2. Choosing to keep no records of wrong.** The Bible says that love “keeps no record of wrongs” (1 Cor. 13:5). Love is a choice. Total forgiveness is a choice. It is not a feeling—at least at first—but an act of the will. It is the choice to tear up the record of wrongs we have been keeping.

We clearly see and acknowledge the evil that was done to us, but we erase it—or destroy the record—before it becomes lodged in our hearts. This way resentment does not have a chance to grow.

We must learn to erase the wrong rather than file it away in our mental computer. When we do this all the time—as a lifestyle—we not only avoid bitterness, but we also eventually experience total forgiveness as a feeling—and it is a good feeling.

**3. Refusing to punish.** Refusing to punish those who deserve it—giving up the natural desire to see them “get what’s coming to them”—is the essence of total forgiveness.

Our human nature cannot bear the thought that someone who hurt us would get away with what he has done. It seems so unfair! We want vengeance. But vindication is God’s prerogative alone. In Deuteronomy 32:35 He tells us clearly, “Vengeance is Mine, and recompense” (NKJV).

**4. Not telling what they did.** There is often a need to talk with someone about how you have been hurt, and this can be therapeutic if it is done with the right heart attitude. But if sharing is necessary, choose the person you tell very carefully, making sure that person is trustworthy and will never repeat your situation to those it does not concern.

Anyone who truly forgives, however, does not gossip about his offender. Talking about how you have been wounded with the purpose of hurting your enemy’s reputation or credibility is a form of punishing him. We divulge what that person did so others will think less of him.

When I recall that total forgiveness is forgiving others as I have been forgiven, I remember:

\* I won’t be punished for my sins.

\*\*Nobody will know about my sins, for no sins that are under the blood of Christ will be exposed or held against me.

**5. Being merciful.** When it comes to being merciful, this is our Lord’s command: “Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:36). In the Greek language, mercy is the

opposite of wrath or justice. One difference between grace and mercy is that grace is getting what we don't deserve (favor), and mercy is not getting what we do deserve (justice). So when we show mercy we are withholding justice from those who have injured us, and that is one aspect of godliness.

There is a fringe benefit for those of us who show mercy: We will also be shown mercy (see Matt. 5:7). This shows that total forgiveness is not devoid of self-interest. "The merciful man does good for his own soul" (Prov. 11:17).

**6. Showing graciousness.** True forgiveness shows grace and mercy at the same time. There is an interesting Greek word, *epieikes*, that means "forbearance" or "tolerance." In Philippians 4:5 this word is translated "gentleness."

It comes down to our English word "graciousness." It implies an exceedingly rare act of grace. It cuts right across a legalistic spirit, which is what comes naturally to most of us. This concept is quite threatening to those of us who think that being inflexible for the truth is the ultimate virtue.

Graciousness is withholding certain facts you know to be true in order to leave your enemy's reputation unscathed. Graciousness is shown by what you don't say, even if what you could say would be true.

Self-righteous people find it almost impossible to be gracious; they claim always to be after "the truth," no matter the cost. Total forgiveness sometimes means overlooking what you perceive to be the truth and not letting on about anything that could damage another person.

**7. Letting it start in your heart.** Total forgiveness must take place in the heart or it is worthless, for "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). If we have not truly forgiven those who hurt us, it will come out—sooner or later. But if it has indeed taken place in the heart, our words will show it. When there is bitterness, it

will eventually manifest itself; when there is love, there is “no cause for stumbling” (1 John 2:10).

Because forgiveness takes place in the heart, reconciliation is not a necessary prerequisite. Those who believe they are not required to forgive until their offender has first repented and been reconciled to them are not following Jesus' example on the cross. If He had waited until His enemies felt some guilt or shame for their words and actions, He never would have forgiven them.

**8. Relinquishing bitterness.** Bitterness is an excessive desire for vengeance that comes from deep resentment. It heads the list of things that grieve the Spirit of God (see Eph. 4:30-32). And it is one of the most frequent causes of our missing the grace of God. “[Look] carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled” (Heb. 12:15).

We must, therefore, begin to get rid of a bitter and unforgiving spirit; otherwise, the attempt to forgive will fail. Relinquishing bitterness is an open invitation for the Holy Spirit to give you His peace, His joy and the knowledge of His will.

This is extremely important when it comes to the matter of reconciliation. If I have totally forgiven a person who has hurt me, I will have no bitterness, and I should not feel the slightest bit of guilt or shame for not wanting a complete restoration of that relationship.

Even if there never had been a friendship in the first place, if someone has greatly wronged me, I can forgive him and yet see it as totally reasonable not to invite him to lunch every Sunday.

How can we be sure that there is no bitterness left in our hearts? Bitterness is gone when there is no desire to get even

or punish the offender, when I do or say nothing that would hurt his reputation or future, and when I truly wish him well in all he seeks to do.

**9. Forgiving God.** Although we often do not see it at first, all of our bitterness is ultimately traceable to a resentment of God. Why? Because deep in our hearts we believe He is the one who allowed bad things to happen.

Only a fool would claim to know the full answer to the question, "Why does God allow evil and suffering to continue when He has the power to stop it?"

But there is a partial answer: He does so in order that we may believe. There would be no need for faith if we knew the answer about the origin of evil and the reason for suffering. I know only that it is what makes faith possible.

God can turn evil into blessing. He causes things to work together for good. God did not send His Son into the world to explain evil but rather to save us from it and to exemplify a life of suffering. Jesus suffered as no one else has or ever will.

One day God will clear His own name from the charge of being unjust, but in the meantime, we need to trust Him and take Him at His Word that He is just and merciful.

If we will patiently wait for God's purposes to be fulfilled, in the end—this is a guarantee—we will say that He has done all things well, even in what He permitted. He was never guilty in the first place, but because He sometimes appears to us to have been unfair, we must relinquish our bitterness and wholly forgive Him.

**10. Forgiving ourselves.** There is no lasting joy in forgiveness if it doesn't include forgiving ourselves. It is as wrong as not forgiving others because God loves us just as much as He loves His other children, and He is just as unhappy

when we don't forgive ourselves as He is when we hold a grudge against others.

Put simply, we matter to God. He wants our lives to be filled with joy. That's why He commands us to forgive even ourselves.

Total forgiveness brings such joy and satisfaction that I am almost tempted to call it a selfish enterprise. In fact, studies show that the first person to experience delight when forgiveness takes place is the one who forgives.

So, for your own sake, obey God. Let go of your hurts by forgiving—totally—those who have wounded you.

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## **Forgiveness Is a Lifelong Commitment**

Making a lifelong commitment to total forgiveness means that you keep on doing it—for as long as you live.

**☒ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. —Psalm 51:4**

When I consider the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ knows all about my sin but promises to keep what He has forgiven a carefully guarded secret, it increases my gratitude to Him.

God does not blackmail us. And when a person is guilty of blackmailing someone else, it gets God's attention. He won't stand for it. To hold another person in perpetual fear by threatening, "I'll tell on you," will quickly bring down the wrath of God. When I ponder the sins for which I have been forgiven, it is enough to shut my mouth for the rest of my life.

Making a lifelong commitment to total forgiveness means that you keep on doing it—for as long as you live. It isn't enough to forgive today and then return to the offense tomorrow. I heard of a person whose wife said, "I thought you forgave me." He replied, "That was yesterday." Total forgiveness is a lifelong commitment, and you may need to practice it every single day of your life until you die. No one said it would be easy.

I have seen some people cave in and return to the offense after they extended their forgiveness to someone. But it is not total forgiveness unless it lasts—no matter how great the temptation is to turn back.

If you are prepared to make a covenant to forgive—and to forgive totally—you must realize you will have to renew that covenant tomorrow. And it may be even harder to do tomorrow than it is today. It could even be harder next week—or next year. But this is a lifetime commitment.

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