

# R.T. Kendall: How to Stop Missing God

**How many times have you pushed ahead in your own strength?**

One of the scariest moments in the Gospels comes when Joseph and Mary are returning from Jerusalem to Galilee. They think they have Jesus with them-but they don't. "Supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey" (Luke 2:44).

If I could see a video replay of my life when I get to heaven, I'll bet it would reveal many times when I too proceeded without Jesus, fully believing I had Him with me. I wish I could have that replay now. Perhaps it would enable me to avoid such mistakes in the future.

How do we make this serious error? I believe we make it in at least two ways.

First, we neglect to pray. After ancient Israel began to be victorious in the Promised Land they were totally deceived by the Gibeonites-and paid dearly for it for a long time. Joshua was a godly leader, no doubt led by the Spirit. And yet, unexpectedly, they succumbed to the Gibeonites. Why? The answer would appear to be in these words: "The men of Israel sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the Lord" (Josh.9:14, NIV).

When I was growing up in Kentucky we listened each morning to a radio program with a song that began, "Ere you left your room this morning, did you think to pray?"

Those words have governed me for years. Yet I have still proceeded repeatedly without inquiring of the Lord. I've let common sense or the advice of old friends dictate my direction before I prayed adequately about a matter. Common sense isn't

necessarily the will of God, and even the best friends can fail us.

Although there is safety in a multitude of counsel (see Prov. 11:14) our ultimate source of wisdom lies in seeking God's face. "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Prov. 3:6). As the old hymn puts it, "O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear; all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer."

Forgetting to pray is an easy thing to do, especially when the way forward seems obvious.

Second, I have gone on without Jesus by being out of touch with the Holy Spirit's immediate leadership. This happens when you think you know the ways of the Holy Spirit fairly well. I doubt any of us will get closer to Jesus than Joseph and Mary were. They assumed He would do nothing without them.

But He did.

You may think you are on such good terms with the Holy Spirit that if He decides to make a move, you will be notified in advance! In my life, I've been amazed by the sensitivity of the Holy Spirit. Grieving the Spirit is so easy to do. It can be done by holding the slightest bitterness, or even by making unguarded comments (see Eph. 4:30-32).

When we grieve the Spirit we forfeit the anointing of clear thinking. The Spirit lifts from us—much like Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem and let His parents carry on without Him.

When we realize we have grieved the Spirit, there is only one thing to do: find Him, no matter how humbling it is to do. Joseph and Mary had to go looking for Jesus. When we realize that we have left Him behind, we must too.

When the Spirit of God is in me not grieved, I will not run ahead of Him—at least not for long. When He's inside of me I

miss His company—should He move on—in a short period of time.

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## **Dignify Your Trials**

*Dignifying a trial means to accept it and go through it without it without complaining.*

In the fall of 1979, less than three years after starting my ministry at Westminster Chapel, I began a series of sermons on the book of James. Shortly afterward, I took my family on a vacation that included a trip to Disney World. We had been there the previous year and discovered a pizza parlor in Kissimmee, Florida, that served the best pizza I had ever eaten. So I promised my family I would get them pizza there again.

After we checked into our motel, we went to the pizza place, about six blocks away, and put in our order. A good while later I went to the counter and asked about the pizzas, which had not come out yet, and a new man who had just started his shift claimed he did not have our order. Without bothering to apologize, he demanded, “So what do you want?”

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# R. T. Kendall: 10 Things at Stake if You Don't Forgive Yourself

Have you ever felt guilty at the thought of totally forgiving yourself? I have.

The idea is this. What I have done is so horrible that I do not deserve to be set free from guilt. It would be irresponsible to forgive myself totally and not look back. I must pay for my failure. I must see that I get justice.

The same is true in forgiving others. We are afraid they will not get justice. To forgive them sets them free and therefore means they may not get punished. When my friend Josif Tson said to me, "R.T., you must totally forgive them," I was not happy. But I knew he was right. I took his advice and was set free with a peace I had forgotten about.

I have to tell you, I went back and forth, back and forth, for months. The peace would come and go in direct proportion to my attitude toward those who had hurt Louise and me.

I'm sorry it took a while, but I came to a conclusion: The peace is better! The way forward is to set such a high value on the peace you get from total forgiveness that you prefer the peace more than their being punished.

Before we proceed, I must further clarify what the implications are when we totally forgive ourselves. It is not only letting ourselves off the hook but also setting ourselves free from any sense of punishment. This includes accepting ourselves as we are and never looking back. It is letting the past be past.

Here are 10 reasons why you should forgive yourself:

**1. It is precisely what God wants us to do.** This is what many of us have difficulty believing, but it is a sin against God not to forgive ourselves (see Eph. 4:31-32).

**2. Satan does not want us to forgive ourselves.** I believe that one of the ways to know the will of God is to imagine what the devil would want us to do-then do the opposite.

**3. You will have inner peace and freedom from the bondage of guilt.** There is nothing to compare with the peace and freedom that comes from total forgiveness. Are you weighed down with guilt over the past? It does not need to last.

**4. The degree to which you forgive yourself may directly relate to your usefulness.** I can tell you that totally forgiving myself and forgiving others have been a lifeline to the anointing of the Spirit.

**5. Totally forgiving yourself will help you love people more.** People who do not totally forgive those who hurt them often do not like themselves. It is not surprising, then, that they struggle with liking people.

**6. People will like you more when you have forgiven yourself.** Not forgiving yourself is an exhibition of the wrong kind of self-love. Self-love is preoccupation with your personal desires; loving yourself is respecting yourself as God intends.

**7. It will enable you to fulfill all God has in mind for you and thus keep you from being paralyzed by the past.** When you truly believe you are forgiven and you have totally forgiven yourself, it shows. People will want what you have.

**8. Your own physical health can be at stake.** It has been proven by medical research that holding a grudge can injure your health. Not forgiving yourself is bad for your health, too. This is because you are holding a grudge against yourself!

**9. Your mental and emotional health is at stake.** The main problem all counselors face-whether their clients have religious backgrounds or not-is that of guilt. It pleases God for His people to have good mental health. Forgiving ourselves is a good place to start.

**10. You should forgive yourself because your spiritual state is at stake.** There is an inseparable connection between our spiritual health and a good relationship with the Holy Spirit (see Eph. 4:30). Forgiving ourselves helps ensure that the anointing is on us; not doing so means that we forfeit a measure of His presence.

Totally forgiving ourselves is not merely an option; we have a command from God to do this. With this mandate accepted by us, God can use us to exceed all we ever dreamed of. If God can forgive and use a man who knew Jesus as Peter did and who fell pitifully and horribly, He can use you and me. Peter had Jesus' prayers behind him. So do we. Jesus' prayers for Peter enabled him to forgive himself. His prayer will do that for you, too.

Adapted from *How to Forgive Ourselves Totally* by R.T. Kendall, copyright 2007, published by Charisma House.

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## **Learn to Adjust to the Holy Spirit**

Adjusting to the Holy Spirit is not easy. It is inconvenient. It requires making major changes in some of the habits that have never bothered us before. The question is, how far are

you and I prepared to go in developing an acute sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's ways? I pray it will not be said of us, "They have not known my ways," as said of ancient Israel (Ps. 95:10, NIV). By not knowing His ways, Israel forfeited its inheritance.

Adjusting to the Dove is welcoming His presence. It is also giving Him no cause to leave.

How do we welcome Him? For one thing, tell Him! Have you often addressed the Holy Spirit in these words, "Holy Spirit, I welcome You"? Do this. Tell Him He is most welcome. Doing this is, in my opinion, virtually the first thing we must utter to God—together with the prayer for the sprinkling of Christ's blood on us—every single morning of our lives.

You may say, "He already knows He is welcome." Really? Do you think He would love to hear you tell Him this? When you visit someone, and that person says to you, "You are most welcome here," doesn't it make you feel good?

Is the Holy Spirit so sensitive that He needs to be told He is welcome? Perhaps. Most people, sadly, want little or nothing to do with Him. You can prove you are different by welcoming Him! You can develop a deeper intimacy with the Lord by talking to Him about the most obvious and simple things—just as you would do with a friend.

But welcome Him to come in the manner He chooses.

There are several ways in which He may test our willingness to welcome Him. He may gently suggest that your attitude toward someone is not right. If you push this thought to one side, the chances are that the Spirit may well unobtrusively slip away. You cannot be selective in the manner He may choose to come. When the Spirit departs like this, you usually feel nothing at first. And yet you *do* feel something—righteousness in yourself that your attitude is justified.

I've been in that position a thousand times. I know what it is to feel so upset that they could do such a thing! Often I have conversations with myself, imagining what I will say to the other person. I rehearse what the other person did. "That can't be right," I keep saying. I even imagine that I hear God saying, "Of course that's not right." I start feeling good, as if God is on *my side—not theirs*. I tell myself that I sense the presence of the heavenly Dove. Wrong! If anything, it's a pigeon.

When I welcome the Holy Spirit I must take Him as *He* wants to come. He may flood my soul with joy and peace. He may highlight a verse as I read the Bible, showing me something I hadn't seen before. I love it when He applies the Word to a current situation in such a manner that I *know* what to do that day. I don't like it, however, when that Word instructs me to apologize to my wife—or a deacon, friend, or fellow minister—before I can feel great peace again.

Of one thing we can be sure, however. The *end result* of the Holy Spirit's manifestation provides considerable inner peace. Peace.

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Adapted from *By Love Transformed* by **R.T. Kendall**, copyright 2006, published by Charisma House. This classic devotional will help you be transformed by God's love and experience Him in ways you never dreamed possible. Taken from Kendall's most beloved writings, it contains 365 timeless messages that are practical, realistic and profoundly personal.

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# Your Trial May Take You to the Next Level

I remember exactly where I was when the meaning of James 1:2-3 dawned on me. I wasn't at an all-night prayer meeting. I wasn't at the end of a 40-day fast. No, I was at a pizzeria in Kissimmee, Fla., in the summer of 1979, and I had just lost my temper.

I had been looking forward to enjoying a pizza from this particular place. But everything went wrong. First, the pizzas took 45 minutes to prepare. Then, as I carried them to my motel room through the pouring rain, they fell out of their wet paper bag into a puddle of water.

I had already told off the manager because I'd waited so long for the first set of pizzas. Now I was going to have to face him again to get new ones.

"How could all this happen?" I asked myself.

That's when James 1:2-3 came to me: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance" (NIV).

This verse had already been on my mind for weeks, since I was planning to preach on the book of James in the autumn. As I returned to the pizzeria, I said to myself, "Either James 1:2 is true or it isn't. And if I plan to preach on it shortly, I had better begin practicing what I preach!"

This trial of having everything go wrong with a long-awaited pizza, when people all over the world are starving, hurting, living in poverty or dying from disease, is almost too silly to mention. It was hardly the greatest trial a person could suffer.

But I have to tell you, this episode—this “trial”—was pivotal in my life. Minutes before I returned to the pizzeria to apologize with genuine meekness to the manager, I repented before God for my anger and behavior.

In that moment a new phrase was born to me: “dignifying the trial.” I decided then and there to dignify that situation by accepting the entire matter as something that God sent. It was a divine setup.

I not only repented to the Lord, but I also thanked Him for the whole thing. I apologized to the manager and cheerfully waited for another pizza. (For some reason, he wouldn't let me pay.)

When I returned to my family at the motel, I was a different person.

### **A GOD-GIVEN PRIVILEGE**

According to James 1:2, a trial is a God-given privilege that we are to “consider” pure joy. The Greek word is *hegeomai*, meaning “to value highly, to esteem.” In other words, what would naturally make us feel the opposite—upset or sorry for ourselves—is to be valued as a wonderful opportunity.

How do we make that adjustment in our thinking? Only by sufficient motivation. We must be inspired or stimulated to look at trials in a positive manner.

Take Moses, for example. The Bible says he “regarded” disgrace for the sake of Christ to be of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, “because he was looking ahead to his reward” (Heb. 11:26).

Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus Himself endured the cross because of “the joy that was set before him.” He did not enjoy the taunts or relish the physical pain. But He considered the cross pure joy because pure joy was coming. And it came!

The message of James 1:2 is that trials are a good thing, if we have a positive attitude toward them when they come. James certainly doesn't say we will enjoy trials. Instead, we must endure them.

But we can regard the thought of them as pure joy because of what they can do for us.

Every trial has the potential to lead to great reward. James wants us to see that—by faith. He wants us to understand that trials are the gateway to God's anointing in our lives.

### **THE GATEWAY TO GOD'S ANOINTING**

If it is anointing you want, then expect suffering. If it is a great anointing you want, anticipate great suffering at some stage.

When I say, "anointing," I am talking about the power of the Holy Spirit to make us do what we do with ease and without fatigue. The main reason for burnout and fatigue among Christians is almost certainly because we go beyond our anointing; we go outside it rather than functioning within it.

We can pray for greater anointing—for the ability to do what we previously could not do in our own strength. This is a legitimate desire; Paul told us to earnestly desire the greater gifts (see 1 Cor. 12:31). God will answer this request so long as it is in His will and sought with His glory in mind (see 1 John 5:14).

Just don't be surprised when you wake up one morning with an enormous trial in front of you. Instead, grasp it with both hands, and consider it pure joy. It is a fairly strong hint from the Lord that you are going to receive the anointing you desire.

Of course, James does not specifically use the word "anointing." His exact words are, "Consider it pure

joy...because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance” (James 1:1-3, emphasis added).

What does perseverance have to do with anointing? Perseverance is the next step forward—the link to a brilliant future. God does not lead us from A to Z, but from A to B.

During a trial, the immediate need is for perseverance. It is not the ultimate goal; but it is what enables you to reach the goal that James envisions: “Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:4).

By dignifying your trial, James says, you will reach a place of indescribable peace and the highest level of anointing. You will have a soul uncluttered by greed and a heart filled with the very presence of God. You will experience pure joy.

### **DIGNIFYING YOUR TRIAL**

Are you ready to dignify your trials and experience more joy and a greater anointing than you have ever known? Here are eight steps you can take when your time of testing comes:

**1. Welcome the trial.** Welcome your trial as you would welcome the Holy Spirit; for it is the Holy Spirit who is behind the whole ordeal, along with the Father and the Son. Even though the beginning of a trial can be painful, say to the Lord, “I know You have sent this to me, and I want to get the maximum benefit You had in mind when You ordained it.” This way, you begin to dignify the trial from the first moment.

**2. Don't panic.** Satan's immediate goal when he is given permission to attack is to get you to panic. This is why he is compared to a roaring lion (see 1 Pet. 5:8). The reason for the roar is to intimidate and cause fear and panic—to make you think you are defeated even before anything has happened.

Remember that God OK'd your trial before it came to you. He reckoned that you were able to cope, or He would not have

allowed it (see 1 Cor. 10:13). As the psalmist put it, "Do not fret—it leads only to evil" (Ps. 37:8).

**3. See the trial as a compliment to you from God.** The kind of trial that God has allowed you to have is very possibly one that could not be granted to others around you. Whereas your first reaction (understandably) may be to feel sorry for yourself, on reflection you should be able to see that God gave this trial to you for one reason: You are up to it.

**4. Never forget that God allowed the trial.** This point must be stressed because Satan wants you to feel sorry for yourself, point the finger at others, and become angry and bitter toward God. Instead, when a trial comes, stop and realize: This scenario has passed through God's filtering process. He could have stopped it, yes, but He didn't.

Try not to get hung up on the vexing theological question of whether God caused—or only permitted—the trial to happen. There is a fine line between the two, and nobody in the history of the world has it all figured out.

Besides, whether your trial is something as big as physical pain or as small as losing your keys, it doesn't matter if God caused it or simply allowed it. You know this much: He let it happen. Your task is to dignify the trial, whether it is big or small.

**5. Know that there is a purpose in the trial.** Were it not for this, there would be no point in counting a trial "pure joy." James states that the immediate purpose of a trial is to develop perseverance that leads to joy so wonderful, you lack nothing.

Here is James 1:2-4 translated in The Message: "Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so

you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way.”

There is a purpose in what you’re going through. It may be to refine you; to teach you a lesson; to equip you; or to teach you self-control. The bottom line is that every trial is designed to make you more like Jesus.

**6. Don’t try to end the trial.** As The Message puts it, “Don’t try to get out of anything prematurely.” God will end your trial at the right time. It will last as long as it’s supposed to last. Try to end it before its time, and you will fail the test.

Your assignment is to dignify the trial by letting it run its course, however long God decides that will be. If you do nothing to bring about its conclusion—if you let God be in control of the timing—you will not only pass the test, but you will also enjoy the fruit of righteousness that God purposed for you.

**7. Don’t grumble.** Here’s a sobering thought: God puts grumbling alongside idolatry and sexual sin in the lists of evil deeds that brought His wrath down on ancient Israel (see 1 Cor. 10:1-12).

It takes no talent or training to criticize and complain. It is part of being a sinner. It takes great grace to endure trials and keep quiet in the hard times.

Remember, God wants you to pass the test far more than you do. Why? First, because He loves you so much that He rejoices when you experience pure joy.

Second, it brings Him glory when you dignify your trial by cheerfully enduring. So trust God in the midst of your trial, and don’t grumble.

**8. Don’t go looking for trials.** If pure joy is the ultimate

result of dignifying a trial, you might logically assume that you should go looking for fiery trials. Wrong. The qualification for a trial to be dignified is that it happens without you doing a thing to precipitate it.

Jesus told us to pray that we would not enter into temptation, or trial (see Matt. 6:13). But when a trial comes—and it comes without you causing it—consider it pure joy.

You may never have another trial that is like the one you are in right now. Dignify it. Welcome it without panic or grumbling.

Know that God has allowed this trial for a great purpose, and endure it to the end. You will be glad you did!

Read a companion devotional.

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*R.T. Kendall is the author of Pure Joy (Charisma House), from which this article is adapted.*

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## **When You Can't Have It Your Way**

*DOES GOD EVER ASK HIS SERVANTS TO WALK WITH HIM IN PLACES THAT ARE UNCOMFORTABLE AND EVEN UNDESIRABLE? THE SCRIPTURES AND HISTORY TELL US, YES.*

One of the most stunning comments I ever heard, almost a throwaway remark, came from one of the most famous ministers in the world. He said to me, “R.T., the more God uses me, the less I am able to enjoy it.”

This may be incomprehensible to some, but I know exactly what he meant. God has many ways of ensuring that while we enjoy His blessing, we do not become conceited.

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## **Do You Have A Thorn in the FLESH?**

Even the apostle Paul struggled with the pull of his sin nature. You can allow weaknesses to cripple you, or you can discover the secret of overcoming.

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## **When Forgiveness Seems Impossible**

*WE KNOW THAT BITTERNESS HINDERS OUR EFFECTIVENESS FOR GOD. BUT HOW MUCH FORGIVENESS IS ENOUGH?*

Most of us have times in our lives when we are pushed to our limits with regard to forgiving others. I have vowed not to retell my story, but suffice it to say, I had never been hurt so deeply before or since.

I couldn't discuss it with my family members. But one friend from Romania was far removed from the situation, so I was able to tell him everything.

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# Don't Hold On to 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 101**

**Of his more than 3,500 sermons, R.T. Kendall says the message in his book Total Forgiveness is the most vital.**

A noted Bible teacher and former pastor of Westminster Chapel in London, England, R.T. Kendall has given his share of sermons. But he says the message in his book *Total Forgiveness* (Charisma House) has garnered an overwhelming response. He spoke with us about what it means to release offense.

### **What prompted you to write this book?**

It was born in the greatest trial of my life at the time. An old friend, Josif Tson, said to me: "R.T., you must totally forgive [those who hurt you]. Until you totally forgive them you will be in chains. Release them, and you will be released." Nobody had ever talked to me like that before. But it was the greatest single word anybody ever said to me.

### **How can someone know whether he or she has totally forgiven?**

We do not tell people what "they" did to us; we will not let them be afraid of us; we will not let them feel guilty for what they did; we let them save face, as God lets us save face; we assure them that their secret is safe with us forever; we do not do it once—total forgiveness is what we do every single day as long as we live; and finally, we pray for them—as Jesus did, that they will be forgiven, let off the hook.

### **What are the consequences of not forgiving totally?**

Spiritually, we grieve the Holy Spirit. Physically, holding a grudge can cause high blood pressure, arthritis, kidney disease and other ailments. Emotionally or psychologically, it will shape your personality so that you become unpopular with people; they avoid you because you are a constant complainer.

### **What would you say to someone who feels they have been hurt so deeply they cannot forgive?**

I would assure them I do understand their hurt. But not forgiving is always counter-productive. They are hurting

themselves more than they realize.

### **How has this message changed you personally?**

Totally forgiving those who have hurt me is the greatest thing I ever did in my life. I cannot exaggerate this. It has shaped my personality, my marriage and my preaching.

### **Is it possible to forgive and forget?**

Total forgiveness is not forgetting. We do not play games with ourselves. We never forget what they did, nor are we required to. In fact, it is not true forgiveness unless we know what they did but still forgive.

### **What would you say to those who struggle with forgiving themselves?**

Not forgiving ourselves is a combination of self-pity and self-righteousness, and we must come to terms with the fact that God wants us to forgive who are hardest on themselves are usually hardest on others. And the closer we come to forgiving others, the easier it will be to forgive ourselves.

### **How have others responded to this message?**

Of all my sermons on record (about 3,500, if you can believe that), my message on total forgiveness brings the greatest response of all I have ever preached.

### **How has unforgiveness hindered the body of Christ?**

Immeasurably. Forgiveness is almost certainly the greatest need in the church today. Unforgiveness divides members, marriages, pastor and deacons, pastor and pastor, friends. It destroys unity, grieves the Holy Spirit and delays revival.

### **What are the benefits of forgiveness?**

It can in some cases hasten the baptism of the Spirit. It will save homes. It will bring mental health quicker than 1,000

hours of psychiatric counseling (and I am not against this). The sooner a person forgives, the sooner they can live with themselves, like people, be liked and enjoy God's presence.

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R.T. Kendall pastored Westminster Chapel in London for 25 years. He is the author of more than 30 books, including *The Word and the Spirit*, *The Sensitivity of the Spirit* and *Total Forgiveness*, all from Charisma House.

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## **Don't Fall for a Cheap Imitation of the Holy Spirit**

*What people think is the Holy Spirit is often a cheap imitation. Don't be deceived.*

Pigeons and doves are in the same family and look much the same. But the pigeon is not the symbol of peace. It was not a pigeon that came down and remained on Jesus. The turtledove—symbolizing the Holy Spirit—is different from a pigeon in interesting ways.

My friend Pete Cantrell is an expert on pigeons and turtledoves. His observations have amused and gripped me. Their relevance to a study of the Holy Spirit is almost astonishing.

“Do you see that pigeon?” he once asked me. “Watch him, he's getting ready to bully the pigeon next to him because it is perched on the spot he wants for himself.” Seconds later, I watched it happen.

“I don't see that happening with turtledoves,” Pete added. “Doves don't fight.”

It seems to me that many of the claims to the presence of the Dove among us are nothing but pigeon religion—a counterfeit for the Holy Spirit. In my own haste I have presumed the presence of God in my life many times—when it was not the Dove after all. Often it has been a pigeon—not the heavenly Dove—that gave me a “religious” feeling. Here’s how you can avoid making the same mistake.

### **Don’t Be Fooled by Appearances**

When one is preconditioned for a certain manifestation of the Holy Spirit, it is easy to presume the presence of the genuine Holy Spirit when you see that particular manifestation. Take falling down and laughing as examples.

I happen to believe that the phenomena of falling down and laughing have been the authentic results of God’s presence in some places. But when one attends a church where this happens a lot, it’s likely that someone could easily fall to the floor after being prayed for and that there could be an entirely natural explanation for it.

Several years ago, because I was sitting on the front row, I felt compelled to come forward when the preacher asked all church leaders to line up for prayer in the front. I sincerely hoped that God would come down on me and do whatever He pleased. Seventy or 80 men and women were lined up ahead of me for prayer.

As the preacher prayed for each person, every one of them fell backward into the arms of the “catcher” waiting next in line. Then the preacher came to me. I stood there like the Statue of Liberty. Nothing happened.

He prayed again, then a third time. Had I closed my eyes and been less conscious of standing straight, I suspect I too would have fallen.

I felt sorry for the preacher and wanted to apologize for his

embarrassment when I didn't fall. I wanted to go down—I promise you. But I didn't want to be pushed over by a pigeon!

I'm not saying that the Dove did not come down on some, if not all the other people in that line. But I believe that their expectancy was so high and the preconditioning so powerful that a pigeon could have done the same thing.

Pigeons may be present whenever God shows up in genuine Holy Spirit power. On one night there may be a most awesome sense of God's presence.

You may feel it in the worship, in the preaching and in the time of prayer ministry. People may be shedding tears of joy and repentance and laughing and crying. Scores may be converted and many healed.

You can't wait for the next night. That night the same worship group leads with the same songs and hymns. The same preacher takes his text from God's Word. But God chooses not to show up.

The important issue is this: Will the minister in charge have the integrity not to manipulate the people? Or will he feel that to be successful, that night's meeting must appear to be just like the meeting on the previous night? If he thinks that, it is likely he may practice pigeon religion in order to get the same results.

The genuine Dove is like the wind that blows "'wherever it pleases'" (John 3:8, NIV). If one is truly sensitive to the Spirit, he or she must flow with the Spirit as well. And if one is equally sensitive to His absence, that person will honor God's sovereignty and will not pretend.

It takes a lot of courage to yield to the Spirit when He comes in power. It takes equal courage to be unpretentious when He is absent. Both aspects of the Dove can threaten one's comfort zone.

There is nothing like a large crowd to counterfeit the presence of the Dove. A big group can create an expectant atmosphere. Nothing preconditions a leader or a congregation like a church that's filled with people.

If there is a lack of discernment and sensitivity to the person of the Spirit, which is needed all the more at such a time, a pigeon could come down on the heads of everyone present, and no one would know the difference. I fear this has happened many times—and to the best of people.

The initial similarity of appearance between a pigeon and the Dove can even produce a “bandwagon” effect—everyone becomes excited and wants to be “in” on what is happening. This can continue for some time. But eventually one wakes up and comes to terms with the sobering possibility that it was all hype. It hurts when you realize you were taken in and that there was a fleshly explanation for everything that happened.

This can happen at an individual level as well, whether it be through speaking in tongues or through prophetic words of knowledge. If we convince ourselves that God must manifest Himself, we will settle for almost anything.

It is almost as if one says, “Well, if I can't have the Dove, I'll take a pigeon.” But if we believe that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever, we ought not settle for the counterfeit.

### **Don't Manipulate the Spirit**

A pigeon can be domesticated, trained and manipulated. A pigeon can be easily controlled and made to conform. Not so with a turtledove.

Nor can the Spirit of God be easily manipulated or controlled: “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going,” (John 3:8). You cannot make the Holy Dove do anything—except

when you make it fly away.

Feeling the need to control the Holy Spirit may be one of the greatest abuses of the Spirit. When we begin to feel we can control the will of the Holy Spirit, pigeon religion has moved in. Yet often we continue trying to convince ourselves that it must be the Dove.

The issue is control. Who's in charge? Some people play with the Holy Spirit as if He has no will of His own.

We can fall prey to this when we are praying alone by attempting to do all the talking—thus quenching the Spirit. Or we can read the Bible and do all the thinking. In this way, the Dove does not have a chance to slip in.

The same can happen with public leadership. A powerful leader (even a worship leader or preacher) can sometimes control a crowd with his or her gift and personality. The people out there may not have a clue they are being manipulated.

The problem lies in the fact that one's gift is, in a sense, also one's anointing. God shapes each gift and personality for His glory.

However, not everything that someone with an anointed gift does is Spirit-led. We are under a solemn obligation to follow—not lead—the Holy Spirit. I may have an anointing to teach and preach, but I can get ahead of the Lord. When I do, pigeon religion takes over because I am in control.

Some years ago I talked with a worship leader about his style of leading worship. He admitted he had a gift that enabled him to control an audience.

He could make them do almost anything—clap, jump, sit or weep. When he did this, the people never knew they had been conditioned for a certain response in much the same way pigeons are trained to perform a particular behavior. It is an

exceedingly rare worship leader who is utterly sensitive to the Dove and does not get ahead of the Lord.

Pigeon religion is man in control. It is manipulative, usurping the place of the Dove.

The gracious Spirit is gentle and prudent. Like the meek and lowly Jesus, the Dove is neither intrusive (coming when not invited) nor obtrusive (unpleasantly noticeable). He is self-effacing. When He is invited and accepts the invitation, the result takes man out of the picture.

When the Spirit is present, people want to wait on the Spirit. They want to worship, and they let the Spirit do the leading. When this happens, it is an unforgettable experience—one worth waiting for.

The Spirit will not be manipulated. The Dove flutters away as soon as one tries to do this, and the pigeon comes in.

### **Don't Be Territorial**

A pigeon thinks a certain place belongs to him. Pigeon religion is manifested when one instinctively feels he or she has a "corner" on the anointing. This happens when we take ourselves too seriously.

It also happens when we decide we own the franchise on God's enterprise in a particular theological or geographic area. As a result, we struggle against someone else "elbowing in" on our calling, area of expertise or following.

This is a party spirit, a rival or competitive spirit. Because we uphold a particular emphasis, we want to be the sole vanguard for the "party line."

Nothing is more deadly than a rival spirit in the church of God. Take the subject of revival, for example. I think we all agree that there is a heart cry for revival today. I doubt there is any evangelical group or church that is not praying

for revival—a sovereign outpouring of God’s Spirit that will revive the people of God and result in many conversions.

The problem is, we all want it to come to us! We all tend to see ourselves as having “borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day” (Matt. 20:12). We resent it if God makes others “equal to us”! We want God to bless our efforts, our party line and our denomination.

Therefore we tend to dismiss any report of God’s coming down powerfully on anyone but us. We honestly believe it couldn’t happen to those who are of a different theological persuasion or ecclesiastical setting.

Not long ago a weekly prayer meeting on the second floor of a civic center in Nairobi, Kenya, centered on revival. A group of a dozen Western missionaries prayed earnestly that God would send revival to Nairobi.

At exactly the same time, 700 Kenyans were praying noisily and worshipping God—and growing rapidly—in the large auditorium just beneath the group of Western missionaries. The irony is, God was answering the missionaries’ prayers!

But they could not bring themselves to recognize revival under their noses—for the Kenyans below them didn’t represent their party line. Another example of pigeon religion!

None of us has a monopoly on the anointing. Jesus’ disciples wanted to stop someone praying in Jesus’ name “‘because he is not one of us’” (Luke 9:49-50). Jesus stepped in, admonishing, “‘Do not stop whoever is not against you is for you.’”

Even Joshua, when he was young and still had a lot to learn, was unhappy when certain people were prophesying without recognized credentials. “But Moses replied: ‘Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!’” (Num. 11:29). That is the way God would have us all to reject pigeon

religion and pray for the restoration of His honor in the world (rather than just in our own ministries).

The Spirit will do His work—if we don't get in the way. We must not step in where we don't belong or elbow in on the Spirit's territory. For the Spirit to be able to do His work, we must simply be the channel through which He works. If we try to do what He does best, He flutters away.

You may think you are incapable of being deceived by a pigeon. But all of us are as capable of following pigeon religion as we are of following the Holy Dove.

Simon Peter was being led by the Dove when he said to Jesus, “‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’” (Matt. 16:16). Yet just a few verses later Jesus turned and said to Peter: “‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men’” (v. 23).

Our best guarantee against following pigeon religion is an ever-increasing sensitivity to the Dove.

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R.T. Kendall has been the pastor of Westminster Chapel in London for the last 25 years. He now lives in Key Largo, Florida. He is a well-known speaker and the author of Total Forgiveness, soon to be released from Charisma House.