

# Holding On When You Want to Let Go (book excerpt)

A young woman at an event several years ago asked me a question. "If I tell you my story will you believe me?" I assured her that I would but her question stayed with me. What must it be like to have gone through a painful situation, a devastating trauma, a life-shaping event, and not be believed? I can't count how many stories I've listened to through the years from those who, when they found the courage to tell someone, were not believed. That has to be like pouring acid into a still open wound. I will keep the individuals anonymous but several of their stories will never leave me.

A twelve-year-old girl decides to tell her mother that the live-in boyfriend is sexually abusing her. Her mom punishes her, calling her a liar.

A young boy scrapes up the courage to tell his pastor that the youth minister is abusing him. He is not believed and the abuse continues for three more years.

A teenage girl tells her parents that she needs help to deal with her crippling depression. They tell her that there is no such thing for a believer in Christ. She should just pray and read her Bible more. She dies by suicide.

I could fill page after page with these stories but you have your own. It is a double betrayal to suffer and then not be believed. One of the hardest lessons that I've had to teach my son is that life is not fair. Christian has a very compassionate heart and with that empathy comes a passion for justice. It is one of his greatest strengths but a strength like that can be an Achilles heel if you don't know what to do with the inequity of life.

I remember picking him up from school one day and I could tell

by the look on his face that he was struggling with something. Eventually he opened up and told me what had happened. It boiled down to one of his best friends doing something disruptive in class and blaming Christian for it. That was hard enough but the final straw was that the teacher believed his friend. Christian asked his friend to tell the teacher the truth and he refused. I remember the look in his eyes as he told me his story. He was hurt and angry.

These moments in life matter. Will we be believed? Obviously, I believed him but even if we are believed, what do we do with the raging sense of how unfair life can be?

That evening when Christian was ready to go to bed I asked him to take a walk with me. Before we left, I gave him a very large bag of flour to carry. I told him that we'd need it on our adventure. We walked for quite a while in silence, the only interruption was this frequent question known to parents far and near, "Are we there yet?"

Finally, he sat down on the grass and declared that he could go no further. Then we talked. I told him that his friend was probably asleep by now and here he was, carrying a heavy bag of flour instead of being tucked up in bed. He reminded me that the flour and the walk were my idea. I smiled and told him I was aware of that but wanted him to understand what the flour represented.

"The flour is like the pain you're carrying inside. You want life to be fair, darling. I get that. The reality is that fair doesn't live here but Jesus does."

We talked about the power of forgiveness, which he was initially very resistant to. His friend wasn't sorry so why should he forgive? Good question. As we sat at the edge of the golf course under a perfect full moon, I shared with him a principle about forgiveness that has been life-changing for me.

“God doesn’t want to make you forgive so that you are a good Christian. No. Forgiveness is God’s gift to us to live in a world that is not fair.”

When you have been wounded by someone who is not sorry, what do you do with that pain? Unchecked it can fester for years and color the rest of your life. Sadly, I’ve prayed with many men and women who are seemingly frozen in what happened to them.

Abandoned by a husband. He’s moved on, remarried, financially secure. You have been left in a vulnerable place, alone, discarded. So unfair.

Someone lied about you at work. It cost you your job. They are now not only secure but have been promoted. So unfair.

You have fought tirelessly to get full custody of your children because of the kind of person you were married to and how badly they treated your children in the past. Your ex’s lawyer says that you are mentally unstable and on psychiatric medication. The only reason you’re taking the medication is to help you get through this nightmare. The judge sides with your ex and rules in their favor. So unfair.

The scenarios are endless but the question is simple: What do you do in a place like that?

Are you stuck forever?

Are you stuck until someone says sorry?

Are you stuck until someone believes you?

No! Jesus offers a better way.

If you have carried an internal bag of flour around for years, there is a place to take it. If you have been wounded and then not believed, there is an invitation to a place of rest and peace. Forgiving someone doesn’t make what they did right. It

doesn't lessen the wrong; it sets you free. It's as if you take this gigantic bag of flour that you have carried for so long to the foot of the cross where the greatest injustice in human history occurred and you leave it there. You give it to Jesus. You let go. You let Him deal with it all because He loves you and, I want you to hear this—He believes you.

“Fair Doesn't Live Here But Jesus Does” — excerpted from *Holding On When You Want to Let Go* (used by permission of Baker Publishing). {eo}

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