

Keep No Record of Wrongs

Though seemingly impossible, you can forgive—completely—and finally let go of the past

I received a heartrending letter from a couple who had heard me teach on the subject of total forgiveness a few years ago. They told me what their son-in-law had done to their daughter and grandchildren. It was an awful story. “Are you saying we must totally forgive our son-in-law?” they asked.

That was a hard question to answer. But I had to tell them the truth: Yes, they must learn to forgive. My heart went out to them. I can only imagine the pain they have experienced. But total forgiveness is the only way they will ever find freedom and release from the offense.

I have received many other letters that describe everything from infidelity to incest to rape to lying and slander. It is enough to make me consider very carefully indeed what I preach and write. People experience real pain when they or someone they love is hurt by another person. It is often harder to forgive when the one who has been hurt is someone you love deeply, especially your child. I find it much easier to forgive what people have said or done to me personally than what they say or do to my children.

It is not unlike Corrie ten Boom’s having to forgive the prison guard who was so cruel to her sister Betsie. Corrie saw this man viciously abuse her sister—who died shortly afterward—when both of them were in prison for protecting Jews in Holland during World War II. Years later, Corrie was seated on the platform of a church, preparing to speak in a service, when she spotted this very man in the audience. She struggled in her heart. She prayed in desperation for God to fill her heart with the love of Jesus. He did, but forgiveness became even more of a challenge when, after the service, this guard

rather glibly said, in so many words, how good God is to forgive all of us. She wondered how sorry he was.

It is often easier, then, it seems to me, to forgive what is done to us personally than what is done to those we love. But it is still very hard to forgive those who have hurt us directly, especially when they do not feel the slightest twinge of conscience. If our offender would put on at least some symbolic show of repentance, it would be much easier for us to forgive them.

Love Doesn't Keep Score

Love is a choice. It is an act of the will. The great love chapter of the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13, is a perfect demonstration of the cause and effect of total forgiveness. The apex of this wonderful passage is the phrase found in verse 5: Love "keeps no record of wrongs" (NIV). The Greek word that is translated as "no record" is *logizomai*, which means to not reckon or impute. Keeping a record of wrongs is also an act of the will—a choice not to love—and it is the more natural, easy choice.

A key to letting go of the record of wrongs and achieving total forgiveness lies in the control of the tongue. The words we say can cause the catastrophe to which James refers: "Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell" (James 3:5-6, NKJV).

The irony is that our words, instead of helping us "get something off our chest," can cause an uncontrollable fire to erupt and incinerate what remains inside us. And instead of that fire subsiding, it doubles, intensifies and gets a thousand times worse in the end. It is a satanic victory,

ultimately traceable to our keeping a record of wrongs.

How, then, do we deal with our tongue? Two things, I believe, will help:

- When a person does wrong, refuse to point it out to the person.
- When a person does wrong, refuse to point it out to others.

If this were to become a more popular lifestyle, the number of records kept would plummet! By refusing to continually bring up the hurt in conversations, the record of that hurt would eventually disappear.

This principle also applies to imaginary conversations—those internal dialogues with yourself in which you can't get what they did off your mind. You may fantasize what you will say or do to them, or what you might tell other people about them. This conversation may go on and on—and hours and days may pass when you neither accomplish anything nor feel any better!

One day at about 11 p.m., as I was going to bed, I found myself having a conversation in my head about someone. I imagined I had the opportunity to spill the beans about this person. I pictured the scenario in great detail. I made myself look good and the other person look bad. But the Holy Spirit—miraculously—got into the matter. I heard Him say to me, “You can get a victory right now if you refuse to think about clearing your name.”

Even though the conversation existed only in my mind, I realized that I had an opportunity to triumph—in my spirit! It was a pivotal moment because it was as if we were real and I was refusing to say anything at all about the person.

By doing that I achieved victory. A peace entered my heart, and I knew then and there that I must never again enter into those imaginary conversations—unless I refused to vindicate

myself.

For those who find such conversations therapeutic, I would only remind you to let your thoughts be positive and wholesome. Keep no record of wrongs in your thoughts, and you will be less likely to expose such records by your words.

When I am tempted to say something negative and I refuse to speak, I can often feel the release of the Holy Spirit in my heart. It is as if God says to me, "Well done." It is a very good feeling! After all, Jesus is touched with our weaknesses (see Heb. 4:15), and He also lets us feel His joy when we overcome them! He rewards us with an incredible peace and the witness of the Spirit in our hearts.

Don't Forget Yourself

It's one thing to have the breakthrough regarding others—totally forgiving them and destroying the record of their wrongs. It is quite another to experience the greater breakthrough—total forgiveness of ourselves.

Forgiving yourself means to experience the love that keeps no record of your own wrongs. This form of love is a choice, as we have seen, and to cross over to the place where we choose to forgive ourselves is no small step.

So many Christians say: "I can forgive others, but how can I ever forget what I have done? I know God forgives me, but I can't forgive myself."

We must remember that forgiving ourselves is also a lifelong commitment. In precisely the same way that I must forgive others every single day—which is why I read Luke 6:37 daily—I must also forgive myself.

Forgiving ourselves is also a daily process. We may wake up each day with the awareness of past mistakes and failures—and fervently wish that we could turn the clock back and start all

over. We may have feelings of guilt—or pseudoguilt if our sins have been placed under the blood of Christ. But our enemy, the devil, loves to move in and take advantage of our thoughts. That's why forgiving ourselves is as important as forgiving an enemy.

Forgiving yourself may bring about the breakthrough you have been looking for. It could set you free in ways you've never before experienced.

This is because we have been afraid to forgive ourselves. We cling to fear as if it were a thing of value. The truth is, this kind of fear is no friend but rather a fierce enemy. The very breath of Satan is behind the fear of forgiving ourselves.

Jesus knows that many of us have this problem. This is a further reason He turned up unexpectedly after His resurrection where, behind closed doors, the disciples were assembled both in terror and in guilt. Jesus not only wanted them to know they were totally forgiven, but He also wanted them to forgive themselves.

Instead of reminding them of what they had done, He spoke to them as if nothing had happened. He said, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21).

This gave them dignity. It showed them that nothing had occurred that would change Jesus' plans and strategy for them. He had already sent a signal to Peter, who had denied knowing Jesus, through the angel who said, "But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you" (Mark 16:7).

And yet all of them had "forsook Him and fled" (Matt. 26:56). After His crucifixion, they felt utterly unworthy. And then the risen Lord showed up and assured them of a future ministry!

I have often thought that one of the reasons Peter was so effective on Pentecost was that he was keenly aware of having been forgiven. He knew full well that, just a few weeks before, he had denied Jesus to a little servant girl! He would never forget the look on Jesus' face when the rooster crowed and that he "went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:61-62). It was real antidote to self-righteousness!

When Peter preached to his fellow Jews on Pentecost, there was no trace of smugness or condescension. Knowing he was a forgiven sinner kept him from usurping God's glory on that day. God alone received the glory for those 3,000 conversions.

I remember one Sunday morning just before I was to preach at the 11 o'clock service. I had an argument with my wife, Louise. I should never have done it, but I stormed out, slamming the door in her face. Before I knew it, I was bowing my head on the upper platform at Westminster Chapel before several hundred people.

I don't know what they were thinking, but I know what I was thinking: I should not be here. I have no right to be here. Lord, how on earth could You use me today? I am not fit to be in this pulpit.

It was too late to send a note to Louise saying, "I'm sorry." There was no way to resolve the situation at that time. I could only ask God for mercy and try my best to forgive myself. I assumed I was about to deliver the biggest flop of a sermon in the history of Westminster Chapel. Never in my life had I felt so unworthy.

But when I stood up to preach, I was not prepared for the help I received. God simply undergirded me and enabled me to preach as well as I ever had!

That is partly why I think Peter was so successful on Pentecost. When we are emptied of all self-righteousness and

pride we enable God to move in and through us.

Let the Past Be ... the Past

The sweet consequence of not keeping a record of all wrongs is that we let go of the past and its effect on the present. We cast our care on God and rely on Him to restore the wasted years and to cause everything to turn out for good.

We find ourselves, almost miraculously, accepting ourselves as we are (just as God does) with all our failures (just as God does), while knowing our potential to make more mistakes. God never becomes disillusioned with us; He loves us and knows us inside out.

Moses had a past. He was a murderer (see Ex. 2:11–12). But years later he would proclaim the eighth commandment: “You shall not murder” (Ex. 20:13). David had a past, but he also had a future after his shame: “Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You,” he wrote (Ps. 51:13). Jonah deliberately ran from God, but he was still used in an astonishing revival (see Jon. 3).

Peter’s disgrace—denying Jesus—did not abort God’s plans for him. But all these men had to forgive themselves before they could move into the ministry God had planned for them.

Can you do that? Having forgiven others, it is time to forgive yourself. That is exactly what God wants of you and me.

It is long overdue: Let the past be past—at last.

R.T. Kendall was the pastor of Westminster Chapel in London for 25 years and is the author of more than 40 books, including his latest release, *Jealousy: The Sin No One Talks About*. For more information, visit his website at .

Watch R.T. Kendall share how to totally forgive someone who has offended you at