

Secrets to Choosing Forgiveness and Releasing Bitterness

Have you ever been hurt by someone? Have you been used, lied about, abused, cheated or deceived? Have you ever done a lot for someone and then, when you needed them, they didn't have any time for you?

Everyone experiences mistreatment of some kind, and forgiveness is not easy. But I've learned through personal experience that if you refuse to forgive, you are in for a miserable life!

For many years, I hated my dad because he sexually abused me throughout my childhood. But all that did was make me bitter and hard to get along with. It didn't change him, and it certainly didn't do me any good.

When my parents were in their old age, God spoke to my heart and told me He wanted me to move them close to where my husband, Dave, and I lived and take care of them until they died. At first, I resisted this idea because there was nothing in me that wanted to see them, much less spend money on them and meet their needs.

I told Dave what I was thinking, and he said if God was telling me to do this, we should do it. It wasn't what I wanted to hear, but he was right, so we moved them into a house near us and took care of them until they died.

It wasn't easy, but I can honestly say now that it is one of the greatest decisions I've ever made. God honored my obedience and gave me the grace to do the right thing, and before he passed away, my dad asked me to forgive him and accepted Christ as his Savior. The reward of forgiveness far

outweighed the pain I had lived with for so many years.

The story of Joseph in Genesis chapters 37-50 is also an amazing example of what God can do in our lives when we choose to forgive. When Joseph was 17 years old, his 11 brothers sold him to slave traders because they were jealous of him and hated him.

Joseph was taken to Egypt and bought by Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard. God gave him favor, and Potiphar made Joseph overseer of his whole household (Gen. 39:5). But when Potiphar's wife became angry because Joseph wouldn't go to bed with her, she lied and claimed he had tried to rape her, and Joseph was thrown in prison.

Genesis 39:21 (ESV) says, "But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison."

Joseph was put in charge of all the prisoners because the Lord was with him and gave him success in whatever he did.

Eventually, God gave Joseph favor with Pharaoh, and he was promoted to a position second in command to Pharaoh only, ruling over the land of Egypt. Several years later, his brothers came to Egypt for food because of a terrible famine, and this was his chance to get revenge. But Joseph wasn't at all interested in vengeance.

When he revealed his identity to his brothers and saw that they were afraid he would harm them, Joseph told them, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gen. 50:20).

Joseph is a powerful example of how we can mature in our faith and character when we go through hard times. He chose to maintain his integrity with God no matter what it cost him personally, and the reward was far greater than the pain he

had endured. As a result, he was able to fulfill God's plan for his life and help many people who would have died from famine.

God has a plan and a purpose for your life, too! No matter how badly you've been hurt, I want to encourage you to trust God's love for you and His ability to bring healing to your soul. Refuse to live an angry, bitter life because of the way someone has mistreated you, and instead, pray for them and love them, doing good to them as you have an opportunity to do so (Matt. 5:43-45).

Let God use your pain to develop the fruit of the Spirit in your soul (Gal. 5:22-23) and make you everything He has created you to be. As you do, others will see the love and goodness of God through your life and be drawn to Him. {eoa}

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