

What Would You Say to Your Father's Murderer?

Letters from My Father's Murderer is an extraordinary true story of grace, mercy, and the redemptive power of God. When her father was murdered, Laurie Coombs and her family sought justice—and found it. Yet, despite the swift punishment of the killer, Laurie found herself increasingly full of pain, bitterness, and anger she couldn't control. It was the call to love and forgive her father's murderer that set her, the murderer, and several other inmates on the journey that would truly change their lives forever.

This compelling story of transformation will touch the deepest wounds and show how God can redeem what seems unredeemable.

Q: Why did you want to write *Letters from My Father's Murderer*, which details such a tragic and painful part of your life?

To be honest, I didn't initially want to write this book. I wanted to share my story, but I knew writing it in a book would require me to bare all. I knew I'd have to share difficult things, and I didn't want to. But greater than my resistance was my desire to see people experience freedom and redemption and healing as I had. I wanted God to be glorified for what He had done in and through my life.

I knew God was calling me to write this book. And I knew God well enough to know that if I answered that call I'd most assuredly see lives change as a result of the message He has given me. God allowed me to see something good could come out of the ashes of my past. I could play a small part in the grand story He has been unfolding since the beginning of time. I could participate in what He's doing in the here and now for the good of many. And so, I chose to say yes, and of course

I'm now completely on board.

Q: Tell us about the significance of the few interactions you had with your father just prior to his murder.

About one month before my dad died, he said to me, "Laurie, when I die, I want people to remember me for who I am. I don't want anyone turning me into something I'm not." The comment sort of stunned me at first. It came out of absolutely nowhere. My dad continued to tell me people only want to talk about the good parts of a person after they die. "But that's not who they really are," he said. "There are good parts and bad parts to every one of us."

For many years, I didn't understand why my dad said that to me—obviously, neither one of us knew he was going to die—but as I began to write this book, his words came to mind. I knew then, without a doubt, God had him speak those words to me more than a decade before I needed them to give me the freedom to share my story however God would lead.

Q: You're very honest in the book about the mistakes your father made and how that affected your teen years and even your choice to reject the faith you had been raised in. Was that difficult for you to do?

Absolutely. I had to do a lot of thinking and praying about how to write what God wanted me to write in this book. But ultimately I knew God was calling me to truth. My dad was an amazing man. A wonderful father. I really was a daddy's girl. But he wasn't perfect. And neither am I. It's my hope that I conveyed my imperfections throughout the book as well.

Q: Before sentencing at trial, what did you tell the jury on the day you stood in the courtroom and came face-to-face with your father's killer?

I told them about my dad. I tried to make my dad real to them. And then I left them with a challenge. I said,

“Until the day of Anthony’s death, we will have to deal with the fact that there is a man out there who took our dad’s life. How long this murderer will spend in prison is left up to you, and we encourage you to help our family in our pursuit of justice.

“This tragedy, which has affected all of our lives, is not over. This will be something we must live with for the rest of our lives; nonetheless, only when justice is served will we be able to move on with our lives and have closure.

“Leonardo da Vinci once said, ‘He who does not punish evil commends it to be done. Justice requires power, insight, and will.’ I challenge you to uphold justice and sentence Anthony to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole.”

Q: What made you decide to begin corresponding with your father’s killer? What did you hope would come from it?

God had freed me from the anxiety and depression after coming to Jesus, but then He began to show me I was irritable pretty much all the time. It was ugly, and quite honestly, I didn’t like myself very much. I began to pray for God to show me why I was like this. *Why can’t I just be nice?* I wondered. And then He showed me that the root of my irritability was anger, which had ultimately turned into bitterness.

I prayed, asking God to remove the bitterness in my heart, and that’s when I heard His gentle whisper tell me, “It’s time to forgive.” But then He took it a step further. “Love your enemy,” He said. God’s call to forgive and love my enemy resulted in the correspondence between the man who murdered my dad and me. Initially, I wasn’t sure what would come out of our interaction, but I did know where God was taking me. I knew He was leading me toward forgiveness and healing. I didn’t know what that journey would look like along the way, but I did know wherever I ended up would be a good place.

Q: Tell us about the moment you were finally able to forgive.

Forgiveness came when I least expected it. My correspondence with the man who murdered my dad had gotten heated. He was blame-shifting and justifying, and I was obviously not OK with that. All I wanted to do was rebuke him—I almost did—but instead, God said to me, “Laurie, leave him to me. Now forgive.” And I did. But it wasn’t of me. If I had my way, I would have met all the blame-shifting and lies with a rebuke. Instead God called and enabled me to give that which I had already been given. He called me to give grace and love and forgiveness.

Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that,” and he was right. The moment I extended grace and love and forgiveness, I began to see the man who murdered my dad change before my eyes.

Q: Your father’s killer wrote, “Your testimony may have saved a life,” in one of his letters. What did he mean by that?

The man who murdered my dad chose to share what God had done through our journey during a church service with his fellow inmates. He shared an article I had written. He told them nothing is unforgivable. He encouraged them to place God in the center of their most broken relationship and pray. Then he told them I had encouraged him to live his life to the glory of God. I had told him that just because he was in prison doesn’t mean he had wasted his life. I challenged him not to allow his life, nor my dad’s death, to be in vain. The men were crying as he spoke, and after he shared a man came up to him to tell him he had been planning to murder a man when released from prison. He said because of this testimony, he decided to pray and forgive instead. I was stunned. God had used my dad’s death possibly to save another life. It was incredible.

Q: What have you learned from your interaction with him?

Oh boy. A lot. More than I can ever say, really. God used this chapter of my life to teach me just about every aspect of the gospel. I learned what it looks like to follow Jesus. I learned more about who God is. I learned how to let go of control. I learned to press through obstacles. I learned how to calm my fears. I learned to be in complete reliance upon Jesus. I learned how to wait on the Lord. I learned about sin and judgment. I learned I am no better than any other, and my sins are no better than those of the man who murdered my dad. I learned true forgiveness is only accomplished by the grace of God. I learned the Christian life is not a life of passivity. I learned how to lay down my biases and seek God's perspective. I learned forgiveness frees us from a victim mentality. I learned God is a God of the impossible—and so much more. Now I certainly don't do all these things perfectly, but I sure did learn a lot through my journey of forgiveness.

Q: What is his status today? Do you maintain regular contact with him?

I do still have contact with him. It's still ridiculously crazy to me that things have turned out the way they have. God has put a man who was once my enemy in my life. The man I once hated is now someone who works alongside me in my calling. The message he shares in there is the same one I share out here, so we do still write every now and again—but now our letters are centered around how God would have us use our story.

*Learn more about **Laurie Coombs** and Letters From My Father's Murderer at and on Facebook ([lauriecoombs](#)), Twitter ([lauriecoombs](#)) and Pinterest ([laurieacoombs](#)).*