



THE
MENTORING
PROJECT

GRACE FOR THOSE
WHO HURT YOU:
HOW TO LOVE
YOUR ENEMIES



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INTRODUCTION

I remember a man in my first church. He seemed to wake up every morning just to make my life hard. He whispered in hallways. He questioned my motives in meetings. Every time I saw him, I felt a sharp burning in my chest. Most of us have a secret list. It is a list of people we hope will fail. We sit in pews on Sunday and talk about grace, but we carry a heavy sack of bitterness the rest of the week. Dealing with difficult people wears us out. Loving your enemies is not some high-level achievement for "super-Christians." It is the basic calling for anyone following Jesus, and learning to love your enemies is essential.

People are mean because the world is broken. We call this total depravity. It means sin has touched every part of us. When someone hurts you, it is a symptom of this fallen state. You see it at the grocery store and in the office. I spent a long time thinking I was the only "good" person in my story. I was busy blaming that man in my church while ignoring my own pride. Trusting God when people treat you unfairly is difficult, especially when asking why does God allow suffering. But God is sovereign over that pain. He is not surprised by your enemy. He often uses difficult people to scrape the selfishness off our souls. Think of Joseph. His brothers threw him into a pit and argued over whether they should kill him or sell him to slave traders. They meant it for evil, but God used that friction to save a nation, and more.

We have to look at the chasm between God and us. Romans 5:10 says we were God's enemies. We were rebels. We didn't deserve His kindness, but He gave it anyway. What the Bible says about forgiveness reveals the depth of our own debt. There are many Bible verses about forgiveness, such as the story about a servant who was forgiven a massive debt (Matt

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18:23-35). Then he went out and choked a man who owed him a few dollars. Sometimes we do that. We want mercy for ourselves but demand cold justice for everyone else. We feel superior. But the Cross reminds us of the true nature of forgiveness in the Bible and that we are all beggars.

Forgiveness is not a feeling, and it is not forgetting. It is not saying the sin was "okay." It is a legal transaction of the heart, often beginning with letting go of the past. You take the debt they owe you, and you put it in God's hands. He is the only fair judge. You stop trying to play God by punishing them with your silence. Understanding how to forgive is vital. I knew a woman in my congregation who finally learned how to forgive someone who hurt you deeply. She didn't do it because her father apologized. He never did. She learned how to forgive someone who isn't sorry because Christ changed her. She realized she was the one in the cage. Forgiveness was the key.

This faith has to work in your everyday life. It isn't just for Sunday morning. It has to work on a normal morning when you are tired and stressed. It starts with how to pray for your enemies. It is hard to stay angry while you are asking God to bless someone's soul. Learning how to love your enemies and how to love someone you don't like biblically requires grace. You can still keep your distance. Knowing the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation allows for Biblical boundaries in relationships. You can forgive someone and still stay away if they are dangerous. That is wisdom, not bitterness. When considering what the Bible says about dealing with toxic people, remember how to treat your enemies with Christ-like kindness. Try doing something small. Buy a coffee for the coworker who tried to get you fired. Don't do it to win an argument. Do it to show Christ. And watch your thumbs – keep your mouth shut when you are attacked online.

There is a reward for the peacemaker. Christian forgiveness brings a rest that hits your soul when you stop seeking revenge. We look at the Cross and hear what Jesus said about forgiveness: "Father, forgive them." That is our stewardship. In the New Heaven, there will be no more enemies. The feuds will end. We are just practicing for heaven by loving people now. Learning how to trust God in difficult times cannot be done with your own grit. You need the Holy Spirit to move your heart. Name that person. Hand them to God. Let the weight go.

1

UNDERSTANDING THE ROOT OF CONFLICT — WHY WE EXPERIENCE PAIN

The Fallen Heart and the Broken World: A biblical perspective on why the world feels fractured

There's a reason the hurt keeps showing up in ordinary places. Not just the hospital room or the graveside. But the grocery store, the kitchen table. The text message that lands wrong and stays wrong. Pain rarely announces itself with ceremony. Most of the time, it just leans against your day and refuses to move. That's where most people get confused. They think something has gone unusually wrong. As if this conflict, this sharp edge, this ache is an exception. It isn't. It's the ground we're walking on. It's the air we breathe.

I've watched people carry themselves with surprising dignity while cancer eats their bodies. I've watched others unravel over a rude comment in a checkout line. Same world. Same soil. Different pressures. Sin doesn't need a dramatic stage. It works just fine under fluorescent lights. Scripture never pretends otherwise. Romans 3 doesn't soften the language. "None is righteous, no, not one." Not the bully. Not the coward. Not the one who smiles while they cut you off. Not you. And not me. That passage doesn't just diagnose obvious villains. It drags the spotlight across everyone. "Their throat is an open grave." That's not poetic exaggeration. That's an autopsy report. It means decay leaks out of us in words, in looks, in silences. It means we carry death into conversations without meaning to. Sometimes without noticing.

You see it at the grocery store because that's where people are tired. Hungry. Rushed. Their patience is thin, their children are loud, their marriage is strained, their bank account is bleeding. And sin doesn't need

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a big opening. It slips through the cracks. Why are people mean? Because the heart is curved inward. Augustine wasn't being dramatic when he said that. He was being honest. We wake up thinking about ourselves. Our needs. Our wounds. Our story. And when someone else gets in the way, even slightly, the old machinery grinds into motion. I once watched a man explode at a teenage cashier over a coupon. A grown man. Veins popping out. Voice shaking. The whole store frozen. People later whispered about anger issues, about stress, about "something he must be going through." All of that may have been true. But the deeper truth sat lower. Sin had found a moment. And it took it. That's not to excuse it. It's to name it. Scripture doesn't call us naïve. It calls us sober-minded. When someone wounds you, it feels personal because it is personal. But it's also bigger than you. You didn't create the brokenness that spilled out of you. You just happened to be standing there when it leaked. That matters. Because if you don't understand the soil, you'll spend your life shocked by the weeds.

The Myth of the Victim: Moving beyond a victim mentality toward spiritual empowerment

There's a lie we quietly tell ourselves, usually without words. It goes something like this: "I'm the reasonable one here. I'm the clean one. If they would just stop sinning, everything would be fine." It's a comforting story. And it's deadly. I learned that the hard way. Years ago, I was locked in a quiet feud with a man in the church. Nothing dramatic. No raised voices. Just tension. Meetings that felt stiff. Emails that read colder than they needed to. I rehearsed his faults on my drives home. His tone. His stubbornness. His inability to see what was obvious to me. I prayed about it, too. That's the dangerous part. I asked God to change him. To soften him. To help him see clearly. All good-sounding requests.

Then one afternoon, after a meeting that went particularly badly, I sat alone in my office. The building was quiet. The sun was coming through the blinds. And the thought landed heavy, not accusing, just clear. "You enjoy being right more than you enjoy being faithful." That sentence hurt more than anything he had ever said to me. I hadn't been fighting for peace. I had been fighting for vindication. I wanted to win the story. I wanted to be the injured party who endured nobly. I wanted him to be the problem so I could stay clean. Romans 3 doesn't leave room for that fantasy. "No one

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seeks for God.” Not naturally. Not instinctively. Even our best instincts need redeeming.

The myth of the victim isn't that suffering isn't real. It is. The myth is that suffering always makes us righteous. It doesn't. Sometimes it just makes us sharper sinners. I've sat across from husbands convinced their marriage problems were entirely their wife's fault. Wives equally convinced of the opposite. Both wounded. Both partially right. Both blind. The fallen heart is clever. It can weaponize pain. It can turn real wounds into moral high ground. It can keep you staring at someone else's sin so you don't have to look at your own. And here's the uncomfortable truth learned over decades of pastoral work: most conflicts don't persist because one person is evil and the other is pure. They persist because sin has found two hearts willing to protect themselves. That doesn't mean blame is always equal. Scripture doesn't flatten justice. Some sins are heavier. Some wounds are deeper. But self-examination isn't optional just because you were hurt first or more. David didn't stop being a sinner when Saul tried to kill him. Joseph didn't become sinless because his brothers sold him. Suffering doesn't sanctify automatically. God sanctifies.

God's Sovereignty Over Our Pain: Finding divine purpose and comfort in the midst of trials

This is where many people tense up. Sovereignty sounds cold when you're bleeding. It can feel like God is being explained instead of trusted. But Scripture doesn't present God's rule as a theory. It presents it as a lifeline. Joseph's story is not clean. Don't sanitize it. He was betrayed by his family. Thrown into a pit. Sold like livestock. Forgotten in prison. Lied about. Years passed. Real years. Long nights. Repetitive days. The kind that grind hope down to powder. When Joseph finally stands before his brothers, power has shifted. He could crush them. And he weeps instead. “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.” Notice what he doesn't say. He doesn't deny their sin. He doesn't rebrand it as misunderstanding. He names it. Evil. Clear. Sharp. Unjust. And then he names something bigger. God meant it.

That sentence has weight. It means God wasn't reacting late. He wasn't scrambling to salvage a bad situation. He wasn't surprised by the betrayal. He was ruling over it without becoming the author of it. That distinction matters. God is sovereign. Man is responsible. Both are true. We don't get

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to flatten one to protect the other. I've sat with people who hated that truth, until years later when it held them up. At first, it felt offensive. "Are you saying God wanted this?" No. Scripture never says that. It says God intended good through what others intended for evil. That's not comfort you feel immediately. It's comfort you grow into. Like a bone knitting back together. Painful at first. Strong later.

God is not surprised by your enemy. Not the obvious one. Not the subtle one. Not the person who smiles while undermining you. Not the person who abandoned you when you were most exposed. None of them caught Him off guard. And here's the harder word. Sometimes He doesn't remove them quickly because He's using the friction. That doesn't mean the abuse is justified. It means the abuse doesn't get the final word. I once walked with a woman through years of quiet mistreatment at work. Nothing illegal. Nothing dramatic enough to report. Just constant undermining. Credit stolen. Passive contempt. She prayed for escape. It didn't come quickly. What did come was clarity. Courage. A deeper fear of God than of man. A stripping away of the need to be approved. When she finally left, she was not the same woman who had entered that job. God had done something in her that comfort never would have.

That's not a story you tell someone in the middle of it unless you know them well. Timing matters. Words can bruise. But it's a truth that anchors later. God uses even enemies as chisels. Not because He delights in pain. But because He delights in forming His people into the image of His Son. And that image was shaped through suffering. Jesus wasn't spared betrayal. He wasn't spared false accusations. He wasn't spared abandonment. And none of it was wasted. If God can govern the cross without becoming cruel, He can govern your conflict without losing His goodness. This is not theory. This is not armchair theology. This is what has steadied saints for centuries when explanations ran out. You are not crazy for hurting. You are not weak for feeling the sting. But you are not alone in the story, and you are not the final judge of it. The root of the conflict is deeper than personalities and circumstances. It runs through the human heart and into a world bent out of shape by sin. And over all of it stands a sovereign God who does not waste pain. That doesn't make the road easy. But it makes it meaningful. And meaning can carry weight that comfort never will.

2

THE GOSPEL AS THE GREAT LEVELER — A SPIRITUAL HEART CHECK

Remembering Who We Were: Reflecting on our shared need for grace and redemption

There's a moment that comes for most people who've been hurt badly. It's usually quiet. No argument. No dramatic turn. Just a slow realization that the anger has started to feel ... useful. Protective. Like a guard dog you've fed for so long, you're not sure who it's really guarding anymore. That's when the gospel starts pressing in. Not gently, but honestly. Memory is a dangerous thing. We curate it. Edit it. We remember the worst moments done to us with cinematic clarity. And we remember our own sin like a footnote. Small font. Easy to skip. Scripture doesn't allow that kind of selective recall. Romans 5:10 doesn't say we were misunderstood by God. It doesn't say we were confused. It doesn't say we were "basically good people who needed direction." It says we were enemies.

Enemies don't drift. They oppose. They resist. They push back. Before grace found us, we weren't neutral toward God. We were not standing on the fence waiting to be convinced. We were at odds with Him. Hostile in mind. Content to run our own lives. Happy to take His gifts and ignore His authority. That word—enemy—has weight. It strips away the flattering narratives we like to tell about our past selves. I've seen people flinch at it. Even lifelong churchgoers. Especially them. It feels too harsh. Too blunt. But Scripture isn't trying to flatter us into humility. It's telling the truth, so humility has somewhere solid to land. God didn't reconcile with friends who had a minor disagreement. He reconciled with rebels. Traitors. People who preferred darkness when light was offered freely. And He didn't wait for us to soften first. That's the part that levels the room.

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I remember sitting with a man who had been deeply wronged by someone he trusted. Real betrayal. The kind that rearranges your view of people. He listened patiently as we talked through forgiveness, then stopped me. “But you don’t understand,” he said. “They knew better.” He was right. They did. And so did you. And so did I. That’s the uncomfortable bridge Romans 5 forces us to cross. We weren’t ignorant pagans stumbling in the dark. We were image-bearers suppressing truth. We knew enough to be accountable. And we still ran. Yet God moved toward us anyway. Not after repentance. Not after restitution. While we were still enemies. If that doesn’t slow your anger down at least a little, you haven’t sat with it long enough.

The Debt We Can’t Pay: How understanding God’s forgiveness transforms our view of others

Jesus had a way of telling stories that cornered people without raising His voice. The parable of the unmerciful servant is one of them. A servant owes a king an unpayable debt. Not inconvenient. Not burdensome. Unpayable. The kind of number that makes accountants laugh and soldiers reach for shackles. The king forgives it. Completely. No payment plan. No probation. And then that same servant walks out and grabs a fellow servant by the throat over a comparatively tiny debt. That detail matters. Jesus isn’t saying the second debt isn’t real. It is real. Money owed is money owed. Hurt done is hurt done. Sin doesn’t stop being sin because someone else sinned worse. But scale matters.

I’ve watched this parable play out more times than I can count. A person receives grace from God that they could never earn. Forgiveness that cost the blood of Christ. And then they guard their grievances like heirlooms. They know the right words. They sing the songs. But their hands are still wrapped around someone else’s throat. “How can they expect forgiveness?” they say. The same way you did. That’s the answer Jesus forces without softening it. I once counseled a woman who carried decades of resentment toward a family member. Again, real sin. No minimizing it. But the resentment had become part of her identity. Letting go felt like losing leverage. Like admitting the pain mattered less than it did. We worked through this parable slowly. No rush. No pressure. At one

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point she whispered, almost to herself, “I’ve been forgiven more than I want to admit.” That was the turning point.

Forgiveness doesn’t begin with excusing others. It begins with remembering what it cost God to forgive you. The cross doesn’t just free us from guilt. It exposes our hypocrisy. It says, “You are far worse than you feared—and far more loved than you dared hope.” Both truths are necessary. Remove either one, and grace collapses into sentimentality or despair. We want justice for others and mercy for ourselves because we believe our story is exceptional. We know our motives. We know our pressures. We know the context behind our failures. But we only see the outcomes of other people’s sins. Not their sleepless nights. Not their quiet fears. Not the wounds that taught them how to wound. Pride thrives in that asymmetry. It whispers, “You’re not like them.” More careful. More sincere. More justified. And it’s a lie.

Killing Pride: Strategies for overcoming the ego to foster genuine reconciliation

Total depravity doesn’t mean we’re as bad as we could be. It means sin touches every part of us. Even our moral reasoning. Even our sense of justice. Especially our sense of justice. I’ve seen pride wear religious clothing more convincingly than almost anything else. It knows the language of righteousness. It knows how to quote Scripture selectively. It knows how to demand accountability without ever offering repentance. True justice doesn’t ignore mercy. And true mercy doesn’t erase justice. They meet at the cross. Nowhere else. The pride that refuses to forgive is often the same pride that forgets it needed forgiveness in the first place. That doesn’t mean reconciliation is always wise. Scripture doesn’t command foolish trust. Boundaries matter. Consequences matter. Forgiveness is not the same as restoration.

But unforgiveness—the kind that hardens and calcifies—reveals something about the heart holding it. I once preached on this passage, and a man approached me afterward. He didn’t argue. He didn’t complain. He just said, “I think I’ve been using my pain to feel superior.” That’s a hard sentence to say out loud. It cost him something. But it also freed him. The gospel levels us by reminding us that no one stands taller at the foot of the cross. Not the wounded. Not the healer. Not the one who repented early

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or the one who came late. We all come empty-handed or not at all. If you want justice without mercy, you will eventually ask God for something He refuses to give. And if you want mercy without justice, you will reshape God into someone who cannot save.

The gospel refuses both distortions. It says: You were an enemy but now are forgiven. So walk humbly. Not weakly. Humbly. Humility doesn't deny pain. It puts it in proper proportion. It remembers who paid your debt. It loosens your grip on superiority. It replaces clenched fists with open hands. And that kind of heart—slowly, painfully formed—is the only soil where real healing ever grows.

3

FORGIVENESS AS A CHOICE — MOVING BEYOND FEELINGS TO LET GO

Dismantling Common Myths About Forgiveness: Clarifying what biblical forgiveness actually means

Forgiveness usually gets talked about like a mood. Like something that shows up once the anger cools off and the memories lose their edge. As if one morning you wake up and realize you feel generous toward the person who wounded you. That almost never happens. Most forgiveness begins while the wound is still tender. While the injustice still feels unfair. While the heart still wants payment. That's because forgiveness is not a feeling. It's a decision. A hard one. Often made more than once. And it always costs.

We need to clear some ground first. A lot of people stay stuck not because they refuse to forgive, but because they've been taught the wrong definition. Forgiveness is not forgetting. Scripture never commands amnesia. God Himself remembers sins in a way that doesn't hold them against His people. Those are not the same thing. Remembering is human. Forgetting is not required. Forgiveness is not calling evil "okay." The cross is proof that God never shrugs at sin. Forgiveness names the offense honestly. It looks at the wound without flinching. It refuses to lie about what happened just to keep the peace. Forgiveness is not trust. Trust is built. Forgiveness is given. Scripture is careful here, even when people aren't. Jesus forgave freely. He did not entrust Himself carelessly. Wisdom still matters. Boundaries still matter. Consequences still matter.

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I've watched people stay imprisoned because they thought forgiving meant reopening doors God never asked them to reopen. That confusion has done real damage. Forgiveness is not reconciliation every time. Reconciliation requires repentance on both sides. Forgiveness doesn't. Forgiveness is one-sided obedience. Reconciliation is a two-sided miracle. If you wait for the other person to change before you forgive, you've handed them the keys to your soul. They decide how long you stay bitter. They decide when you're free. Scripture never places that much power in human hands. Forgiveness is something you do before God, not something you negotiate with your offender.

A Legal Transaction of the Heart: The intentional decision to release the debt of an offense

At its core, forgiveness is a transfer. A deliberate act where you move the debt from your ledger to God's. Every offense creates a debt. Something is owed. An apology. Restitution. Recognition. Sometimes just acknowledgement. When that debt goes unpaid, the heart starts collecting interest: coldness, distance, silence, subtle punishment. We learn these techniques early. They feel safer than confrontation and more respectable than rage. But they're still a form of judgment. Romans tells us God is the judge of all the earth. That's not a theological slogan. It's a boundary line. When you refuse to forgive, you step over it. You don't just remember the wrong—you sentence the person for it.

That's a heavy burden to carry. Too heavy. I've seen it wear people down. Not the original wound, but the ongoing trial. The constant replay. The silent verdict handed down again and again. Forgiveness is the moment you say, "I will no longer be the one who collects this debt." You don't erase it. You don't minimize it. You place it in the only hands strong enough to hold it without corruption. God does not lose track of injustice. No sin slips past Him unnoticed. No wrong disappears into thin air. It is either paid for at the cross or answered for in judgment. That truth is what makes forgiveness possible. Not because justice disappears, but because it's finally in righteous hands.

When you withhold forgiveness, you're not protecting justice. You're impersonating it. And impersonating God is exhausting work. I've watched people punish others with distance for decades. Never yelling. Never

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confronting. Just withholding warmth. Withholding presence. Withholding grace. It feels controlled. It feels dignified. It feels safe. But it slowly hollows the soul. Forgiveness says, “I will no longer play God in this story.” And that surrender is where freedom starts.

The Freedom of the Prisoner: How forgiving others sets your own soul free from bitterness

There was a woman in my congregation years ago. Faithful. Quiet. Steady. The kind who served without needing to be seen. If you had asked, most people would’ve said she had it together. She didn’t. Her father had left when she was young. No explanation. No goodbye. Just absence. Decades passed. Birthdays missed. Weddings observed from a distance, if at all. Silence thick enough to shape a childhood. She never called it bitterness. She called it realism. “I don’t expect much from men,” she once said, half-joking. It wasn’t until later—much later—that Christ began pressing on that old wound. Not accusingly. Persistently.

She told me once, “I realized I’d been waiting my whole life for him to come back and make it right. And he never did.” That’s when forgiveness became unavoidable. Not because he repented. He didn’t. Not because he changed. He didn’t. Forgiveness came because she did. She didn’t excuse him. She didn’t reconcile with him. She didn’t even speak to him again. But she released him. “I put him in God’s hands,” she said. “Not because he deserved it, but because I couldn’t carry him anymore.” That’s the part people miss. Forgiveness isn’t primarily about the offender. It’s about the one who’s been carrying the weight.

Jesus was clear about this. Unforgiveness imprisons. And the bars are internal. That woman didn’t walk away lighter because her father became a better man. She walked away lighter because Christ had become a deeper Savior. Forgiveness didn’t erase her past. It loosened its grip. And that’s often how it works. Not all at once. Sometimes slowly. Sometimes with tears. Sometimes with the same decision repeated again when the memories resurface. Forgiveness doesn’t feel like triumph. Most days, it feels like obedience. A quiet, costly obedience. But it’s the obedience that sets prisoners free. Not the one who hurt you. You. And that freedom—hard-won, deeply rooted—is something no one else gets to take from you.

4

PRACTICING LOVE IN THE REAL WORLD — ESSENTIAL RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

Praying for the Person Who Irritates You: Transforming your heart through intercession

Most people don't struggle with loving humanity. Humanity is abstract. Distant. Safe. The trouble starts with names. Faces. Personalities. The man who interrupts. The woman who undermines. The person who knows exactly how to push your buttons and does it anyway. That's where the gospel leaves the study and walks into traffic. Love, in Scripture, is not a posture you admire. It's a path you walk. And it's usually uneven pavement. Jesus didn't say, "Feel warmly toward your enemies." He said, "Pray for them." That command is more merciful than it sounds. Prayer forces honesty. You can't fake reverence for long when you're alone with God. The resentment shows up fast. The sarcasm. The edge. God isn't surprised by any of it. He's been listening to human hearts a long time.

Here's the mistake people make: they think praying for someone means pretending they don't bother you. It doesn't. Start where you are. Not where you think you should be. I often tell people to begin with this sentence: "Lord, You know I don't want to pray for this person." That's not irreverent. That's truthful. And truth is where prayer actually begins. Then ask God to do what you can't. Not to fix them first—but to steady you. Ask Him to restrain your tongue. To soften your reflexes. To keep you from becoming cruel in return. Over time, if grace allows, ask God to bless their soul. Not their success. Not their plans. Their soul. That's different. It acknowledges that whatever they're doing flows from a heart as broken as yours once was. It is hard to hate someone while you're asking God to rescue them from sin. Not impossible. But hard. And hardness is where the

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cracks begin. I've watched prayer do quiet work in people who never expected it. The irritation didn't vanish. But it stopped running the room. It stopped being in charge. Prayer doesn't always change the other person. But it always reorders who sits on the throne of your heart.

Setting Boundaries Without Bitterness: How to protect your peace while remaining loving

Grace does not require foolishness. That sentence has rescued more people than you might think. There's a strain of spirituality that confuses forgiveness with exposure. As if holiness means staying within reach of harm. Scripture never teaches that. Jesus withdrew. Paul escaped in the night. The early church met quietly because wisdom demanded it. You can forgive someone and still lock the door. Boundaries are not a failure of love. They are often its final expression. I've walked with people who stayed in dangerous situations far too long because they thought leaving meant they hadn't forgiven. That's not spiritual maturity. That's confusion wearing religious clothes. Forgiveness releases the debt. Boundaries acknowledge reality. If someone continues to lie, manipulate, or wound, love may require distance. Not as punishment but as stewardship.

Bitterness says, "I hope you suffer." Wisdom says, "I will not place myself where harm is predictable." Those are not the same thing. A bitter boundary slams the door and keeps replaying the offense. A wise boundary closes the door and hands the key to God. The difference shows up in the heart. One simmers. The other grieves, then rests. I once counseled a man who had to step away from a longtime friend whose behavior had become destructive. He wept when he told me. Not because he hated the man. Because he loved him and finally accepted that proximity was doing no good. "That's not unforgiveness," I told him. "That's sobriety." Grace doesn't deny patterns. It responds to them truthfully.

Doing Good to Those Who Hate You: Radical kindness as a tool for spiritual victory

This is where love stops feeling theoretical and starts feeling unreasonable. Jesus didn't suggest dramatic gestures. He talked about bread. Water. Miles walked. Ordinary acts done under strain. Doing good to someone who hates you is not about winning. If winning is your goal,

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you've already lost. The heart knows the difference. Small acts matter because they strip away theatrics. Buying a coffee. Offering help. Speaking respectfully when sarcasm would be easier. I knew a woman once who brought baked goods to a coworker who had tried to get her fired. No speech. No confrontation. Just a quiet offering placed on a desk. When I asked her why, she said, "Because I don't want his sin to teach me how to sin." That's the right instinct. Doing good doesn't guarantee reconciliation. Sometimes it confuses people. Sometimes it irritates them more. Love isn't measured by outcomes. It's measured by obedience.

And obedience is costly. These acts don't erase boundaries. They don't deny wisdom. They simply refuse to let hatred write the script. Paul says, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." That's not sentimental. It's strategic. Evil spreads by imitation. Good interrupts the cycle. Not loudly. Quietly. And quietly is often where real strength lives. If the tongue was dangerous in the first century, the thumb is catastrophic now. Social media rewards speed, outrage, and performance. None of those cultivates godliness. The temptation to defend yourself publicly is strong. Especially when you're misrepresented. Especially when silence feels like surrender. But Scripture is strangely calm about this. "A gentle answer turns away wrath." "Commit your way to the Lord." "Entrust yourself to Him who judges justly." Notice the pattern. God doesn't rush to vindicate in real time.

I've watched people light themselves on fire trying to control a narrative. Screenshots. Threads. Subtle jabs masked as prayer requests. It never ends well. You don't need to correct every lie. You don't need to answer every accusation. You don't need to prove your innocence to strangers. Sometimes the most faithful response is restraint. That doesn't mean passivity. It means choosing your audience. There are conversations that belong in private rooms, not public feeds. There are defenses God handles better than you ever could. Gossip feels lighter than confrontation, but it weighs more in the long run. It fractures trust. It trains the heart to seek allies instead of truth. Keeping your mouth—and your thumbs—quiet is not weakness. It's discipline. I've told people this for years: if you wouldn't say it with the person in the room, don't say it when they're not. That rule alone would heal half our conflicts. Grace often looks like restraint. Silence. Waiting. Not because truth doesn't matter. But because timing does.

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The Hands and Feet of Grace: Practical Ways to Live Out God's Love and Service

None of this is easy. Anyone who tells you otherwise hasn't tried it. Loving in the real world costs sleep. Costs pride. Costs the illusion of control. But it also frees you. Grace, when practiced, does something subtle. It loosens your grip on outcomes. It teaches you to walk lightly even on hard ground. It keeps you human in a world that keeps trying to make you harsh. You won't do this perfectly. No one does. You'll fail. You'll snap. You'll replay conversations you wish you'd handled differently. Grace is there too.

The Christian life is not about mastering love. It's about being mastered by it—again and again—until our reflexes slowly change. Not overnight but over years. That's how faith has always worked. In kitchens. In offices. In grocery store lines. In places where love has to wear work boots. And when it does, people notice. Not because you're impressive. But because something sturdier than instinct is holding you upright. That something has a name. Grace.

5

THE REWARD OF THE PEACEMAKER — RESTING IN CHRIST’S PEACE

The Peace That Passes All Understanding: Experiencing supernatural calm in a chaotic world

There is a kind of exhaustion that doesn’t come from work. It comes from vigilance. From replaying conversations. From rehearsing arguments you’ll never get to finish. From staying alert in case the wound opens again. That kind of tiredness settles into the bones. Most people don’t realize how much energy revenge requires until they stop pursuing it. And when they do, something unexpected happens. Scripture doesn’t promise peace the way the world does. Not the fragile calm that depends on circumstances behaving themselves. Not the ceasefire that lasts only as long as no one provokes it. The peace of Christ arrives when something deeper finally stands down. When you stop seeking revenge—whether loud or quiet—your soul exhales. Not because justice vanished, but because you’re no longer trying to manufacture it with your own hands. The courtroom in your head finally adjourns. The case you kept reopening gets handed over.

That peace really does pass understanding. Not because it’s mystical, but because it’s illogical to the flesh. Everything in us says, “Hold on. Stay alert. Don’t let them get away with it.” Peace says, “You are not the judge. You are safe.” I’ve watched this moment arrive in people’s lives sometimes slowly and sometimes suddenly. Often with tears. The anger doesn’t always disappear right away. But it loses its authority. It stops being the thing that organizes their days. Sleep comes easier. Prayer becomes less strained. The heart grows quieter. Not numb, but quiet. There’s a difference. Peace doesn’t mean you forget what happened. It means what happened no longer owns you. And that kind of rest is a gift, one many

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believers never open because they're afraid peace will make them vulnerable again. Scripture says the opposite. It makes you free.

Becoming Like Jesus: The journey of character transformation through peacemaking

If forgiveness ever feels unnatural, it's because it is. It runs against instinct. Against self-protection. Against pride. And that's why it shapes us so deeply. The clearest picture we have is not abstract. It's bloody. Public. Final. Jesus on the cross did not forgive after the pain stopped. He forgave while the nails were still doing their work. While mockery filled the air. While injustice reached its loudest volume. "Father, forgive them." That wasn't weakness. That was authority under restraint. Jesus wasn't pretending the sin wasn't real. He was absorbing it. Bearing it. Carrying it somewhere it could finally be dealt with. Every time a Christian chooses forgiveness, they step into that pattern. Not atoning. Not saving. But reflecting.

Forgiveness doesn't make you less human. It makes you more like Christ. I've seen people change visibly as this truth sinks in. Their posture softens. Their words slow down. They stop living as if every offense is a threat to their identity. They begin to resemble Someone. Not because they've mastered grace. But because grace has begun to master them. That likeness doesn't come from trying harder. It comes from standing longer at the foot of the cross and letting it recalibrate what matters. Jesus did not cling to His rights. And because of that, He secured our peace. There is no safer place to learn forgiveness than there.

The End of All Feuds: Resting in the eternal hope of God's final restoration

Scripture never lets us forget that this world is temporary. Not disposable—but temporary. And that matters more than we think. Every feud you've ever known has an expiration date. The New Heaven and the New Earth will not have grudges. No cold shoulders. No unresolved bitterness. No careful avoidance. No names that still tighten the chest when they're spoken. There will be no enemies there. That future is not escapism. It's direction. It tells us what we are being shaped for. We practice for heaven now. Every act of forgiveness is rehearsal. Every choice to love instead of

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retaliate is a small alignment with the world that's coming. We're learning the language we'll speak fluently one day.

That doesn't mean we ignore injustice now. It means we refuse to let it define us forever. I've buried people who carried grudges to the grave. And I've buried people who laid them down years earlier. The difference is unmistakable. One life feels unfinished. The other feels resolved. Not because everything worked out. But because peace took root. Blessed are the peacemakers, Jesus said. Not because they avoid conflict. But because they walk through it without becoming what they hate. They will be called sons of God. That name fits because they look like their Father. Peacemaking doesn't erase the past. It redeems the future. It loosens your grip on this age and trains your heart for the next one. And when you finally rest—not just physically, but deeply—you'll realize the reward was never control. It was peace. The peace of Christ. And that is enough.

Vengeance is Mine, Says the Lord: Trusting God with Justice and Letting Go of Revenge

Yet Revelation 6 also speaks of the martyred saints, who are already in heaven, asking the Lord how long they must wait for justice. How long must they wait for God to avenge their blood. They do not ask *if* God will enact justice, but *when*. Does the Lord correct them for their impertinence? Does He point out their lack of forgiveness? No. God does no such thing. He patiently tells them to rest a little longer until still more witnesses are added to their number. The book of Revelation is clear that justice will come for God's people in God's timing. And it will come by the sword of the Lord Jesus. By the wrath of the Lamb.

Revelation shows that ample warning and witness have been and will be given to a world that does not want God's forgiveness. And the very one who became the perfect sacrificial Lamb, sufficient to purify the most wicked sinners, is also the Lamb who expresses the wrath of God on unrepentant sinners.

Lawbreakers should be made to repay the wrongs that they have done. But to whom? Retribution in these cases is right and good. But when? When an individual or group of people has been gravely wronged, we rightly want not only protection, but also vindication. Still, we sense that

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our own forms of retribution are not always fair in this life. For example, if a loved one is murdered, no amount of financial payment or imprisonment will bring the loved one back. So, we sense an appropriate desire for complete vindication. But we realize that God's perfect day of reckoning, when He wipes away every tear, has not yet arrived. That human vindication often falls flat.

There is a conflict. For the Christian, we are already a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). We are already part of a new kingdom with a new King. The Lamb is our Lord and Savior, who has overcome the world. We look to Him to bring salvation in all forms, including vindication, restitution, and retribution in His time. And He will. He is both the Savior from sin and Deliverer from evil.

On the other hand, we still live in this world, and we are to be in submission to governing authorities despite their imperfections. For they are the arm of the Lord to express His vengeance on evil-doers, including aggressor nations. Yet human authorities never perfectly mete out justice.

Only the Lamb of God perfectly and righteously pours out God's final wrath on those who reject His gracious gospel. Loving our Savior's return includes loving His perfect vengeance, which we would also deserve if we were not covered in His precious blood.

This aspect of the gospel goes back to the fall of Adam and Eve. There, God made a promise that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent, while the latter would only bruise the heel of the former (Gen 3:15). This speaks not only to the animosity between Jesus and Satan, but also that between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent.

It is true that we often do not know who is in which camp, for that isn't settled until the end of a person's life. Therefore, we cannot use that as an excuse to say who will or won't forgive. That is a trap of the enemy. We are to forgive 70 times 7 times, as we have been forgiven.

But the promise that the Lamb of God is the perfect judge who will mete out perfect justice in a way that we could never do gives us peace to rest in God's holy grace and holy justice.



CONCLUSION: A FINAL WORD FROM THE PORCH

I want to end this the way many hard conversations have ended over the years. Not behind a desk. Not in a pulpit. But on a porch. Evening light fading. Boards creaking under weight. The kind of place where you don't argue anymore. You just tell the truth and let it land. Years ago, I watched a small bridge get rebuilt outside a rural town. It had washed out during a storm. Not all at once. Slowly. Boards weakened. Supports undermined. One morning, it simply gave way, and the road ended in midair. For a long time, people took detours. Longer drives. Extra miles. They adjusted. Some forgot the bridge had ever been there. Others complained about the inconvenience but never lifted a tool. Then one day, a crew showed up. Not to talk about the bridge. To rebuild it. Beam by beam. Sweat. Noise. Time. The crossing reopened quietly. No ceremony. Just a way forward where there hadn't been one. That's what peacemaking looks like most of the time. Not dramatic reconciliation scenes. Not tidy endings. Just slow obedience. Costly obedience. The kind that rebuilds a passage you may never fully walk across with the other person. But someone will. And you needed to be faithful anyway.

Here's the truth that needs saying plainly at the end: you cannot do any of this in your own strength. Not for long. Not honestly. Not without becoming brittle or proud or exhausted. Anyone who tells you otherwise has not tried to forgive deeply entrenched harm. This kind of love is not a personality trait. It is a work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit does not erase pain. He

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steadies you inside it. He reminds you who you belong to when old instincts come roaring back. He interrupts the reflex to retaliate. He gives restraint when silence is wiser than speech. He gives courage when obedience feels exposed. And sometimes, quietly, He gives peace before you think you deserve it.

If you are reading this and a name is already forming in your mind, don't push it away. Don't sanitize it. Don't spiritualize it into abstraction. Name your enemy honestly before God. The one who wounded you. The one who disappointed you. The one who still tightens your chest when they come up in conversation. God is not threatened by specificity. He works with truth, not generalities. Hand that person over to Him. Not with dramatic words. Just with sincerity. Tell Him what the debt feels like. Tell Him what you wanted that you never received. Tell Him where the bitterness still lives. And then, deliberately, release the judgment. Not because it feels right. But because it is right. Because you are not the judge. And because you were never meant to carry that weight. Let the Holy Spirit do what only He can do. Let Him rebuild what sin and time and fear tore down. Let Him make you into a peacemaker in ways that feel costly now but will feel like freedom later.

And as you go, hear this blessing spoken plainly and without flourish. May the God of peace guard your heart when old wounds ache. May the Spirit give you restraint when anger rises quickly and wisdom when love requires distance. May Christ, who forgave you at the cost of His own blood, shape your reflexes until mercy comes more naturally than revenge. May your obedience, even when unseen, prepare you for the kingdom where enemies no longer exist and peace is no longer fragile. The road ahead will not always be easy. But it will be walked with grace. And that is enough.



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