

FORGIVENESS

REFLECTING
GOD'S MERCY

31-DAY DEVOTIONALS FOR LIFE

HAYLEY SATROM

Hayley has written a wonderful devotional on forgiveness. Her personal stories are interwoven throughout many of the entries and relate exceptionally well to the Scripture she's chosen. She handles a difficult subject with grace and truth. I believe this devotional will really help those struggling with forgiveness, and I heartily endorse her book!

—**Julie Ganschow**, Author, *Seeing Depression through the Eyes of Grace*; Director, Reigning Grace Counseling Center, Kansas City, Missouri

In *Forgiveness: Reflecting God's Mercy*, Hayley Satrom invites us into Christ's life-changing grace. In helping us to experience God's grace, Hayley encourages and empowers us to give Christ's grace to others. Though this is a brief devotional, it is packed with theological truth applied to real life. There's no pretense in Hayley's writing—she talks candidly and wisely about the costly grace of forgiveness.

—**Bob Kellemen**, Author, *Gospel-Centered Marriage Counseling: An Equipping Guide for Pastors and Counselors*

With our culture's descent into a cultivated meanness, forgiveness has become critical. Hayley's devotional will help to deliver you from the rising tide of touchiness that is dragging even the church into bitterness. Let Jesus bless you through Hayley!

—**Paul Miller**, Executive Director, seeJesus.net; Author, *A Praying Life*

Hayley Satrom is a gifted communicator who tackles the sensitive topic of biblical forgiveness in a clear, loving, and practical way. She begins by defining what biblical forgiveness is, then discusses the difficulty of forgiveness and God's continuing model of forgiveness in his love for us. In my work with individuals and couples in a church setting for over nineteen years, the topic of forgiveness has entered into almost every situation. Hayley shares

some of her own impactful story, uses the stories of biblical characters, and shares God's Word to help others who struggle with grace, mercy, and forgiveness. This book will be a go-to resource for our counselors and those we counsel.

—**Joanne Owens**, Director of Care and Counseling,
Immanuel Bible Church, Springfield, Virginia

You begin to grasp the heart of forgiveness only when you behold the heart of the Savior revealed in the gospel. It's only in Christ that we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace. In *Forgiveness*, Hayley Satrom helps us to marvel at this good news of free and full forgiveness and moves us toward forgiving those who have sinned against us. Hayley wisely walks alongside her readers, faithfully showing from the Scriptures what forgiveness is and how God helps us to forgive others. I was helped by this devotional, and I'm delighted to commend it to others.

—**Nick Roark**, Pastor, Franconia Baptist Church,
Alexandria; Coauthor, *Biblical Theology: How The
Church Faithfully Teaches the Gospel*

FORGIVENESS

31-DAY DEVOTIONALS FOR LIFE

A Series

DEEPAK REJU

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F O R G I V E N E S S

REFLECTING
G O D ' S
M E R C Y

HAYLEY SATROM



P U B L I S H I N G

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Tips for Reading This Devotional

EARLY IN OUR marriage, my wife and I lived on the top floor of a town house, in a small one-bedroom apartment. Whenever it rained, leaks in the roof would drip through the ceiling and onto our floors. I remember placing buckets in different parts of the apartment and watching the water slowly drip, one drop at a time. I put large buckets out and thought, *It'll take a while to fill them.* The water built up over time, and often I was surprised at how quickly those buckets filled up, overflowing if I didn't pay close enough attention.

Like rain filling up a bucket, this devotional will surprise you. It may not seem like much—just a few verses every day. Drip. Drip. Drip. Yet a few drops of Scripture daily can satiate your parched soul. The transformative power of God's Word will build over time and overflow into your life.

Why does a devotional like this make such a difference?

We start with Scripture. God's Word is powerful. Used by the Holy Spirit, it turns the hearts of kings, brings comfort to the lowly, and gives spiritual sight to the blind. It transforms lives and turns them upside down. We know that the Bible is God's very own words, so we read and study it to know God himself.

Our study of Scripture is practical. Theology should change how we live. It's crucial to connect the Word with your struggles. Each devotional contains a mixture of reflection questions and practical suggestions. You'll get much more from this experience if you answer the questions and do the practical exercises. Don't skip them. Do them for the sake of your own soul.

Our study of Scripture is worshipful. In this fallen world, we face trials, hurts, pains, conflict, anger, and outright messy situations.

It can be hard to forgive. It can be a struggle. Heart work is hard work. It takes heart work to move toward genuine forgiveness of wrongs, as you bear the liability and foolishness of someone else's sins and mistakes. An unwillingness to forgive can poison our heart and quickly morph into bitterness. There are exhortations to forgive in Scripture (see Matt. 6:12; Eph. 4:32) and warnings against a lack of forgiveness (see Matt. 18:21–35). So we pay close attention to John's warning: "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20). If you hate your brother and you are unwilling to forgive, it hinders your relationship with the Lord. A lack of forgiveness is a worship problem.

Does God's forgiveness of our sins make a difference? Can Christ help us to forgive? As Christians, we forgive because Christ first forgave us. That's the basis of our hope. Christ can reorient our wounded and angry hearts and help us to forgive because of the richness of his gospel. That's good news, especially if you are struggling to forgive someone you know and love.

If you find this devotional helpful (and I trust that you will!), reread it in different seasons of your life. Work through it this coming month, and then come back to it a year from now to remind yourself about our forgiveness in Christ and our need to forgive others.

This devotional is *not* meant to be a comprehensive guide to forgiveness. Good volumes are already written for that purpose. Buy them and make good use of them. You'll see several resources listed at the end of the book.

That's enough for now. Let's begin.

Deepak Reju

Introduction

HAVE YOU HEARD of Dorothy Holloway? Hers is a story of unimaginable forgiveness.

Dorothy lost her teenage son Brian in a senseless crime when he was shot by another teenager in a scuffle about a girl. For the fifteen years following Brian's death, Dorothy suffered what she called a "personal hell" of grief, so great was her anger and despair.

Eventually, however, this heartbroken mother discovered God's power of forgiveness. "When God put forgiveness in my heart," she said, ". . . I could finally breathe."

On December 3, 2014, Dorothy wrote a letter to her son's murderer, James, who was still serving his prison sentence. Dorothy explained that God had given her the grace to forgive him. As it turns out, James had been praying for many years that God would enable Dorothy to forgive him for killing her son. "When I received that letter from her," he said, "I knew then that God had been listening to my prayers."

A most unexpected reconciliation followed. Dorothy and James write frequent letters to one another, and Dorothy regularly visits James in prison. James now refers to Dorothy as "Mama." When people ask Dorothy how this could possibly be, she shrugs her shoulders and states matter-of-factly, "I am his mother . . . in *Christ*. And he is my son . . . in *Christ*."¹

Dorothy's ability to forgive her son's murderer is a reminder to us that nothing is impossible with God (see Matt. 19:26). It is a stirring example of powerful forgiveness made possible by the Spirit of God, who is alive and working in all God's children.

The Difficulty of Forgiveness

Does Dorothy's story make you wonder if you could radically forgive like she did?

Forgiveness is difficult. We say, “I forgive you,” but in the next breath speak words of malice. We urge ourselves to love our wrongdoer, only to inwardly rejoice when the person suffers or to feel disappointed when they succeed. It feels easier to distance ourselves from hurtful people than to forgive them. Sometimes we are tempted to lash out or slander our offenders behind their backs. But forgive? Even if we desire to forgive, actually doing so seems impossible.

If you recognize this struggle, you are not alone. Forgiveness is one of the most common struggles I see in my work in the counseling room. No one escapes injury in relationships—not spouses, parents, children, siblings, friends, or exes. Though God made us to live in relationship with one another—and relationships are good!—the fallenness of this world taints our dealings with one another. We selfishly hurt those around us, and others selfishly hurt us too. No wonder so many folks feel *stuck* in perplexing emotions of disappointment, anger, bitterness, and even despair. We wonder *if* we should forgive, *why* we should forgive, and *how* we can forgive.

What Is Forgiveness?

According to the Bible, forgiveness is extending undeserved grace to wrongdoers, which includes absorbing their debts against us. We read in the Scriptures, “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Col. 3:13 NIV). God calls Christians to the highest standard of forgiveness imaginable: *his* standard! God canceled our debt of sin against him—indeed, he paid it himself by dying in our place. He expects us to go and do likewise. As we’ll see, he commands us to cancel other people’s sin-debts against us just as he has canceled ours.

There are lots of ways we demand payment from other people for their sins. Instead of showing grace, we berate our wrongdoers, wish ill on them, nurse bitterness against them, withdraw from

them, or keep a record of their wrongs. Yet Jesus teaches that having received immeasurable mercy from God, we have no right to withhold lesser mercy from others. Instead of berating, we are to speak the truth in love. Instead of wishing ill, we are to pray for God's will. Instead of nursing bitterness, we are to love our enemies. Instead of withdrawing, we are to move toward. Instead of keeping a record of wrongs, we are to hope in what we cannot see. Instead of *punishing* our wrongdoers, we are to *forgive* them.

Forgiveness is a high calling from the Lord; at times it feels like an impossibly high calling. Forgiveness is a part of what it means to pick up our cross and follow Jesus (see Matt. 16:24–25). There is nothing easy about that. To forgive the debts of those who sin against us requires nothing less than the miraculous Spirit of God working within us, transforming us to become more like Christ. We cannot forgive with our own strength.

Perhaps I don't need to tell you that. You picked up a devotional on forgiveness, after all. I imagine you know all too well what it means to be hurt by someone. I hope you will be encouraged to hear that you are not the only one. As a daughter, wife, and friend, I also have struggled to forgive. There have been times—even seasons—when I have felt stuck in my own anger and coldness, striving to forgive in my own strength and finding it impossible. By God's grace, I have also experienced the power of true forgiveness with *God's* strength and the unmatched peace it brings. I have collected these Scriptures and meditations out of my own experiences, and others who struggle with forgiveness have helped me with this resource as well. I pray that our thirty-one days together will encourage your soul.

This Book

In this devotional, let's explore and meditate on God's words about forgiveness. We'll journey together with God as we apply the following gospel truths to our lives:

- God *forgives* us.
- God *shows* us what forgiveness looks like.
- God *teaches* us how to forgive.
- God *helps* us to forgive.

If you desire to fathom more of God's forgiveness in your life, this devotional is for you. If you have been seriously hurt and forgiveness seems impossible, this devotional is for you.² If you try to forgive but feel frustrated by how hard it is, this devotional is for you. If you struggle to move past even perceived slights or minor offenses, this devotional is for you too.

As you read, I invite you to pray for better understanding of God's forgiveness of you. Pray for an attitude of forgiveness toward your debtors that mirrors God's. Pray for wisdom about the ifs, whens, and hows of reconciliation. With the help of God's Spirit, we can forgive in ways that are humanly impossible—just like Dorothy Holloway.

GOD FORGIVES US

“The unchangeableness of the Lord’s love, and the riches of his mercy, are likewise more illustrated by the multiplied pardons he bestows upon his people, than if they needed no forgiveness at all.”

John Newton, *The Works of the Rev. John Newton*

DAY 1

Remember the Lord's Benefits

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. (Ps. 103:2-5)

THE DEGREE TO which we rejoice in God's forgiveness of us will be the degree to which we are able to forgive others. It is difficult to forgive when we lose sight of God's amazing grace. Today let's remember *who* God is and *what* he has done for us!

Psalm 103 celebrates God's love. King David, the writer of the psalm, begins with shouts of praise: "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits" (vv. 1-2). Can you feel the heart-swell of David's words as he exhorts himself ("O my soul") to praise God? He is caught up in gratitude for all that God has done.

Throughout the entire psalm, David reminds his soul of God's steadfast love. In verses 3-5, he recalls the many benefits of knowing the Lord: God forgives your sin, he heals your diseases, he redeems your life from hell, he shows you steadfast love and mercy, and he satisfies you with good so that you can have strength like an eagle. What an amazing God! Amen?

It's not surprising that David celebrates the Lord for forgiving all his sin. He is the Bible's most famous murderer and adulterer, after all. He abused his kingly authority and suffered God's painful judgment. So when David speaks of God's forgiveness, he is speaking very *personally*. God's amazing grace is a sweet balm to David's soul.

As we look at David's life story, found in 1 Samuel 16 through

1 Kings 2:11, we find that he was quintessentially human. He soared to high highs of faithfulness and plummeted to low lows of selfishness, just like you and me. David experienced God amidst his victories, and he also experienced God amidst his sins. The Lord walked alongside him—supplying courage, wisdom, seasons of discipline, and ultimately forgiveness and restoration. As David grew in his relationship with the Lord, he could not help but look back at God’s love and praise him for it: “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me!”

Can you relate to David? Have you experienced God’s presence in the highs and lows of *your* life? How has God shown up for you? Has he ever supplied you with what you needed at just the right time? Forgiveness? Healing? Redemption? Steadfast love? Like David, do you need to remind yourself of God’s kindness today?

If we are to grow in our ability to forgive other people, we must first remember who God is and what he has done for us. As we meditate on God’s love and mercy, may we find our souls tender for the task of forgiveness.

Reflect: Can you trace the “benefits of God” in your life? If you have trouble tracing his kindness, read Psalm 103 in its entirety and reflect on his character displayed there. Pray for God to reveal more of his good character to you.

Act: Don’t do this heart work on your own. As you read through this devotional, consider inviting a mature Christian friend to meet with you weekly to talk through your reflections and pray together.

DAY 2

Believe in God's Love

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved. (Eph. 2:4–5)

“I BELIEVE GOD saved me, but I imagine him doing it . . . *out of obligation.*” “I know in my head God loves me, but it’s hard to *feel* he could possibly love someone this messed up.” “Maybe God loves Christ, who covers me with his righteousness, but that’s different from God actually loving *me personally.*” I hear such sentiments many times in the counseling room. Many Christians believe the truth that God chose to rescue them from death. But their joy in their salvation is dampened as they imagine Jesus giving his life with rolled eyes and a loud sigh.

I’m not surprised by these sentiments. They are colored by how we humans “love” each other. It’s easy for us to love someone who is pleasant. But love someone who hurts and betrays us? That’s not something we do naturally.

Let’s not allow our *natural* selves to dictate what we believe about our *supernatural* God. Today’s verses give us a glimpse into why and how our salvation took place. In Ephesians 2:1–3, the apostle Paul explains that before we were rescued by God, we were spiritually dead and deserved God’s wrath. We needed his forgiveness! We couldn’t do anything to save ourselves, so we needed a rescuer. Verse 4 starts with the most important two words in the Bible—“But God . . .” Here we find the good news: being *rich in mercy*, because of *his great love* for us, God made us alive in Christ. So abundant is God’s love and mercy that he rescues us from spiritual death, at great cost to himself. Praise the Lord!

If we are Christians, it is only because God supernaturally awakened our dead hearts with spiritual life. As Paul tells us, it is “by grace you have been saved.” *Grace*. That rich theological word means “undeserved favor.” God shows us mercy and love not because we deserve it but because of who he is. Jesus Christ chose to die in our place because his character is overwhelmingly gracious, merciful, and loving.

The Bible gives no hint that God loves us because we have it all together. Quite the opposite—it says he loved us even while we were still sinners, dead in our trespasses. *What marvelous mercy*. On the cross, God took the punishment we deserved, not begrudgingly, not out of obligation, with no bitterness in his heart. He did it because he loves us. *What infinite love*. God is not man, and his love is not dependent upon ours. God loves us because of who he is.

Matchless *grace*. Marvelous *mercy*. Infinite *love*. This is the character of the awesome God we serve. Are you willing to accept his love for you? Receiving God’s love more fully is the pathway to giving love more fully. If you wish to become a more forgiving person, start by meditating on God’s love for you, which he showed by his death on the cross.

Reflect: Can you *really* believe that God loves you—*not* out of obligation or begrudgingly? If not, what is getting in your way?

Reflect: How is God’s love radically different from the imperfect love in your earthly relationships?

Act: Pray that God’s Spirit would enable you “to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:18–19).

DAY 3

Trust God's Free Gift of Grace

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not by your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph. 2:8–9)

IN 2012, I became a mother to my firstborn, Hannah Sue. Even as I write that sentence my eyes well up with tears. That's what happens when you have a mother's love in your heart!

Becoming a parent changed the way I love. While love is earned and deserved in many of my other relationships, my love for my children is a completely free gift. I can't explain it, except to say that *I love them because I love them*. I love them when they are cute, funny, and sweet, and I love them when they are whiny, difficult, and sinful. I love them . . . always. I'm not saying I always like how they're behaving; they are not perfect, and neither am I. But a deep, abiding love undergirds our relationship. That love is deeper than anything behavior can earn. It is tethered to their being as my children and to my being as their mother. It just *is*.

Our verses today remind us that just as my love is a free gift to my children, God's grace is a free gift to us, *his* children. Grace is God's unmerited favor. Out of his rich mercy and love for us, God saved us when we were dead in our sins. It is by God's grace we are saved! Our salvation, our faith, God's grace . . . all these are gifts from our heavenly Father. We need not earn them. Indeed, we *cannot* earn them. Our salvation is not by our own doing, and as a result there is no room for us to boast.

How many of us behave as if we need to work hard to achieve our salvation? Do we think we need to perform well to be loved by God? We look at God not as our loving parent, eager to extend grace, but as a taskmaster, ready to punish when we mess up.

Perhaps we see God this way because that's how we often function. I see a tendency in my own heart to love and forgive the people who deserve it . . . and only those people! Do you see this same tendency in yourself? Or perhaps you grew up in a home where grace was not eagerly extended. It is no wonder that you imagine that God functions similarly. The truth, however, is that God's grace *is* freely given; we need only to believe him that this is true.

God's grace can renew our hearts and supernaturally enable us to extend grace to others. As we accept God's free gift of grace in our lives, we discover new ability to offer unmerited love and forgiveness to others. No longer do people need to earn our favor. Even our greatest enemies are seen in a different light as we remember that God's mercy was extended to *us* while we were still his enemies.

God's grace is our free gift, given to us by our perfect, loving Father. Let's enjoy his grace and see how that impacts the way we treat others.

Reflect: Have you ever experienced a love that was unconditional and free? If you have, you know what a parent's love should be like and, even better, what our heavenly Father's love is like.

Reflect: How has God's free gift of grace changed your life? Does it affect how you treat others?

Act: Consider Julia Johnston's lovely hymn lyrics, and ask God to help you to receive his grace.

Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,
Freely bestowed on all who believe.
All who are longing to see his face,
Will you this moment his grace receive?¹