



HOPE FOR THE ORPHAN



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INTRODUCTION

Dear Friend,

I was born in Melbourne, Australia without arms and legs even though three sonograms had never revealed any complications. Growing up, it wasn't easy. Throughout my childhood, I struggled with depression and loneliness. I even questioned the purpose of my life and tried to take my own life when I was ten years old.

But Jesus met me in my pain and I decided to give my life to him. Since then, I've travelled to 74 countries to share my story with millions of people just like yourself, from students and young people to business professionals and even world leaders. I want to share a special message with the world based on my own story and encounter with Jesus: there is hope.

I may not know what you're struggling with today. But like I've seen in my own life, the Bible teaches us that Jesus is not only present in our pain, but that He is the answer to our heaviest struggles. Jesus says, *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have **peace**. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33).

I'm here to tell you today that you are special, you are loved, and that God does have an amazing plan for your life. He will never leave or forsake you. And if God can use me, a man without arms and legs, to be His hands and feet, then He will certainly use any willing heart. Throughout my life I've always held onto a special verse that says: *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you **hope** and a **future**"* (Jeremiah 29:11). If we give our lives to him, he promises to give us hope and a future. Now that is amazing!

Here at NickV Ministries, we love you and we're praying for you. We're here to be your Champions and to point you back to the true Champion: Jesus. We pray that these resources will help you through whatever challenges you may be facing and bring hope for the way forward.

Thank you and God Bless,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "NickV". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a large 'V' at the end.

Nick Vujicic and the NickV Ministries Team

REJECTION & ABANDONMENT

Healing a Wounded Heart

What is God's Heart on Rejection & Abandonment?

If you've experienced rejection, perhaps one of the hardest truths to accept is that God loves you and accepts you. Even more, it can be difficult to grasp that God *delights* in you. And yet, that's the truth. The Lord chose you to bring you into His family and to be with you—and it gives Him great joy to love you.

*“Even before he made the world,
God loved us and chose us in Christ
to be holy and without fault in his eyes.
God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family
by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ.
This is what he wanted to do,
and it gave him great pleasure.”
(EPHESIANS 1:4–5 NLT)*

8 Biblical Truths on Rejection

1. God understands the pain of rejection.

“He [Jesus] was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem” (ISAIAH 53:3).

2. God has chosen you and is always with you.

“I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (ISAIAH 41:9–10).

3. God will not abandon you—even if those closest to you do.

“Even if my father and mother abandon me, the LORD will hold me close” (PSALM 27:10 NLT).

4. God will not reject His people—those He made His own.

“For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own” (1 SAMUEL 12:22).

5. God will not reject anyone who comes to Him in faith.

“Whoever comes to me I will never drive away” (JOHN 6:37).

6. God completely accepts you through Christ.

“Accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory” (ROMANS 15:7 NLT).

7. God wants you to see yourself through His eyes—as precious and honored.

“You are precious to me. You are honored, and I love you” (ISAIAH 43:4 NLT).

8. God wants you to see yourself through His eyes—as His dearly beloved child.

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 JOHN 3:1).

Key Passage to Read

“I am *with* you.” Few statements express love so simply and concisely. The word *with* might be one of the most meaningful words in the world. *With* implies connection, closeness, togetherness, relationship, and intimacy. We love and feel loved when we show that we are with one another.

Rejection and abandonment hurt because they sever the sense of *with* in a relationship. Love says, “I am with you,” but rejection and abandonment communicate “I am not with you” or even worse “I am against you.” If you’ve known the pain of receiving that message, then you need to know one of the most powerful and life-changing truths: the Lord is *with* you. He always has been and He always will be.

God loves you
and
accepts you.

Isaiah 41:9-10

*“I have chosen you and have not rejected you.
So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”*

- God** chose you to belong to Him and be with Him.v. 9
- God** has not and will not reject or abandon you..v. 9
- God** is always with you, so you can overcome the fear of rejection.v. 10
- God** made you His own, so you always have reason to be encouraged.....v. 10
- God** will give you strength to heal the pain of rejection and abandonment.....v. 10
- God** will help you move forward from your painful past.v. 10
- God** will sustain you each day, each step of the way.v. 10
- God’s** mighty hand will be with you to bless you and give you victory.v. 10

Rejection vs. Abandonment

Question: “What’s the difference between rejection and abandonment?”

Answer: There is some overlap between rejection and abandonment yet there are some differences.

- **Rejection** involves refusing someone; **abandonment** involves withdrawing from someone
- **Rejection** involves pushing someone away from you and casting them aside; **abandonment** involves moving yourself away from someone and leaving them behind
- **Rejection** often involves strong negative emotions like hatred—despising someone; **abandonment** often involves careless disregard of responsibility—neglecting someone.

Although they are different, rejection and abandonment both signal a break in intimacy, a severing of a relationship. They often result in painful feelings and a broken heart for the one cast aside or left alone. The Lord offers hope and healing for both—for those who have been rejected or abandoned.

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”

(PSALM 147:3)

How to Overcome Rejection & Abandonment

Rejection from parents, a spouse, or other significant people in your life can bring devastating blows. In addition to emotional pain, your sense of identity and self-image can be impacted as well. It’s no mystery why. Those closest to you play a critical role in forming your identity and shaping your self-image. When these individuals reject or abandon you—it can be difficult to grasp who you are and how to see yourself.

Long before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah spoke of the Messiah, saying, “*He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain*” (Isaiah 53:3). Realize, the Lord understands the pain of rejection and abandonment.

An important step in overcoming rejection is reflecting on God’s acceptance of you and the truth that He does not reject you. Even if those closest to you reject you, the Lord will not. . . . “*Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me*” (Psalm 27:10). Embrace the truth of the Lord’s love for you just as He embraces you.

*“The LORD will not reject his people;
he will not abandon his special possession.”*

(PSALM 94:14 NLT)

Overcoming Rejection with God’s Truth

The messages of rejection and abandonment can be bitterly painful and terribly destructive to your life and relationships. The lies they convey must be countered with the truth of Scripture.

When you experience . . .

Rejection

Tell yourself the truth: “Just because someone withholds love from me doesn’t mean everyone will withhold love from me. God listens to me and will never withhold His love from me.”

“Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!” (PSALM 66:20).

Worthlessness

Tell yourself the truth: “Just because someone doesn’t value me doesn’t mean no one values me. God created me, so I have inherent, unchanging worth—and He sees me as precious in His sight.”

“You are precious and honored in my sight, and . . . I love you” (ISAIAH 43:4).

Self-hate

Tell yourself the truth: “Just because someone has judged me doesn’t mean I should condemn myself. God does not condemn me, because I am set free in Christ.”

“There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death” (ROMANS 8:1–2 NLT).

To Overcome Feeling Rejected Remember in Christ, You Are Accepted (an acrostic for the word ACCEPTED)

A—Admit rejection from the past and acknowledge its pain.

“I am about to fall, and my pain is ever with me” (PSALM 38:17).

C—Claim God’s acceptance and unconditional love.

“He made us accepted in the Beloved” (EPHESIANS 1:6 NKJV).

C—Choose to forgive those who have rejected you.

*“Forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others”
(COLOSSIANS 3:13 NLT).*

E—Expect future rejection to be natural in a fallen world.

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you” (1 PETER 4:12 ESV).

P—Plant Scripture in your mind to produce new and truthful thought patterns.

“I will study your commandments and reflect on your ways” (PSALM 119:15 NLT).

T—Thank God for what you’ve learned through your rejection.

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 THESSALONIANS 5:18).

E—Encourage others as an expression of Christ’s love.

“Encourage one another and build each other up” (1 THESSALONIANS 5:11).

D—Draw on the power of Christ’s life within you.

*“May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think”
(EPHESIANS 3:19–20 NLT).*

People-Pleasing

Question: “How do I overcome my tendency to always want to please people?”

Answer: You’re not alone. Many struggle with people-pleasing and for a variety of reasons. They may be a peace-at-any-price type of person who generally avoids confrontation. They may fear sticking up for themselves or making their opinions known—or they may have never learned how to set boundaries with others. Deep down, they may seek the approval of others as a way to meet an inner need for love, significance, or security.

- **Address your fears.** You may have underlying fears about not meeting others’ approval. Pray, journal, and talk with someone you trust to help you address those fears. Whatever the reason for people-pleasing in your life, it can feel like an inescapable trap—but you can be set free with God’s help.

“Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe” (PROVERBS 29:25).

- **Set boundaries.** It’s okay to say *No* to others. Sometimes you need to say *No* to people so you can say *Yes* to God. Setting boundaries can help guard you from excessively doing things for others in an attempt to gain approval.

“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it” (PROVERBS 4:23).

- **Trust God to meet your needs.** Only God can fully meet your deep needs for love, significance, and security. Even if you receive the approval of others, it won’t satisfy the deepest longings in your heart. Look to Christ to meet those needs and seek God’s approval above all.

*“Am I now trying to win the approval
of human beings, or of God?
Or am I trying to please people?
If I were still trying to please people,
I would not be a servant of Christ.”
(GALATIANS 1:10)*

IDENTITY & SELF-IMAGE

Knowing What's True about You

What Is God's Heart on Your Identity?

Paul had it all—born into the right family, educated by the best teachers, and held the top status job and position in his culture as a religious teacher, a Pharisee. He said, *“I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault”* (Philippians 3:5–6 NLT).

His identity was wrapped up in where he was born, who he knew, and what he did. But that all changed when he met Jesus. Paul continues, *“I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord”* (Philippians 3:7–8 NLT).

As Paul compared his past identity to his identity in Christ, there was no contest. He even says about his former accolades and accomplishments: *“I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him”* (Philippians 3:8–9).

When you are *“found in him,”* everything changes. The identity you receive in Christ far outweighs any other identity you may have. Your gender, your family, your age, race, culture, school, job, accomplishments, status, and hobbies may all reveal important aspects about you—but they are not where your ultimate identity is found. Your identity is to be rooted in Christ.

*“Just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord,
you must continue to follow him.
Let your roots grow down into him,
and let your lives be built on him.
Then your faith will grow strong
in the truth you were taught,
and you will overflow with thankfulness.”*
(COLOSSIANS 2:6–7 NLT)

12 Truths about Your Identity in Christ

You are loved.

“God loves you and has chosen you to be his own people” (1 THESSALONIANS 1:4 NLT).

You are chosen.

“Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes” (EPHESIANS 1:4 NLT).

You are accepted.

“Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory” (ROMANS 15:7 NLT).

You are redeemed.

“But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you . . . he who formed you . . . ‘Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine’” (ISAIAH 43:1).

You are precious.

“You are precious to me. You are honored, and I love you” (ISAIAH 43:4 NLT).

You are forgiven.

“You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins” (COLOSSIANS 2:13 NLT).

You are cleansed.

“But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 CORINTHIANS 6:11 NLT).

You are renewed.

“Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” (2 CORINTHIANS 5:17 NLT).

You are empowered.

“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 PETER 1:3).

You are gifted.

“In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well” (ROMANS 12:6 NLT).

You are useful.

“We are God’s handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (EPHESIANS 2:10).

You are blessed.

“All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ” (EPHESIANS 1:3 NLT).

“The identity you receive in Christ far outweighs any other identity you may have.”

Key Verse to Memorize

Heart transplant stories inspire and amaze. With the wonders of modern surgery and the generosity of organ donors, a dying individual can receive new life from another. There's a sense in which the donor's life continues, living in and through the recipient. The new life of the recipient is due to the generosity of the donor.

However, astounding stories of successful heart transplants are but a dim reflection of an incredible biblical reality. When you become a follower of Christ, God gives you a new heart, a new identity, a new family, and a new purpose. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ's life becomes yours as He lives in you and through you. This new life and identity is due entirely to the generous grace of God in Christ.

*"I have been crucified with Christ
and I no longer live,
but Christ lives in me.
The life I now live in the body,
I live by faith in the Son of God,
who loved me and gave himself for me."
(GALATIANS 2:20)*

Key Passage to Read

God's Word describes each person in two different ways. There's the "you" before receiving Christ, and there the "you" after receiving Christ. The Bible describes this difference as your "old self" and your "new self."

The old self, like Adam, disobeyed God, lived independently of God, and generally lived to please self. But in and through Christ, we are given a new nature. The new self seeks to obey God, lives dependently on Him, and desires to please God. Everything about the old self was centered on self; everything about the new self is centered on Christ.

*"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off
your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;
to be made new in the attitude of your minds;
and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true
righteousness and holiness."
(EPHESIANS 4:22-24)*

Colossians 3:1-17
Putting on the New Self

You are with Christ and in Christ—so focus on Him.v. 1

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.”

You have died to your old self—so look to Christ to find life.vv. 2-3

“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”

You have a new, glorious future—so live with joyful expectation.v. 4

“When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

You are not defined by the sins of your past—so you can conquer them. vv. 5-9

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices . . .”

You are made new—so grow to be more and more like Christ.v. 10

“and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

You belong to Christ—so find your primary identity in Him. v. 11

“Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.”

You are chosen, holy and loved—so love and forgive as Christ does. vv. 12-14

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

You have the peace of Christ—so live a life of peace and gratitude.v. 15

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.”

You have a new purpose in Christ—so share Him with others.v. 16

“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.”

You have a new motivation in Christ—so do everything to the glory of God. v. 17

“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

My Personalized Plan to Embrace My Identity in Christ

Who am I?

There are so many ways people answer that question. Some look to their country—"I am an American." Some look to their family—"I am a mother" . . . "I am a husband" . . . "I am a grandparent."

I could look to my job, school, gender, or many other things to define myself. But God knows me best. He knows everything about me. Only He can give me the most accurate description of my own identity. So I will look to Him and His Word for my identity

Inevitably, I will recognize that there is a great difference between who God says I am and who I think I am. But God doesn't just give me a new identity in Christ and leaves me alone to figure it out—He graciously helps me become who He says I am.

*"But by the grace of God I am what I am,
and his grace to me was not without effect.
No, I worked harder than all of them—
yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me."
(1 CORINTHIANS 15:10)*

As I seek to grow and become more like Christ, **I will** ...

Embrace my identity in Christ

I understand that Christ died not only to forgive my sins but to make me a new person—to make me to be more like Him. The Lord has the final word on my identity, not me or my family or my job or my circumstances. The person the Lord says I am . . . is who I am.

- I will study God's Word regularly to remind myself of who God is and who He says I am.
- I will look to Christ to find my primary identity.

"For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God" (COLOSSIANS 3:3).

Put my old self and old ways behind me

God does not define me by my sin, my past, or my mistakes . . . so neither will I. Things in my past no longer define my self-image and identity. I can acknowledge those influences and overcome them with God's help.

- I will remember that I am not defined by my past or my sins.
- I will seek to overcome the sins that have previously entrapped me.

"We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. . . . So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus" (ROMANS 6:6, 11 NLT).

Acknowledge my background

Who I am is no accident. God is sovereign over my life. He determined the time, place, and family I'd be born into—it's no mistake. God chose the circumstances surrounding my life, and chose me to be His, so I can acknowledge and be thankful for the various ways God has orchestrated my life to make me who He created me to be.

- I will acknowledge the people, places, and positions that have influenced my identity (for good or bad), but remember they are not where my ultimate identity lies.
- I will reflect on and be thankful for the positive influences that shaped who I am today—my family, culture, education, friends, jobs, and life experiences.

"Give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (EPHESIANS 5:20 NLT).

Honestly evaluate myself

Having an exaggerated or elevated view of myself is prideful—God doesn't want that for me. However, having a worthless or undignified view of myself is not what God desires either. I must honestly assess who I am in God's sight.

- I will not think of myself too highly—remembering that I am a sinner saved by grace.
- I will not think of myself too lowly—remembering that I am made in God's image and loved.

"Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us" (ROMANS 12:3 NLT).

Correct faulty thinking and emotions

If I *feel* like a failure, that does not mean I *am* a failure. If I *think* I am worthless, that does not mean I *am* worthless. I recognize that my thoughts and emotions can be misguided and wrong. It's important to be in God's Word to identify the lies I believe about myself and God—and correct them with His truth.

- I will identify the lies I've believed about myself, about others, about life, and about God.
- I will look to God's Word to replace those lies with the truth.

"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (JOHN 8:32).

Encourage others

I know there are Christians who don't understand their identity in Christ. I also know there are many who are not Christians but long to understand who they can be. The Lord can use me to help others see who they are in God's eyes.

- I will reach out to those struggling with identity and self-image issues and help them see their God-given worth.
- I will embrace my identity as an ambassador of Christ and share the life-changing identity others can also have in Christ.

"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 CORINTHIANS 5:20).

How to Live Out Your Identity in Christ

The apostle Paul once told a church *“You should imitate me”* (1 Corinthians 11:1 NLT). On the surface, that sounds like a boastful, if not outright prideful, claim. Some might have been cautious about following such an instruction, considering Paul once described himself as a *“blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man”* (1 Timothy 1:13). Why imitate Paul? He explains, *“You should imitate me just as I imitate Christ”* (1 Corinthians 11:1 NLT).

Paul’s life shows that when Jesus gives you a new identity, He also makes your life reflect His life. Jesus can take the “chief” of sinners (as Paul once called himself) and make each a shining example of His love and grace (1 Timothy 1:15–16). God can change your identity and life so much that you’ll be able to say, like Paul, *“Imitate me just as I imitate Christ.”*

But what does it look like to imitate Christ? Once you receive your identity in Christ, how are you to live it out?

“Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.”

(1 JOHN 2:6)

Love God Like Jesus

Jesus was once asked what the greatest commandment was in all of God’s Word. He said, *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment”* (Matthew 22:37–38). What does it mean to love God like Jesus?

Obey completely

“For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will” (JOHN 6:38 NLT).

Pray reverently

“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission” (HEBREWS 5:7).

Work heartily

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (COLOSSIANS 3:23–24).

Deny your self daily

“If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me” (LUKE 9:23 NLT).

Suffer willingly

“For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps” (1 PETER 2:21 NLT).

Give thanks consistently

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 THESSALONIANS 5:18).

Love Others Like Jesus Did

In addition to loving God, Jesus also spoke of a similar commandment of equal importance. Jesus said, “*And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments*” (Matthew 22:39–40). What does it mean to love others like Jesus did?

Love sacrificially

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (JOHN 15:12–13).

Serve humbly

“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (JOHN 13:14–15).

Forgive completely

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (EPHESIANS 4:32).

Build up others spiritually

“We must not just please ourselves. We should help others do what is right and build them up in the Lord. For even Christ didn’t live to please himself” (ROMANS 15:2–3 NLT).

Accept others graciously

“Accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory” (ROMANS 15:7 NLT).

Help others practically

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?” (1 JOHN 3:16–17).

As a child of God, living out your identity in Christ means loving God and loving others. Jesus said, “*As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another*” (John 13:34–35). The same Paul who told people to imitate him also told others to imitate God, which he described as a life of love. . . .

*“Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do,
because you are his dear children.
Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ.
He loved us and offered himself
as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.”
(EPHESIANS 5:1–2 NLT)*

ANXIETY

Calming the Fearful Heart

What Is God's Heart on Anxiety?

Anxiety inaccurately judges reality. It forgets the past and fears the future. It fails to remember how you've made it through past difficulties and focuses instead on potential threats in the future. Anxiety leaves you with a fight or flight response in the present, vigilantly preparing for possible outcomes or avoiding fearful situations altogether.

The Lord, however, sees all things clearly. He says, *"I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please'"* (Isaiah 46:10). God has brought you through the past and holds your future in His hands. And in your present struggle with anxiety, He is with you. The Lord is at work in your life—your anxiety is not without purpose. God longs to be your refuge and help you walk through your fears and troubles.

*"God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble."*

(PSALM 46:1)

10 Biblical Truths on Anxiety

God wants you to remember that He is good and gracious—and compassionately cares about you.

"The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made" (PSALM 145:8–9).

God wants you to remember He is with you when you're fearful.

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (ISAIAH 41:10).

God wants you to pray and experience His peace when you're feeling anxious.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (PHILIPPIANS 4:6–7).

God wants you to look to Him and His Word when you're filled with anxiety.

"When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy" (PSALM 94:19).

God wants you to align your thoughts with His truth when you feel anxious.

"Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (PHILIPPIANS 4:8).

God wants you to trust Him when you're anxious—to have faith and not fear.

"When I am afraid, I put my trust in you" (PSALM 56:3).

God wants you to talk to Him about all that causes you to feel anxious.

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 PETER 5:7).

God wants you to talk to others about your fears and anxieties.

"Where there is no guidance the people fall, But in abundance of counselors there is victory" (PROVERBS 11:14 NASB).

God wants you to take care of yourself physically and spiritually.

"For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come" (1 TIMOTHY 4:8).

God wants you to encourage others who struggle with anxiety.

"Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up" (PROVERBS 12:25).

Key Verse to Memorize

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."

(1 PETER 5:7)

Key Passage to Read

Philippians 4:4–9

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."

My Personalized Plan to Manage Anxiety

For those who wrestle with anxiety, the future can feel bleak—void of hope and joy but full of fear and misfortune. But God always offers hope for the future and help for today. He comes alongside you and says, “*Do not fear, for I am with you*” (Isaiah 41:10). To the fearful heart, the Bible says, “*With his love, he will calm all your fears*” (Zephaniah 3:17 NLT). With God’s help, you can move forward today and have hope for tomorrow.

“There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off.”
(PROVERBS 23:18)

As I seek God’s help with my anxiety, I will . . .

Remember God’s character

When I’m anxious, I’m tempted to think that God doesn’t care about me, He’s not in control, or He’s not powerful enough to change anything. This can lead me to believe that I have to hold everything together. I need to realize, that my view of God amidst anxiety can either make matters seem worse or help me remain calm and see things clearly.

- I will seek to know God’s character by reading His Word and praying for Him to continually reveal Himself to me.
- I will believe that God is good, that He is with me, and that He will help me—and trust that He is in control and has my best interests at heart.

“The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. . . . The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does” (PSALM 145:8–9, 13).

Address physical issues

Anxiety is not just emotional or cognitive but also physical. It can be caused by or result in physical changes, so it is therefore important to address any physical issues that may be contributing to my anxiety.

- I will talk with a doctor about the symptoms I am experiencing and seek treatment.
- I will seek to maintain a healthy lifestyle by eating well, exercising regularly, getting plenty of rest, staying hydrated, avoiding harmful substances, and learning relaxation techniques to manage stress and anxiety.

“I discipline my body and keep it under control” (1 CORINTHIANS 9:27 ESV).

Talk with others

Anxiety can consume my thoughts and emotions and impair my ability to work and go about my daily life. Given the impact it can have on me, sharing my struggles with others and receiving guidance can help me process my experiences and move forward.

- I will seek the help of a professional counselor, supportive group of people in my church or community, and/or talk with trusted friends and family members.
- I will be honest about how I’m feeling and what I’m experiencing.

“Where there is no guidance the people fall, But in abundance of counselors there is victory” (PROVERBS 11:14 NASB).

Reorient my thoughts

Much of the experience of anxiety occurs in the mind. It can cloud my judgment and hinder my decision making. Anxiety can cause difficulty concentrating and lead me to believe the future is grim. Addressing my thoughts and thought patterns is critical to managing and even overcoming anxiety.

- I will keep a journal and write down my honest thoughts.
- I will seek to align my thoughts with God’s Word, identifying thoughts that are based on lies and replacing them with God’s truth.

“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable— if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (PHILIPPIANS 4:8).

Be in community

Anxiety leads many people like me to avoid social interactions. Taken to an extreme, I can become isolated and alone. But God made me to be in relationships with others. Having supportive friendships and relationships can go a long way toward helping me gain a sense of wholeness, wellness, and normalcy amidst anxiety.

- I will regularly meet with friends and family members to talk, share a meal, or go out together.
- I will look into joining a local church, small group, Bible study, or community support group.

“Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help” (ECCLESIASTES 4:9–10 NLT).

Stay active spiritually

God clearly states in His Word that He cares about me. When I’m anxious, He wants to hear from me. He provides help for me through His Word, His people, and most of all, His constant presence.

- I will maintain an active spiritual life by praying, reading God’s Word, and meeting with other believers to help me grow.
- I will constantly seek to grow in my relationship with Christ, who loves me and gives me grace each day.

“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 PETER 3:18).

Hang on to hope

It’s been said that a person can live weeks without food, days without water, seconds without air, but not a moment without hope. Anxiety leads me to focus on the future, and often not a bright future. How important it is to maintain a hopeful outlook on life.

- I will remember that true, lasting hope is found not in my circumstances but in God and His Word.
- I will mediate on God’s promises in the Bible, remembering that I can always have hope.

“Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope” (ROMANS 15:4).

ABUSE RECOVERY

From Surviving to Thriving

What Is God's Heart on Abuse?

God is a God of love, and He created us for loving relationships. Abusive relationships run contrary to His design and His plan for healthy, flourishing relationships. To those who treat others abusively, God sees their actions, calls them to change, and will hold them accountable. The Bible says, *"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account"* (Hebrews 4:13).

To those who have been mistreated, the Lord is a refuge. He extends His healing hand and even uses the pain of abuse to accomplish His good purposes.

*"You intended to harm me,
but God intended it for good
to accomplish what is now being done,
the saving of many lives."
(Genesis 50:20)*

God hears the cry of the battered and abused.

"You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry" (Psalm 10:17).

God understands the pain of abuse.

"He [Jesus] was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain" (Isaiah 53:3).

God strengthens and upholds the victim of abuse.

"Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10).

God confirms the abuse victim's value and worth.

"Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (Luke 12:6–7).

God gives hope to victims of abuse.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11).

God offers healing from the pain of abuse.

"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3).

God wants to be a refuge to the abused and help them process their emotions and experiences with Him.

“Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge” (Psalm 62:8).

God wants to transform victims’ hearts and minds with His Word.

“Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect” (Romans 12:2 nlt).

God wants those who’ve been abused to establish boundaries in their life and relationships.

“Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life” (Proverbs 4:23 nlt).

*“God is a God of love,
and He created us for
loving relationships.”*

God wants abuse victims to help others who have experienced abusive treatment.

“The Father of compassion and the God of all comfort . . . comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4).

God calls for abusive people to change.

“Give up your violence and oppression and do what is just and right” (Ezekiel 45:9).

God will one day end all abuse and pain.

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever” (Revelation 21:4 nlt).

Key Verse to Memorize

Help and healing ultimately come from God. He knows your pain. He sees your grief. He is not indifferent toward you, and He does not ignore you. You can trust Him. You can place your past, present, and future in His hands.

*“You, God, see the trouble of the afflicted;
you consider their grief and take it in hand.
The victims commit themselves to you;
you are the helper of the fatherless.”
(Psalm 10:14)*

Key Passage to Read

Stories abound in Scripture about people who were mistreated, maligned, attacked, assaulted . . . *abused*. In the book of Lamentations, the prophet Jeremiah reflects on his suffering and the suffering of Israel after being attacked by an enemy nation. Jeremiah's response to the attack mirrors the response of many to harsh treatment: anger, confusion, despair, and bitterness.

Jeremiah shows us that as God's people bring their emotions to Him and look to Him in the midst of their suffering, they find hope. Your story of abuse may differ in many ways, but the same hope is available to you.

*"There is surely a future hope for you,
and your hope will not be cut off."
(Proverbs 23:18)*

Lamentations 3:19–26 (NLT)

*"The thought of my suffering . . . is bitter beyond words.
²⁰ I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss.
²¹ Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this:
²² The faithful love of the LORD never ends!
His mercies never cease.
²³ Great is his faithfulness;
his mercies begin afresh each morning.
²⁴ I say to myself, 'The LORD is my inheritance;
therefore, I will hope in him!'
²⁵ The LORD is good to those who depend on him,
to those who search for him.
²⁶ So it is good to wait quietly
for salvation from the LORD."*

The Hope of Recovery from Abuse

Acknowledge your pain and suffering.	v. 19
Allow yourself to time to grieve.	v. 20
Dare to hope.	v. 21
Realize that God's love for you never ends.	v. 22
Rejoice in God's daily faithfulness and mercy toward you.	v. 23
Speak God's words of truth and hope to yourself.	v. 24
Keep relying on and looking to God, who is good to you.	v. 25
Know that salvation and healing come from the Lord.	v. 26

My Personalized Plan to Recover from Abuse

Healing from abuse is a process—a multi-faceted process that takes time. Although you may no longer be in an abusive situation, the effects may still impact your life and relationships. The road to recovery might seem like an uphill battle, but you can take steps toward healing and find victory with the Lord's help.

*"I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from?
My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth."
(Psalm 121:1–2)*

As I seek to overcome the abuse I've experienced and become the person God created me to be, I will:

Look to the Lord

Change, healing, and freedom all begin with God. He will listen to your prayers, strengthen you, and help you rise above abuse. Abuse can often distort one's view of God but remember—He loves you. He is for you, and He is with you. The Lord desires to heal you, restore you, and set you free. You can trust Him.

- I will read God's Word and pray regularly.
- I will get involved in a local church to deepen my relationship with God.

"Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always" (1 Chronicles 16:11).

Talk to someone and find support

Sadly, much abuse goes unreported. Fear and shame, as well as manipulation and control, keep many victims from discussing abuse. But you're not alone. It's important to talk with someone and find support. Talking to someone can be the first step toward healing and recovery. God can use your friends, family, and counselors to comfort you and to help you heal and grow.

- I will reach out to a trusted family member or friend that I feel safe with to discuss my experiences and pain.
- I will look into support groups in my local church and community, and I will consider talking with a counselor.

"In an abundance of counselors there is victory" (Proverbs 11:14 nasb).

Address physical issues

Whether or not the abuse you endured was physical—you may have physical issues that need to be addressed. There may be literal wounds or lingering pain that needs healing. The stress of the abuse may have led to sleeping problems, an addiction, an eating disorder, or other unhealthy behaviors that are used to cope with the abuse.

- I will talk with a medical professional about my health concerns.
- I will make it a priority to develop a healthy lifestyle of exercising, eating well, managing stress, getting rest, and avoiding harmful substances.

"For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come" (1 Timothy 4:8).

Process my emotions

The pain of abuse can create lingering, damaged emotions that are ever-present and just waiting to surface and spill out. Painful, hidden emotions like anger and hurt can still affect your well-being and relationships. You may not know how to express your emotions, or you may not have had permission to express them, but confronting your emotions is an important step toward healing. Therefore, give yourself time to grieve and process your pain.

- I will be honest about the emotions I've felt as a result of the abuse I experienced.
- I will talk with God and trustworthy individuals to help me process my thoughts and emotions.

"In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help" (Psalm 18:6).

Replace lies with truth

Abuse can lead you to believe lies about yourself, your value, and your purpose. You may have come to believe lies about certain relationships and even about God. Healing occurs when you recognize the lies and walk in the truth. God's Word provides truth about you—your identity, your purpose, and your worth. As you read His Word, you can begin to see yourself through God's eyes.

- I will identify the lies I've believed: lies about myself, about others, about life, and about God.
- I will look to God's Word to replace those lies with the truth.

"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

Help others

One sign of healing and growth is that you can take the bad things that have happened to you and use them for good. God can use your painful experience to help others. He can turn your misery into ministry.

- I will trust God to use me, even my painful past, to help others who have been impacted by abuse.
- I will look for opportunities to share my story, listen to others, and point people to the Lord.

"The Father of compassion and the God of all comfort . . . comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God" (2 Corinthians 1:3–4).

How to Support Survivors on the Road to Recovery

If you know someone who has been impacted by abuse, you may want to help but don't know where to start. Maybe you've experienced abuse and want to help others rise above the abuse in their own lives.

Because abuse involves pain and a range of difficult emotions, it's important to know what to do and what not to do. Realize, the person before you may be wounded, emotionally fragile, perhaps even traumatized. The tone and tenor of your words are essential to establishing a nurturing conversation. Many people who have experienced abuse may dismiss the severity of their situation. They may display defense mechanisms such as denying that anything is wrong, minimizing their pain, or rationalizing their abuser's behavior.

If the abused person is open and honest about discussing the situation, realize they are displaying significant courage. Be prepared to respond with love and patience when your wounded friend begins to share the secrets of a broken heart. As you seek to help others, remember that God is the source of comfort and change, and you are an instrument of His comfort and love. . . .

*“God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort.
He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others.
When they are troubled, we will be able to give them
the same comfort God has given us.”*
(2 Corinthians 1:3–4 nlt)

How to Support Survivors of Abuse

Don’t feel like you have to be an expert to help.

Do learn what you can about abuse and help them, but remember that their healing is dependent not on you but on God.

*“Let the wise listen and add to their learning,
and let the discerning get guidance.”*
(Proverbs 1:5)

Don’t treat the problem lightly or minimize the abuse.

Do realize that abuse can leave lasting wounds and significant emotional damage.

*“My life is consumed by anguish
and my years by groaning;
my strength fails because of my affliction.”*
(Psalm 31:10)

Don’t be quick to give simple answers or platitudes.

Do listen intently, ask questions, and seek to understand them.

*“Everyone should be quick to listen,
slow to speak and slow to become angry.”*
(James 1:19)

Don’t rush or push for full disclosure of uncomfortable things.

Do respect boundaries, privacy, and the healing process that takes time.

“Show proper respect to everyone.”
(1 Peter 2:17)

Don’t feel like you have to say something or have the right answer.

Do be present, and know that just your presence can be a comfort.

*“They sat on the ground with him for seven days and nights.
No one said a word to Job, for they saw
that his suffering was too great for words.”*
(Job 2:13 nlt)

Don't dismiss feelings or experiences.

Do encourage, validate, and compliment the courage it takes to share painful thoughts and emotions.

*"Let everything you say be good and helpful,
so that your words will be an encouragement
to those who hear them."*

(Ephesians 4:29 nlt)

Don't communicate that abuse is in some way the victim's fault.

Do express sympathy and compassion.

*"Be sympathetic, love one another,
be compassionate and humble."*

(1 Peter 3:8)

Don't be critical or express judgment.

Do show your love and acceptance.

*"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you,
in order to bring praise to God."*

(Romans 15:7)

Don't assume someone who has been abused is comfortable talking about God and spiritual matters.

Do be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit, and ask if you can share God's Word.

"Let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives."

(Galatians 5:25 nlt)

Don't leave them to their own resources.

Do help them find support, resources, and wise counsel in their community, local church, or online to help them heal and recover.

*"Plans fail for lack of counsel,
but with many advisers they succeed."*

(Proverbs 15:22)

Don't overextend yourself or offer to help in ways you cannot provide.

Do recognize your limits and know when you need to point to additional help or professional counseling.

*"Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought,
but rather think of yourself with sober judgment."*

(Romans 12:3)

Don't forget to pray *for* them and *with* them, as much as they are comfortable doing so.

Do lift them up before the Lord on a regular basis.

*“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions
with all kinds of prayers and requests.
With this in mind, be alert and always keep on
praying for all the Lord's people.”*

(Ephesians 6:18)

As you seek to help others, don't feel like God can't use you. He can use your pain and your past to comfort another. Almost everyone has been touched either directly or indirectly by some form of abuse. That means everyone is in a position now or will be in the future to further a survivor's journey to becoming an overcomer—to travel from merely coping to thriving, from struggling to surviving, from pain to peace, from victim to victory.

*“Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory
through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

(1 Corinthians 15:57)

FORGIVENESS

Releasing You Is Freeing Me

What Is God's Heart on Forgiveness?

The thought of forgiving the person who hurt you (or your loved ones) can seem unthinkable, unfair, and unequivocally wrong. For many, the pain is just too real. However, forgiveness is at the heart of God's character. It's why Jesus came. And it's at the heart of healing, growth, and freedom.

Choosing to forgive is not about letting the other person "off the hook" or ignoring the pain and damage that's been done. It's about walking in God's grace, living in freedom, and moving forward with hope.

A good way to think about forgiveness is to imagine letting go of the offense by *releasing* your offender. When you don't forgive, it's like holding on to bitterness, holding on to the pain, and holding on to the offender. When you forgive, you release your resentment, your pain, and your offender into the hands of God.

Forgiveness is difficult, but it is possible by God's grace. His grace helps you heal from past wounds and empowers you to forgive. So when you find yourself struggling to forgive, reflect on God's grace and He will help you walk in the freedom of forgiveness.

*"Let us then approach God's throne
of grace with confidence,
so that we may receive mercy and find grace
to help us in our time of need."*

(HEBREWS 4:16)

God wants us to forgive each other because He has forgiven us.

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (EPHESIANS 4:32).

God wants us to forgive others in the same way He forgives us.

"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (COLOSSIANS 3:13).

God wants us to see unforgiveness as sin.

"If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them" (JAMES 4:17).

God wants us to get rid of unforgiveness and have a heart of mercy.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (MATTHEW 5:7).

God wants us to do our part to live in peace with everyone.

"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (ROMANS 12:18).

God wants us to overcome evil with good.

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (ROMANS 12:21).

God wants us to be ministers of reconciliation.

“God . . . reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation” (2 CORINTHIANS 5:18–19).

God wants us to forgive others so we will not become bitter.

“See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many” (HEBREWS 12:15).

God wants us to forgive others so we will accurately reflect the character of Jesus.

“Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (EPHESIANS 5:1–2).

What Is Forgiveness *Not*?

Misconceptions abound when the word *forgiveness* is mentioned. Some think forgiveness is the equivalent of *excusing* sin, saying that what was wrong is now right. Yet this is not the example of forgiveness Jesus displayed. When He encountered the mob of men eager to stone a woman caught in adultery, He chose not to stone her. However, neither did He *excuse* her sin. Instead, He said, *“Go, and sin no more”* (John 8:11 KJV). To help correct any confusion about what forgiveness *is*, you need to know what forgiveness is *not*!

*“Let the wise listen and add to their learning,
and let the discerning get guidance.”
(PROVERBS 1:5)*

Forgiveness is not circumventing God’s justice.

- It is allowing God to execute His justice in His time and in His way.

Forgiveness is not waiting for “time to heal all wounds.”

- It is clear that time doesn’t always heal wounds; some people will not allow healing.

Forgiveness is not letting the guilty “off the hook.”

- It is moving the guilty from your hook to God’s hook.

Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation.

- It takes two to reconcile, but it takes only one to forgive.

Forgiveness is not excusing wrong behavior.

- It is acknowledging that wrong behavior is without excuse, while still forgiving.

Forgiveness is not explaining away the hurt.

- It is working through the hurt.

Forgiveness is not based on what is fair.

- It was not “fair” for Jesus to hang on the cross—but He did so that we could be forgiven.

Forgiveness is not being weak.

- It is being strong enough to be Christlike.

Forgiveness is not stuffing your anger.

- It is resolving your anger by releasing the offense to God.

Forgiveness is not a natural response.

- It is a supernatural response, empowered by God.

Forgiveness is not denying the hurt.

- It is feeling the hurt and releasing it to God.

Forgiveness is not being a doormat.

- It is seeing that, if this were so, Jesus would have been the greatest “doormat” of all!

Forgiveness is not conditional.

- It is unconditional, a mandate from God to everyone.

Forgiveness is not forgetting.

- It is necessary to remember before you can forgive.

Forgiveness is not a feeling.

- It is a choice—an act of the will.

Is Forgiveness the Same as Reconciliation?

No. Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. *Forgiveness* focuses on the *offense*; *reconciliation* focuses on the *relationship*. Forgiveness requires no relationship. However, reconciliation requires a relationship in which two people, in agreement, are walking together toward the same goal. The Bible says . . .

“Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?”

(AMOS 3:3)

Forgiveness can take place with only one person.

- **Reconciliation** requires at least two people.

Forgiveness is directed one-way.

- **Reconciliation** is reciprocal, occurring two ways.

Forgiveness is a decision to release the offender.

- **Reconciliation** is the effort to rejoin the offender.

Forgiveness involves a change in thinking about the offender.

- **Reconciliation** involves a change in behavior by the offender.

Forgiveness is a free gift to the one who has broken trust.

- **Reconciliation** is a restored relationship based on restored trust.

Forgiveness is extended even if it is never, ever earned.

- **Reconciliation** is offered to the offender because it has been earned.

Forgiveness is unconditional, regardless of a lack of repentance.

- **Reconciliation** is conditional, based on repentance.

Key Verse to Memorize

*“Bear with each other and forgive one another
if any of you has a grievance against someone.
Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”*

(COLOSSIANS 3:13)

Key Passage to Read

Matthew 18:23–35

What Are the Four Stages of Forgiveness?

Have you ever noticed that the word *forgiveness* has the word *give* in it? When you choose to forgive, you give someone a gift—the gift of freedom from having to pay the penalty for offending you, the gift of dismissing the debt owed to you. Because this can be a difficult gift to give, you may need to travel through four stages of forgiveness. Realize that you are also giving yourself a gift—the gift of grudge-free living. That is true freedom.

*“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone
among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself.”*

(LEVITICUS 19:18)

1. Face the Offense.

When you feel pain that is personal, unfair, and deep, you have a wound that can be healed only by forgiving the one who wounded you. First you must face the truth of what has actually been done and not hinder true healing by rationalizing or focusing on false thinking.

- **Don't minimize the offense** by thinking: "No matter how badly he treats me, it's okay."

Truth: Bad treatment is not okay. There is no excuse for bad treatment of any kind—any time.

"Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them" (EPHESIANS 5:11).

- **Don't excuse the offender's behavior** by thinking: "He doesn't mean to hurt me. I shouldn't feel upset with him—he's a member of my family!"

Truth: No matter the age of the offender or our relationship, we need to call sin "sin." We need to face the truth instead of trying to change it. There must first be a *guilty* party in order to have someone to forgive.

"Whoever says to the guilty, 'You are innocent,' will be cursed by peoples" (PROVERBS 24:24).

- **Don't assume that quick forgiveness is full forgiveness** by thinking: "As soon as that horrendous ordeal occurred, I quickly and fully forgave him. That's what I've been taught to do."

Truth: Many well-intentioned people feel guilty if they don't extend immediate forgiveness so they "forgive" quickly. Yet they have neither faced the full impact of the offense nor grieved over what actually happened.

Rarely is the full impact of sin felt at the moment it occurs. Rather, its impact is felt at different levels over a period of time. Therefore, forgiveness needs to be extended at each of these levels.

"Quick forgiveness" over deep hurts may seem sufficient, but it may not be "full forgiveness"—not until it has been extended at each level of impact. Before complete forgiveness can be extended, you must face the truth about the gravity of the offense and its extended impact on you.

"You [God] desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place" (PSALM 51:6).

2. Feel the Offense.

We usually do not hate strangers or acquaintances; we just get angry with them when we think we've been wronged by them. But author and theologian Lewis Smedes writes, "When a person destroys what our commitment and our intimacy created, something precious is destroyed." Then anger or even hatred may be our true feeling in response to deep, unfair pain. Hatred toward an offender needs to be brought up out of the basement of our souls and dealt with. However, not all hatred is wrong. For example, God *hates* evil, and we should too.

"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens . . . a time to love and a time to hate" (ECCLESIASTES 3:1, 8).

Failing to feel the offense results in . . .

- **Denying your pain:** "I don't blame her for always criticizing me. She is under a lot of pressure. And besides, it doesn't hurt me."

Truth: Being mistreated by someone you love is painful. Feeling the pain must take place before healing can occur.

"The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (PSALM 34:18).

- **Carrying false guilt:** "I feel guilty if I hate what was done to me. I'm never supposed to have hatred."

Truth: God hates sin. You, too, can hate sin. You are to hate the sin but not the sinner.

"To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech" (PROVERBS 8:13).

3. Forgive the Offender.

“To err is human, to forgive, divine.” This famous quote by English poet Alexander Pope is a heavenly reminder to all of us. However, the earthly reality is more like this: “To err is human, to blame it on someone else is more human!”

Oh, how much easier it is to blame than to forgive. But we are called by God to forgive! When you do forgive, genuine forgiveness draws you into the heart of God, and your life takes on the divine character of Christ.

– **Argument:** “I don’t think it is right to forgive when I don’t feel like forgiving.”

Answer: Forgiveness is not a feeling, but is rather an act of the will—a choice. Jesus established what was right when He said . . .

“When you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins” (MARK 11:25).

– **Argument:** “I can forgive everyone else, but I don’t have the power to forgive that person.”

Answer: The issue is not your lack of power to forgive, but rather how strong God’s power is within you to forgive any sin committed against you.

“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 PETER 1:3).

– **Argument:** “Forgiveness isn’t fair. She ought to pay for what she did!”

Answer: God knows how to deal with each person fairly—and He will, in His own time.

“Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord” (ROMANS 12:19).

– **Argument:** “I have forgiven, but it doesn’t do any good. He keeps doing the same thing over and over.”

Answer: You cannot control what others do, but you can control *how you respond* to what others do. Jesus said you are to respond with forgiveness no matter the number of times wronged. The apostle Peter asked Jesus,

“Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times’” (MATTHEW 18:21–22).

– **Argument:** “I cannot forgive and forget. I keep thinking about being hurt.”

Answer: When you choose to forgive, you don’t get a case of “holy amnesia.” However, after facing the hurt and confronting the offender, close off your mind to rehearsing the pain of the past. Forget about your pain by refusing to focus on your hurt.

“I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (PHILIPPIANS 3:13–14).

4. Find Oneness—If Appropriate.

Relationships filled with resentment ultimately perish. Relationships filled with forgiveness ultimately prevail. However, reconciliation in a relationship—the restoration of oneness—is contingent on several vital factors. When these conditions are met, and when both parties are committed to *honesty* in the relationship, there is real hope that the two can be of one mind and one heart again. The Bible says . . .

“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind” (PHILIPPIANS 2:1–2).

Note: Situations where reconciliation is *not* appropriate include: a physically abusive relationship, an adulterous affair, rape, murder, or even spiritual abuse. For *some* offenses, reconciliation may not be wise or safe. In these instances, seek God’s direction in the decisions you make beyond forgiveness by reading His Word, praying, and talking with a pastor, counselor, or trusted Christian friend about the situation and how best to proceed.

How to Truly Forgive

Have you ever said, “I was severely wronged by someone I once trusted. People tell me I should forgive, but how can I simply let my offender off the hook?” If these words have passed your lips or even crossed your mind, be assured that you are not alone. That is precisely why you need to know how to handle “the hook.”

How to Handle “The Hook”

Make a list of all the offenses caused by your offender.

Imagine a meat hook hanging around your neck and a burlap bag hanging from the hook, laying against your chest. Then imagine all the pain caused by the offenses represented as 100 pounds of rocks dropped into the burlap bag. Now you have 100 pounds of heavy rocks—rocks of resentment—hanging from the hook around your neck.

Ask yourself: “Do I really want to carry all this pain with me for the rest of my life?”

Are you willing to take the pain from the past and release it into the hands of the Lord? If so, lift up your pain and release it all to Jesus.

Visualize taking the one who hurt or offended you off of your “emotional hook” and placing that person onto God’s hook.

Remember, the Lord knows how to deal with your offender in His time and in His way. God says, “*It is mine to avenge; I will repay*” (Romans 12:19).

Finally, use the following model and pray to release your offender to God.

Prayer to Forgive Your Offender

*“Lord Jesus, thank you for caring about
how much my heart has been hurt.
You know the pain I have felt because of
(list every offense).
Right now I release all that pain into your hands.
Thank you, Lord, for dying on the cross for me
and extending your forgiveness to me.
As an act of my will, I choose to forgive (name).
Right now, I move (name) off of
my emotional hook to your hook.
I refuse all thoughts of revenge.
I trust that in your time and in your way
you will deal with (name) as you see fit.
And Lord, thank you for giving me your
power to forgive so that I can be set free.
In your precious name I pray. Amen.”*

Genuine Forgiveness

Question: “How do I know whether I have genuinely forgiven someone?”

Answer: Over time, as you go through the process of forgiveness, you may find old thoughts and feelings resurfacing. You may wonder if you’ve really forgiven your offender. It’s completely normal. Ask yourself the following questions:

- “Do I still expect my offender ‘to pay’ for the wrong done to me?”
- “Do I still have bitter feelings toward my offender?”
- “Do I still have vengeful thoughts toward my offender?”
- “Do I desire that my offender will one day come to have a saving relationship with Jesus Christ and experience a changed life?”
- “When is the last time I prayed for my offender?”

Remember, forgiving someone does not in any way mean that you do not want justice. It simply means that you are leaving the offense entirely in God’s hands. You are refusing to harbor hateful feelings toward your offender. Forgiveness is an ongoing process which requires that you choose to forgive every time the offense comes to mind. Likewise, you choose to pray for the offender every time the offense crosses your mind.

“Pray for those who hurt you.”

(LUKE 6:28 NLT)

HOPE

The Anchor for Your Soul

What Is God's Heart on Hope?

The world cries out for hope. From individuals and families to cities and nations, the cries for justice, for peace, for *hope* ring out around the world. We cry out for answers, for guidance, for comfort . . . to make it through one more season, to overcome one more tragedy, to persevere one more day.

But there is only one hope that will satisfy our longings and our cries, one hope that will anchor us during the storms of life—the hope of Jesus Christ.

From His first cry as a baby to His last cry on the cross, Jesus Christ came to give us hope. The Bible says of Jesus:

“In his name the nations will put their hope.”

(MATTHEW 12:21)

God is the God of hope.

“I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit” (ROMANS 15:13 NLT).

God is the only lasting hope for everyone.

“You are the hope of everyone on earth, even those who sail on distant seas” (PSALM 65:5 NLT).

God wants your hope to be in Him.

“O Lord, you alone are my hope” (PSALM 71:5 NLT).

God wants His Word and His promises to be your source of hope.

“You are my refuge and my shield; your word is my source of hope” (PSALM 119:114 NLT).

God does not want you to put your hope in people or leaders.

“It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in humans. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes” (PSALM 118:8–9).

God does not want your hope to be in money or wealth.

“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (1 TIMOTHY 6:17).

“There is only one hope that will anchor us during the storms of life—the hope of Jesus Christ.”

God has a plan for your life that is filled with hope.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (JEREMIAH 29:11).

God wants you to have hope all day—every day.

“Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long” (PSALM 25:5).

God gives you hope during times of trouble and suffering.

“Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God” (PSALM 42:5).

God strengthens you with His hope.

“But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (ISAIAH 40:31).

God keeps you anchored with His hope.

“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure” (HEBREWS 6:19).

God wants you to know that no matter what happens—there is always hope.

“There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off” (PROVERBS 23:18).

Key Verse to Memorize

*“I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord,
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.’”
(JEREMIAH 29:11)*

My Personalized Plan to Stay Anchored in Hope

True hope comes from knowing Jesus Christ, resting in Him and His plan for both my todays and my tomorrows. Therefore, when unexpected sorrows and hardships come, I will remember God’s promises to me found in the Bible.

*“I am counting on the LORD; yes, I am counting on him.
I have put my hope in his word.”
(PSALM 130:5 NLT)*

As I focus on renewing my mind with God's Word and deepening my hope in Christ, **I will . . .**

Remember that true hope is anchored in God.

- I will remember that true hope is found in God, who doesn't change—not in people, who do change.
- I will remember that true hope is found in God's unchanging Word, not in shifting circumstances or cultural opinions.
- I will remember that true hope is found in God's Son, who loves me and secured my eternity through His death and resurrection.

"And so, Lord, where do I put my hope? My only hope is in you" (PSALM 39:7 NLT).

Recognize that when I feel hopeless, God calls me to trust Him.

- I will accept that in this broken world, I will inevitably face painful circumstances.
- I will accept that even believers can experience sorrow, loneliness, depression, and periods of desperation.
- I will accept that in dark times, God is with me and He desires to give me His love and hope.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (ROMANS 15:13).

Realize that there is always hope and God will help me overcome the obstacles in my life.

- I will trust that God is always with me, guarding and guiding me, fulfilling His purposes for me.
- I will trust that God is in control of the circumstances of my life, and I can learn and grow during both good and bad circumstances.
- I will trust that God can use me to be an encouragement to others who are facing their own obstacles.

"Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; . . . The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever" (PSALM 138:7–8 ESV).

Rely on the Lord and others for support and help when I feel hopeless.

- I will remember that I don't have to suffer alone or in silence, and I will acknowledge my need for help.
- I will seek the support of a counselor, friend, or pastor when I feel unable to handle my situation or emotions.
- I will seek God in prayer, trusting Him to give me victory and use my trials for my good and His glory.

"Where there is no guidance the people fall, But in abundance of counselors there is victory" (PROVERBS 11:14 NASB).

Recount my blessings, thanking God for them.

- I will thank God for all the good things in my life—for family and friends, work and play, clothes and food, rest and inspiration.
- I will do at least one thing a day that brings me joy and focuses my attention on Jesus.
- I will remember all the things God has brought me through in the past and trust Him for my future.

"Put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption" (PSALM 130:7).

Reach out to others and share the hope of Christ.

- I will pray for those in my life who do not know the Lord—that God will save them.
- I will look for opportunities to share the hope of Christ with the lost.
- I will encourage others who are suffering or facing a trial with God's truth.

"Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (1 THESSALONIANS 5:11).

4 POINTS OF GOD'S PLAN

Whether you're trying to make sense of your past, trying to overcome something in the present, or trying to make changes for a better future, the Lord cares about you. He loves you. No matter what challenges you or your loved ones are facing, no matter the pain or difficult feelings you may be experiencing, no matter what you've done or what's been done to you, *there is hope*. And that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for your life, and it begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The most important decision you can ever make is whether you will accept His invitation. If you have never made that decision, these four simple truths can help you start your journey together with Him.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD,
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*
(JEREMIAH 29:11)

God's Purpose for You: *Salvation*

What was God's motivation in sending Jesus Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says, *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him”* (John 3:16–17).

What was Jesus' purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said, *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”* (John 10:10).

The Problem: *Sin*

What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God's standard—knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway—also knowing what is right and choosing not to do it. The apostle Paul said, *“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway”* (Romans 7:18–19 NLT).

What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual death, eternal separation from God. The Bible says, *“Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God”* (Isaiah 59:2). Scripture also says, *“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 6:23).

God's Provision for You: *The Savior*

Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins. The Bible says, *“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8).

What is the solution to being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6). The Bible says, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved . . .”* (Acts 16:31).

Your Part: *Surrender*

Give Christ control of your life, entrusting yourself to Him. Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”* (Matthew 16:24–26).

Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your “good works” as a means of earning God’s approval. The Bible says, *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Has there been a time in your life when you know you’ve humbled your heart and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of your life? You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

*“God, I want a real relationship with you.
I admit that many times I’ve chosen to go my own way instead of your way.
Please forgive me for my sins.
Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins.
Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.
Change me from the inside out and make me
the person you created me to be.
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”*

What Can You Now Expect?

When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who empowers you to live a life pleasing to God. The Bible says, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . .”* (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus assures those who believe with these words:

*“Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me
has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”*

(JOHN 5:24)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

God gives us His Word not just for information but for transformation. The Lord wants you to “*be transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Romans 12:2). This isn’t something you do alone, but something God does in you by His Spirit.

The following questions are designed to help you reflect on the biblical truths in this resource. Take a moment to pray and ask God to settle your mind and quiet your spirit as you reflect on His truth.

“Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.”
(2 TIMOTHY 2:7)

What are two key truths, Bible verses, or “takeaways” from this resource that you found helpful—or that you simply needed to be reminded of?

In relation to these topics, what behavior(s) do you need to *begin, change, or stop* in order to help you grow into the person God created you to be?

In relation to these topics, what is the biggest obstacle you need to overcome in order to move forward?

What might your life look like a few years from now if you do *not* make changes regarding these issues? How might your life be different if you *do* make changes?

Is there anyone in your life who needs help with these topics/issues? How can you pray for them, and what is one thing you can do to encourage them?

What can you give thanks to God for today?

*“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself
and God our Father, who loved us
and by his grace gave us eternal comfort
and a wonderful hope,
comfort you and strengthen you
in every good thing you do and say.”
(2 THESSALONIANS 2:16–17 NLT)*

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