



Loving Enemies

Why Jesus calls us
to battle bitterness
and hatred



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Introduction

Frenemies No More!

By Kelli B. Trujillo



○n the outside: Smile. Act nice and sugary sweet. Pile on the politeness.

On the inside: Fume. Stew. Be irritated. Re-hash everything annoying, unworthy, or just plain evil about the other person. Grow bitter. Begin to hate.

This, sadly, is how many of us do our feeble-best to live out Jesus' call to "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44). It's the Christian woman's version of being a *frenemy*—what the Urban Dictionary defines as "an enemy disguised as a friend." We know we're not supposed to gossip or hate or sock her in the face (even though she deserves it!), so we cage up our baser instincts and try our darnedest to act Christianly. But inside, we still hate that person.



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Our dislike for them (which may be for good reason!) can then serve to justify behaviors like willful unforgiveness, gossip, slander.

This isn't exactly what Jesus had in mind.

Jesus' call to love our enemies is arguably one of his most famous teachings, well known even in our secular culture. It's quoted so often that we tend to treat it as trite and pithy rather than taking Jesus' radical call to heart. The love he describes is *so* radical and counterintuitive that, if we're honest, it can seem impossible. It's a love that's beyond our human abilities.

And the difficulty of it is magnified when we consider love for enemies who are much worse than just people who annoy us or who've done mean things to us. What about a person who wounds or kills one of our loved ones? What about someone hell-bent on blowing up an airplane filled with people? What about a hate-spewing racist? What about a child molester? How in the world—*why* in the world—would Jesus want us to love *them*?!

Jesus' teaching about enemy-love demands that we wrestle with very difficult questions and take on some serious challenges; this KYRIA download is designed to help you examine what Jesus' call means for you, both in terms of people you don't like and those whom it seems justifiable to hate. Including stories of radical forgiveness (a woman forgiving her son's killer; a man seeking to forgive war criminals who've brutalized his people) and thoughtful explorations of why enemy-love is





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good for *us*, these articles and Reflect questions will help you journey through Scripture's other teachings on this life-changing call to love.

These articles and the powerful passages from God's Word highlighted in this download have deeply convicted me about my own half-hearted, politely-fake, and rather shallow version of loving those who've crossed me. I pray God will teach me more about his love that embraces the wrongdoer even before they ask for forgiveness! May God transform each of us from "frenemies" into truly Christ-like ambassadors of God's generous love.

Grace,

Kelli B. Trujillo

Managing Editor, KYRIA downloads,
Christianity Today International



Leader's Guide

How to use “Loving Enemies” for a group study



“Loving Enemies” can be used for individual or group study. If you intend to lead a group study, some simple suggestions follow.

1. **Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.**
2. **Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.**
3. **Alternately, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.**
4. **Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.**
5. **When working through the “Reflect” questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for women to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.**
6. **End the session in prayer.**

While We Were Yet Enemies

What my enemies show me
about myself

By Charles Moore



I'm not particularly paranoid, nor do I harbor delusions of sainthood. And I'm certainly not a masochist. But I need my enemies—in fact, I'm not sure what it means to love without them. I have come to believe that enemy-love is the only kind of love Jesus brings. It was while we were yet enemies, the apostle Paul says, that God sent his Son to die for us. And it was because of the dividing wall of hostility, a rift in humanity itself, as Paul puts it elsewhere, that Christ shed his blood. In other words, God's love is supremely manifested in the fact that we exist estranged from God and each other. We are even our own enemies. And it is precisely this state of contrariness that connects us to love and to forgive each other.



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Dale showed up one Sunday to participate in a Bible study class I was teaching. I was making a point about the narrow way evangelicals tend to understand salvation, when Dale raised his hand to ask what seemed a genuine question. "Tell me again," he began, "what you understand by the kingdom of God." I tried to answer him succinctly, and he appeared satisfied. A few minutes later he asked another question. Again I offered a brief response. Before I knew it, I was under attack, being peppered with one question after another.

The next week Dale appeared again, this time with a couple of friends. Almost before I got started, the questions started flying. Then all hell broke loose. Dale stood up and began a diatribe against me. He accused me of teaching a false, humanistic gospel that reeked of communism. I quickly went on the defensive and started to argue my case, point by point. We were getting nowhere fast. Fortunately, a member of the class stood up and asked Dale to stop and leave. "We came here to learn," she said, "not to interrogate." In a last-ditch effort to salvage the session, I tried to smooth things over by emphasizing that Dale had made some good points and that we should look into his concerns further. Then I ended the class, and just like that, Dale was gone.

The next day, Dale called me up. He wanted to meet me for lunch. Was this a setup? Would the ranting continue? Not if I could help it. I armed myself with every possible argument and line of defense. In fact, I prepared to go on the offensive. My theological guns were not only fully loaded, but carefully aimed. It would be my turn to attack.





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I couldn't wait. But when it came time to meet Dale, things didn't go as I'd planned.

Dale began by apologizing for the disturbance he had made. Even though he still thought I was off my rocker, he felt bad for being so obnoxious. Then he went on to talk about his past—how his father had been blown to bits in Vietnam, how his mother drank herself to death, how he managed to put himself through college on an ROTC scholarship, and how he proudly served in the army for four years. At one point in the conversation, his eyes welled up and he looked at me with a helpless, boyish expression. He told me that I didn't have to worry about him coming around on Sundays anymore. Then he said he had to go.

I never saw Dale again, but neither did he ever leave me. I have met many "Dales" since. More importantly, I have learned to recognize the "Dale" in myself. Dale triggered the enemy inside me, a foe I was too afraid to face. For I too could slaughter others in verbal inquisitions. I too hated those who flatly disagreed with me. And although I didn't really appreciate what Dale had to offer (I was only 23 at the time), my encounter with him eventually laid the groundwork for my search for other enemies. That's right—my search for enemies.

A year or so later, I decided, along with a group of fellow former seminarians, to move to Denver's inner city. We were tired of conventional Christianity and wanted to form an intentional community that reached out to the city's poor. We found a row of duplexes and started to





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share life together. We also got involved with a nearby church outreach ministry that provided street people with a kind of living room and served free coffee day and night.

It didn't take long, however, before we were accused of "stealing sheep." Joe, the pastor of the church, didn't appreciate our help. The leader of our community ended up in a face-to-face confrontation with Joe. Was there a possibility of reconciliation? No way. Joe wouldn't budge. So our leader skipped town, leaving the rest of us stunned and bereft.

This time it was I who decided to initiate a lunch. And again I found myself on the listening end. Joe, it turned out, had grown up in a middle-class family. But the 1960s were in full force, and so were the chemicals pumping through his bloodstream. Joe not only stoned himself to a stupor, but started to hear voices. He decided to build himself a tepee in the foothills outside of Denver and to become a hermit. He might well have died if it had not been for his parents' intervention. He had gone insane, he told me. Joe's conversion to Jesus, however, led him out of insanity. It also led him back into Denver and to the emotionally dysfunctional people who lived under its bridges and in its back alleys.

Suddenly I had a different picture of what had happened between Joe and our community leader. Joe's pain had given birth to a zealousness that defended the outcasts of society. Because of this, he could smell do-gooders and wanna-be Mother Teresas a mile away. Joe was our "enemy" because he was friend to those we couldn't even begin to understand.





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Behind Joe's antagonism was an awful sort of pain. He was still battling voices, but the voices now lived in society's rejected and abandoned. His was the same pain Dale had carried—the pain of a person who is desperate to be someone, to belong, but who has not yet come to terms with his own brokenness. Both Joe and Dale were hurting souls—aching, craving connection, grasping after wholeness. They were my enemies, but not the kind I had made them out to be. And without knowing it, they both cast light on shadows I preferred to keep dark.

In one way or another we are all enemies: of God, of each other, of ourselves. The more readily I recognize and welcome this fact, the less I need to barricade myself behind a mentality of "us against them." Dorothy Day once wrote, "It is not love in the abstract that counts. Men have loved a cause as they have loved a woman. They have loved the brotherhood, the workers, the poor, the oppressed—but they have not loved personally . . . It is never brothers right next to us, but the brothers in the abstract that are easy to love." The same could be said of our enemies.

For me, part of loving my enemy concretely is first to see the enemy in myself. I am a man in revolt, an opponent of God's love. Because of my ego-centered existence, I am invariably a threat to others, and my own worst enemy to boot. But Jesus' call to love one's enemy is actually a call to see the co-humanity of even my worst foe. I cannot love until I see that I and my enemy are one. To love is not so much to do something, but to discover something. I am able to love when I discover that I am in no position to





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love, since it is I who am in desperate need, and it is I who undermine the way of love. Love is not an act of generosity or superiority but rather a discovery of similarity.

The realization of this similarity is what eventually led me to join a Christian community with an 80-year history of sharing all things in common. I needed to surround myself more closely with "enemies" who shared my quest for enemy-love. I came to understand that by selectively distancing myself from others, I had simply been perpetuating the illusion that I could really love. I thought I could obey Jesus' command to love my enemies without needing any actual enemies to love. Not surprisingly, any time an enemy came my way, I succumbed to my own need and anger—the acids I tried to bury beneath layers of cultivated Christian civility. If the "Mr. Nice Guy" veneer was to be stripped away, I needed to move deliberately toward my enemies.

Jesus commands us to forgive as we have been forgiven. This compels me to move into the space of enemy territory: the region where God's forgiving love does its most decisive work. What else is community but the sphere where enemies can meet each other and learn to love and forgive? Granted, people often clump together for mutual protection from an outside enemy. But in Christ, life's main antagonists are located within us. We are sinners and traitors who are struggling for redemption. My experience tells me that genuine community is not a way of escape, a defense against the broader culture. I am a part of a community not to escape my enemies, but rather to have a context in which to deal with them and to love each of them, especially the enemy who resides within me.





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To seek out the enemy is to risk, in Oscar Romero's words, undergoing "the violence of love." Such violence, says Romero, "is the violence we must each do to ourselves to overcome our selfishness and the cruel inequalities among us." Enemy-love is like fire. It burns the flesh, consumes the offal hiding in the nooks and crannies of our denial—everything that opposes God. It is the purifying power of forgiveness. But for such a fire to burn there must be fuel: the presence of others who are real enough to let their enemy selves be known and converted. We avoid community, and the enemies we encounter in its crucible, because we refuse to change.

There will always be enemies, simply because justice demands it. In this sense, there is no need to go looking for them. But God's love flows out to every enemy. Such love is never extended from a distance. Within community, where God's mercy is free to roam, enemies can become real enough to become companions. My enemies are weak and fallible just as I am. But in the sphere of unconditional love, each enemy can become a brother or sister. Herein lies the gift of my enemy. Instead of avoiding my foe, I can step toward him, and we can experience together the wonder of finding each other's need. Thank God for enemies.

Charles Moore lives with his wife, Leslie, and daughter, Brianne at Spring Valley Bruderhof in Farmington, Pennsylvania. A full version of this article was published in the Winter 2001 issue of RE:GENERATION QUARTERLY.





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While We Were Yet Enemies

Reflect

- *Read **Matthew 5:38–48**. How would you put the main idea of Jesus' teaching here in your own words? How would you define "enemy-love"?*
- *Charles Moore describes how his unexpected and painful confrontation from Dale "triggered the enemy inside me, a foe I was too afraid to face." When have you had an experience with a "Dale"—someone whose actions or attitude have brought out the worst in you? What did that experience reveal to you about yourself?*
- *God helped Charles begin to see the difficult people in his life in a different way, as "hurting souls" who were "aching, craving connection, grasping after wholeness. They were my enemies, but not the kind I had made them out to be." Focus on a particular person who is, in some way, an enemy in your life. What hurts, aches, and needs do you think he or she may be experiencing? What difficulties may have caused that person to be the way he or she is?*
- *Charles has come to believe that "part of loving my enemy concretely is first to see the enemy in myself. . . . To love is not so much to do something, but to discover something. I am able to love when I discover that I am in no position to love, since it is I who am in desperate need, and it is I who undermine the way of love." Read **Colossians 3:12–14**. How does this passage personally challenge you? How can an understanding of your own need for forgiveness and grace enable you to love others?*
- *Charles made a deliberate choice to "move toward" his enemies—to live in a close community that would challenge him in the area of enemy-love. How might God be calling you to move toward your enemies? What steps can you take to engage and love your enemies rather than avoid them?*



Do I Have to Love Her?

Loving the people we
honestly can't stand

By Lisa K. Clark



Although I hadn't yet spent much time with her, I admired "Sarah." I could learn a lot from her, since I was a new missionary and she'd served overseas for years. She was energetic, decisive, resourceful, and confident. Most importantly, she loved the Lord and wanted to make her life count for eternity.

I can't remember exactly when my feelings toward Sarah began to change, but as the weeks progressed, I grew increasingly uncomfortable around her. She presented her opinions at our team Bible study forcefully, the polar opposite of my style. She often spoke with such authority and conviction that it left no room for disagreement.



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I felt that I had only had two options in responding to Sarah. I could rip her idea apart in front of the others in the group (something I didn't want to do) or else silently disagree with her. I inevitably opted for the second choice.

The crux of the problem

I hate conflict, so I tried to ignore the problem rather than talk with Sarah about my feelings. That tactic caused me to carry my silent protestations far beyond our meetings. I brooded for days about what she'd said, as well as the way she said it. As time went on, I found myself sinking into increasingly deeper turmoil.

I knew Sarah was God's child and someone for whom Jesus died. I felt I shouldn't criticize her, either to others (like my husband, who had to put up with me talking about how she'd hurt me) or to God.

I decided just to forgive her for the way she—unintentionally—plowed over me verbally and emotionally. Rather than experiencing the peace God gives when we forgive someone, though, I was filled with guilt because the negative feelings I had toward her didn't disappear.

Looking back, I can see why this solution didn't work: Sarah wasn't sinning against me. I didn't need to forgive her, because she'd done nothing wrong. She was just being herself! I had no right to expect her to be like me or anyone else. The fact that she was relating in a way I didn't like didn't mean that she was sinning.





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Do I Have to Love Her?

When, even after that revelation, the problem persisted, I decided to talk with Sarah.

Surely that will help, I thought. So after praying about and planning how I would express my feelings, I met with her.

I wanted to get to the crux of the problem clearly and without laying blame on her.

"Sarah, you and I communicate so differently," I told her. "While I hesitate to present my ideas in absolute terms, you state your thoughts forcefully. When that happens, though, I feel shut down and left with only two options: to say nothing or to fight back verbally."

Sarah seemed to understand how I felt and, though our time was tense, we left on a friendly note.

Unfortunately, nothing changed as a result of our conversation. Sarah continued to relay her opinions in the same way at our group meetings.

How could she have misunderstood? I wondered.

Next, I tried writing a letter to Sarah. I felt I could be direct and yet kind that way. To my dismay, that didn't effect any change either. I wanted Sarah to understand how much she'd hurt me and to demonstrate it by changing the way she interacted with me. In reality, I expected Sarah to begin acting like me instead of acting like herself. That was neither realistic nor fair on my part. *I* was the one who was putting a roadblock in our relationship, though I didn't yet understand that truth.





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Do I Have to Love *Her*?

I just don't like her.

I was desperate. I was a missionary because I wanted to help others know the Lord. But how could God use me to help others when I was such a tangled mess inside?

The first breakthrough came when I realized that I just didn't *like* Sarah. But was that okay?

I began to study about various personality types. Sarah is strong in leadership qualities, unhesitating, and commanding. She naturally dominates the groups she's in and won't easily concede that she's wrong. Popularity isn't nearly as important to her as acting decisively. I, on the other hand, am contemplative and sensitive. I'm a perfectionist who can spend too much time planning and not enough time doing. Although I don't like being the center of attention, I want people to like me.

Although two people with such divergent personalities are bound to irritate each other occasionally, that doesn't mean our differences are irreconcilable. Regardless of our strengths and despite our weaknesses, God loves us both unconditionally. He calls us, his children, to imitate that kind of love.

In the Lord's strength, I knew I could—and must—actively love Sarah, even if there were parts of her I didn't like. Jesus commanded his people to *love* one another (John 13:34), not to *like* them. We demonstrate that kind of love through our actions and attitudes (1 Corinthians 13:4–8). The first action I needed to take was to confess my bad thoughts and feelings and begin to truly love Sarah. I asked for God's help.





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As I studied Paul's prayers for the various churches he wrote to, I discovered something instructive. Paul *thanked* God for the people he was ministering to. Even when he wrote his first letter to the Corinthians—a church notable because of its problems—he followed this practice. "I always thank God for you," he wrote, "because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus" (1 Corinthians 1:4). He then went on to mention the good work God was doing in their lives. By doing that, Paul encouraged them while giving glory to God.

Thanksgiving also held the key to my inner peace. "Do not be anxious about anything," Paul wrote in Philippians 4:6–7, "but in everything, 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" (emphasis mine). Paul continued his thought with these words, "Finally, brothers, 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). I needed to focus on good things in Sarah's life rather than on her "flaws." I decided to thank God for Sarah. What a difference!

I need people like her.

With God's help, I turned my hurt feelings over to him and gained more of his perspective. By focusing on the good things the Lord is working in and through her, my attitude toward Sarah changed. I can now recognize her as one who desires to please God—in fact a blessing from





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the Lord. This new way of relating to Sarah doesn't mean I agree with everything she says. But I need Sarah and people like her. In areas where I'm weak, Sarah is strong. God wants to use our strengths to complement each other.

On a practical level, other changes helped me maintain a good attitude toward Sarah. What initially led to our conflict was discussing the Bible together. Since our vastly different approaches were helpful to neither of us, we stopped meeting in that small group setting. Instead, we were able to encourage each other through celebrating birthdays, praying for the people and events in our lives, sharing holiday meals together, and meeting in other group settings.

Through all of these changes, the Lord took Sarah's and my broken relationship and turned it into something beautiful.

Today, though we live on different continents, I still actively love Sarah. In our apartment, we have a picture of Sarah and her family that reminds me to pray for her and those she loves.

God *can* transform difficulties, misunderstandings, hurt feelings, and pain into something lovely.

Lisa K. Clark is a freelance writer living in Bulgaria. She and her husband have worked with the Navigators for 28 years. This article was originally titled "Personality Clash!" and was published on Kyria.com in September, 2009.





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Do I Have to Love Her?

Reflect

- *Sometimes enemies are people who've done cruel things to us or have wronged us in a painful way. But other times enemies are people who have simply rubbed us the wrong way—people who, if we're honest, we just don't like. Without revealing details, when have you had a relationship that's similar to Lisa and "Sarah's"?*
- *How do you typically respond to people you don't like? How are you most often affected by interactions with those people?*
- *Lisa observes that "Jesus commanded his people to love one another (John 13:34), not to like them." How are love and like different?*
- *Is it truly okay to not like someone? Why or why not? If it is, how should that "dislike" look in the life of a Christian? What attitudes or actions associated with disliking someone are inappropriate for a Christian?*
- **Read John 13:34–35 and 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. Think of (and share) one specific and practical thing you can do to exhibit this kind of love toward someone you don't like.**





My Son Was Murdered

Forgiving Tim's killer
seemed impossible.

By Dianne Collard

We were at home in Vienna, Austria, in September, 1992, when our phone rang at 9:15 one Sunday night. The caller introduced himself as a police officer from our hometown of Concord, California.

"Mrs. Collard, I need the phone numbers and addresses of your closest relatives in this area. I believe a Timothy Collard has been involved in an accident here, and we're checking it out. We'll call you back in 30 minutes."



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Tim Collard! That was our 23-year-old son's name! What could have happened? Fear began to build inside me. Two hours of agony later, our distraught daughter, Wendy, 21, who lived about an hour from Tim, called. Two policemen had delivered her life-altering news: Tim had suffered at least three close-range bullet wounds in the back of his head. He was killed instantly. The bragging murderer—a man named Mike—asserted that he'd killed his wife's lover.

Friends worked with my husband, Glenn, our son Greg, 15, and me to book a flight back to the States and get to the airport for the trip to California. As we were leaving, one friend said to me, "Remember, Dianne, God is good. Hold on to this."

My response was a fervent, "No! I will *never say*, 'My son's been murdered,' and 'God is good' in the same sentence!"

My life was shattered. My firstborn son had been brutally murdered. How could God be good? We'd left our homeland and family to serve God in Europe as missionaries—*why* would a good God allow this to happen?

Upon our arrival at San Francisco Airport, we learned Tim's murder was front-page news, complete with gruesome pictures and the sordid tale as reported by the jealous, murderous husband. We were in shock.

Slowly the truth of what happened that night emerged. Tim worked weekends as a concessions-line supervisor at an outdoor amphitheater, the Pavilion. Since the last summer concert had finished that night, the employees





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had a parking lot "party" to celebrate. Although Tim didn't stay for the party, as he was leaving, a coworker named Donna expressed her fear of returning home to an abusive husband. Tim went home, but in his concern for Donna, he returned to the Pavilion around midnight to make sure she was all right. By this time, Donna was drunk. Only two other people besides Donna remained at the amphitheater, so Tim offered to drive her home.

As he waited in the passenger seat of her car while she and the two others locked up, Donna's husband, Mike, arrived in his pickup truck. When Donna came to her car, he spotted them together and assumed Tim was the cause of his marital problems. Enraged, Mike fired five shots into his wife, then shot Tim and left him in an abandoned parking lot. Donna lived—with disabilities. Our son was dead.

We met with the assistant district attorney and lawyers, and soon learned some hard facts: Because the murder was unpremeditated, the likelihood of a first-degree murder conviction was slim. We also learned that as Tim's parents we had no rights and involvement in the prosecution—murder is a "crime against the state." Because California courts were overbooked, we had no way of knowing when the trial would be set. Within a month we returned to Vienna, and were encouraged not to return for the trial. My brother, Bill, agreed to be our representative. He and other family members attended each of the pretrial hearings and the start of the official trial.





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Our attorney advised us that there was no question of Mike's guilt. Yet the pretrial hearings all indicated that truth was not the issue. In order to justify the murderer's actions, the defense would attempt to destroy Tim's character, somehow leaving the perception with the jury that Tim was such a horrible person, he deserved to die. I pled with our prosecuting attorney not to let this happen. The attorney responded that legally it didn't matter who Tim was or what he'd done—it was wrong to kill him. While I knew that, it didn't satisfy.

We didn't know how to pray. We cried out for truth to prevail, that somehow God would intervene.

At the pretrial hearings, Mike appeared cocky and totally unrepentant. But on the morning of the actual trial, contrary to the expectations of his attorney, the judge, and the media, Mike changed his plea to guilty of first-degree murder. He received the strongest sentence we could expect—life in prison, with the possibility of parole in 25 years. We don't know what prompted Mike's change of heart, but God answered our prayers beyond anything we could ask.

At the sentencing, we sent a letter to be read, plus Bill spoke for us. In both we expressed our desire that the murderer know God's forgiveness and experience the salvation God offers.

Bill talked to one of Mike's family members, but the attorneys wouldn't allow us to talk to Mike himself. We tried to talk to Donna, but with no success. Donna made it





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clear she didn't want any contact with us. She had semi-recovered, divorced, and remarried.

Since Tim's murder, it's been a long year process of forgiveness and growth. I had a decision to make: Would I trust God, or reject him? My ultimate surrender expressed itself in a heartfelt cry one night as I thought of a chorus: "In my life . . . in my pain . . . in Tim's death, Lord, be glorified."

Even though I had no feelings of forgiveness, God brought me to the point where I could pray, "God, in your strength, I choose to forgive this man." I've had to repeat that prayer whenever I've experienced the pain of seeing my husband and children go through terrible times of grief. When my family suffered, or we'd learn something new about the murder, I'd have to choose to forgive again.

That first year, I felt I'd done all God expected of me. My husband and children were on their own journey toward forgiveness, and I couldn't push them.

But as the anniversary of Tim's murder approached, I felt convinced God wanted me to do more. I contacted my brother, Bill, and asked him to find out where Mike was so I could contact him. Bill had to go to great lengths to get Mike's address; the prison system doesn't trust the victim's family members with that information.

My brother initiated contact with Mike. Eventually I prayerfully, tearfully sent a letter to him through Bill. Mike responded, expressing sorrow for what he'd done. Mike was repentant, but did not feel he deserved God's





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forgiveness. My brother continues to correspond with him and plans to visit him when it's appropriate.

I can't tell you what God will lead me to do in the future. I've done all he's asked, and I'm committed to obey whatever else he wants. If my husband, Glenn, seeks to visit Mike, I'm willing to go along and face him, but I don't believe I can do it on my own.

I know, both from the Bible and from personal experience, that God's command to forgive as he forgives us is for *my* good—it brings release from the destructive forces of bitterness and anger.

Obviously, forgiveness doesn't mean murder is "okay," or that Mike doesn't deserve his punishment. It in no way diminishes the horror that this one man's choice contains. But it says I release my "right" for revenge or judgment. Mike's in God's hands—and I pray he'll experience God's love and forgiveness.

Has my pain gone away? No! I don't expect to be free from the pain of losing my son. As another grieving parent expressed, "It never becomes easy, but it does become more bearable." But I don't grieve as someone without hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). I know that Tim, who asked Jesus to be his Savior when he was four years old, is in heaven—and that some day we'll see him again.

I have this hope because Jesus rose from the dead. The same power which raised Jesus out of the grave that early Sunday morning, is the very power that saved me from my





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sin and changed my (and my son's) destination from hell to heaven. It's that power that enables me to have hope in the midst of despair and this world's evil.

We've permanently engraved Tim's tombstone, "Life is not fair, but God is good." My cry of "Why?" is engulfed in the goodness of God—my reason for life and hope.

Dianne Collard, a freelance writer, and her husband, Glenn, are missionaries with Greater Europe Mission. This article was first published in the March/April 2000 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.

Reflect

- *Imagine what it would be like in Dianne's shoes: What thoughts and feelings do you think you might have about the crime committed against your son (and your entire family)? What would you think or feel about the murderer?*
- *What do you think Jesus' expectations are of a Christian in a position like Dianne's? How do you think God views a victim's feelings of anger, hate, or bitterness? Are they okay with him? Why or why not?*
- *Learning to love an "enemy" who's hard to get along with is one thing. But what about a true enemy—someone who has done heinous and horrific things to you or to a loved one? What about a murderer, a rapist, or an abusive parent? Or what about a lying, cheating spouse? What about a drunk driver who turns your life upside down? How does **Matthew 5:43–47** work in those circumstances?*





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- *Do you think God expects someone like Dianne to feel love toward Mike? Why or why not?*
- *Re-read **Colossians 3:13**. Dianne made the choice to forgive her son's murderer. What do you think forgiving an enemy has to do with loving an enemy? Are they the same or different? Can you have one without the other? Explain.*



Loving Military Enemies



War does not exempt Christians from the second-greatest commandment.

By Stephen L. Carter

Modern wars divide American Christians much as they divide the rest of the nation. Whatever our view of war, however, we should be consistent in our view of the enemy. He is a human being and a part of God's creation. As difficult as the task may sound, our obligation, always, is to look on him with the eyes of love.



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Centuries ago, Augustine of Hippo argued that a Christian may not harm another person, even in war, unless he does so with love in his heart. Augustine did not oppose Christian service in war—pacifism was widely preached at the time—but supported it. He believed war is sometimes necessary. He did not quarrel with Christians who chose to fight. But he insisted that the Christian fight out of love, not hatred. His advice was solidly rooted in the Gospels, for Christ's teaching that we should love the enemy was offered without any exceptions (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:35). Arguing that this world is less important than the next, Augustine struggled to explain how a Christian, acting out of love, could nevertheless kill. Although his argument is too complex to encapsulate here, I will say that Augustine's position, especially as refined by Thomas Aquinas, became the basis of just war theory and, ultimately, of today's international law of war.

It is important that we act out of love, even when, reluctantly and as a last resort, we decide to fight. To put it simply, it matters, in Christian terms, how we think about the enemy, and, therefore, how we talk about the enemy. (It also matters, of course, how we decide who qualifies as the enemy. But that is a subject for another day.)

During the first phase of the Iraq war, I read four daily newspapers (*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*). Every morning all four printed counts of American casualties. Only the last two, however, made an effort to estimate daily Iraqi





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casualties. Christian love suggests that we should keep track. Enemy combatants, even when we have no choice but to kill them, are equally human, equally partakers of God's creation, and equally embedded in a world of friends, families, and the familiar. We should not render them faceless or their deaths trivial, as we do when the media report as though only American casualties matter.

But we must also be wary of an attitude of contempt for our enemies, a mindset that can easily reduce their humanity and make it easy to treat them as animals. Yes, a degree of dehumanizing may make it easier for soldiers to do what, reluctantly, they must. I have never been in combat and would not presume to say. But the same dehumanizing that makes the enemy easy to kill also makes the enemy easy to mistreat, to further dehumanize, as we saw with the terrible abuse at Abu Ghraib. None of us would subject those we love to what many of the detainees (some of them charged with no crime) were forced to face.

I am not arguing for a moral equivalence between the two sides. I am not denying that, very often, one's enemies will be guilty of the most horrid atrocities. Indeed, many theologians believe that preventing another government's atrocities, even against its own people, is a sufficient Christian ground for war. But the horrifying things that others may do—terrorist bombings and beheadings of the innocent, for example—are a test not only of national resolve, but also of our commitment to love. It is no easy matter to pray for those who work evil in the world, even in the midst of what some will consider necessary battles to defeat them. But it is a responsibility Christians must not shirk.





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It is appropriate to pray for our troops, to cheer each success that brings a war's conclusion closer, to celebrate our brave soldiers with candlelight vigils, and to remember prisoners with yellow ribbons. It is appropriate to mourn our dead, to pray for peace as well as victory (when we are in the right), and to ask God to guide our leaders. But a war is not a sporting contest. We should remember the wounds suffered by the other side as we remember our own. And although we should celebrate victory when our cause is just, we must never celebrate killing our fellow human beings.

Stephen L. Carter is the William Nelson Cromwell Professor of Law at Yale University. He is the author of several fiction and non-fiction works and writes frequently for CHRISTIANITY TODAY. This article is adapted from one first published in the September 2004 issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY.





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Reflect

- *What's your gut reaction to the ideas in this article? Why?*
- *This article touches the surface of a very complex theological question: How do we love our enemies in wartime? Some Christians answer by denouncing war entirely, affirming that true love of enemies requires pacifism. Other Christians swing to the opposite extreme, living as if this call to love enemies isn't applicable to wartime; in this mind-set, the "bad guys" can justifiably be stereotyped, mocked, killed, and (some would say) even tortured in the name of war. Stephen Carter's answer attempts to affirm the idea of necessary and just war while also reminding Christians that we must love our military enemies. Which of these responses are you most familiar with? Which do you most often see expressed among the Christians in your church community? Which do you think is most common in our culture?*
- *Do you believe it is even possible to love a military enemy? If so, what does that love look like? More specifically, what would this kind of love look like for a civilian in wartime? For a soldier in war?*
- *While we're at it, let's wade in even deeper: Do you believe God calls you to love a terrorist leader such as Osama Bin Laden or a young, brainwashed suicide bomber? What does that kind of love even mean? What does it require of you?*



The Clumsy Embrace



Croatian Miroslav Volf wanted to love his Serbian enemies; the Prodigal's father is showing him how.

Interview by Kevin D. Miller

As a young man in Communist Yugoslavia, Croatian-born Miroslav Volf saw firsthand the ethnic frictions that turned bloody after the breakup of the country. He began searching for a resolution to the tension that existed in him between the "natural instinct to fight for your rights" and the teaching of his Pentecostal parents "that the enemy is there to be loved." He talked with CHRISTIANITY TODAY about how Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son has impacted his thinking about forgiveness and reconciliation.

You say the story of the Prodigal Son teaches us a "theology of embrace." What do you mean by that?

After the war broke out in the former Yugoslavia, I started thinking about the whole issue of relationship between cultures and between individuals who are part of cultures. How should I relate to my friends and my fellow Christians who are Serb, and who find themselves on the other side of the barricades?



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Right about that time I was asked to write a paper addressing the upheavals in Eastern Europe from a theological perspective. I asked myself, How am I going to relate to those who have injured me and my country?

I tried to apply liberation theology to the situation, which says we need to fight first for justice and liberation and then we can get reconciliation. It didn't work. Both parties saw themselves as oppressed, and both saw themselves as engaged in the struggle for liberation. So the main categories of liberation theology, oppression and liberation, serve to justify the struggle rather than lead to peace. Then it occurred to me that one of the best portrayals of what lies at the core of Christian faith is this amazing story of the Prodigal, which I read as an expression of what God did for us on the cross. Suddenly those open arms of the father became for me the picture of who God is, how God had acted toward sinful humanity. And not only how God acted toward humanity, but how we ought to act toward those who have sinned against us.

How did that lead you away from a liberation-theology paradigm?

I started thinking about the implications of the Prodigal story for how we relate to one another in situations of conflict, of enmity, of wrongdoing, of suffering. At the center of Christian faith lies not so much liberation, but the embrace of the wrongdoer. That was where the idea of a "theology of embrace" was born. It is simply the Prodigal's father not giving up his relationship with his son—in spite of the wrongdoing of the younger son. When that son returns, the father runs toward him without having heard a single word from that son. He shows his





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son grace and acceptance because he was and he is and he remained his son even through the wrongdoing. That is what we see on the cross.

But it doesn't stop there. The God who runs toward us—the wrongdoers—also demands we do the same with those who have wronged us. So there is a social meaning to the cross. Divine grace obligates. In his book *The Real Jesus*, Luke Timothy Johnson argues that the core of the gospel is found at the end of the Gospels in the story of the crucifixion. The significance of the crucifixion is not only what God does for us; consistently throughout the New Testament the crucifixion is portrayed as the pattern that we are to follow. It is a model of social behavior toward the other as well as a statement about what God has done for us.

How does a theology of embrace apply to ongoing conflicts in war-torn countries?

The basic challenge in all these conflicts—indeed, the basic challenge in all human conflicts—is the same one identified in the story of the Prodigal: the relationship between justice and peace, liberation and reconciliation, law and grace. Do you call first for justice, then peace? First liberation, then reconciliation? Or is it the other way around?

When I read the Prodigal story, I saw that the primacy was given to grace, embrace, reconciliation. Not cheap reconciliation—"nothing that happened between us matters, so let's hug each other and everything's going to be okay." Everything *wouldn't* be okay. But also not the pursuit of what you might call "strict justice." As a way





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of resolving problems between people, this simply will not work, because strict justice is impossible in the real world in which we live. The stage on which we fight for justice was partly built by unjust means, and the fight for justice itself always and inescapably creates new injustice. If our relationships are governed by the idea of strict justice, they will never be healed.

Instead, I see in this story a dual emphasis. One can distinguish in it the *will to embrace* and the *embrace itself*. The will to embrace the other is absolutely indiscriminate and unconditional. It does not depend on anything that the other person has done, and it applies to every and any individual. The Prodigal's father runs toward his son; he is willing to embrace him no matter what the son will say. The will is there. And yet the full reconciliation takes place after the Prodigal's confession. It takes confession for the Prodigal to be transformed into a son.

The grace we see demonstrated here affirms justice in the act of transcending it. Just as forgiveness always entails blame (try offering forgiveness to somebody who thinks he or she has done no wrong!), similarly, every act of grace entails affirmation of justice precisely in the act of transcending the claims of justice.

But it still takes two to embrace.

Yes. The offer of embrace can be there, but there must also be a willingness on the part of the other party to belong to the relationship and to behave in a way that builds rather than undermines the relationship. Consider the relationships between the father and the Prodigal and the





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older brother and the Prodigal. It took the willingness of both the father and the younger son before their embrace could take place. But the older son did not will to embrace. Therefore, no embrace followed, at least as far as the story goes.

You've talked about "a theology of embrace" and "strict justice." In your book you also talk about the interplay of "identity of otherness." How does that fit into the story?

I see it in the behavior of the father, but also negatively in the behavior of the older brother. In order to extend grace, you need to make a journey together with the person to whom you are extending that grace. That's what the father does in never giving up on his son. The father never becomes self-enclosed in his own existence after the son has departed into the far country. Instead, he keeps his erring son, the son who sought to undo himself as a son, in his heart. He suffers the son's departure and therefore is always willing to readjust his identity as the identity of his son shifts.

That's a very significant feature of grace—the sense of being with another person and making a journey with that person. It requires being open and providing space in oneself for the other person even as that person is changing for the better or for the worse. To do this, I must readjust my own identity in the relationship to that other. In good relationships, we are happy to grow as the other person becomes part of us and who we are. When we suffer the changes in fractured relationships, we keep possible the healing of that relationship. It is this kind of commitment that I see exemplified in God's coming into the sinful world to die for our redemption.





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That makes sense, considering how the Old Testament Law was broken, and yet God did not void the covenant with his chosen people.

You have Yahweh saying in Hosea, "How can I hand you over, O Israel?" Why? Because God is bound to Israel with "bonds of love." God's commitment and covenant are irrevocable. That's the eternality of the covenant and, therefore, I would say, the priority of the relationship. All sorts of things can happen within a relationship, but relationship is forever; the commitment to the other is eternal. And because this eternal commitment is there, it leads God—and anyone who is in relationship—to suffering on account of the other who has done wrong. If anything, in the New Testament, this kind of divine commitment gets intensified and its scope expanded.

A different way of making the same point would be to say that, at its core, the Christian faith is not about justice. It's about justification. There's a world of difference between the two. Now that does not leave justice outside of it, but puts a different spin to it. If Christian faith was about justice, it would also be about enforcement of justice in relationships between people. The whole of the relationship between God and people and people by themselves would be governed by enforcement of justice, so violence would then be an integral part of what Christian faith is about. But it's not about that. It's governed by justification of the ungodly; it's governed by showing the kind of grace to the one who has done wrong, which makes that person and the relationship just again. This is the Christian—the Christlike—way of dealing with the wrong that is presumed to be there.





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We need to justify each other even when there's wrong done.

That's exactly what I want to argue. In our human way—a way that is both alike and different from the divine way—we need to seek to make the unjust person just and thereby create just peace between us. To say that we need to justify each other is a different way of saying what the apostle Paul said. He summarizes the whole teaching of Romans by applying it to the relationship between Christians. In 15:7, he instructs us to accept one another as we have been accepted by Christ. This is in his letter in which justification plays such an important and significant role. His injunction is to make the pattern of divine action toward us a pattern of our actions toward the other.

How do you respond to those who say that what you are proposing is conceptually elegant but of no practical good?

My friend Jurgen Moltmann put that question to me in a slightly different way. I was presenting the paper on the social upheavals in the former Yugoslavia that I referred to earlier, arguing that we need a theology of embrace rather than a theology of liberation. Rather than Croats simply fighting for their liberation and Serbs simply fighting for their liberation, and therefore Christian faith serving to legitimate their fighting, we need something that will unite the two, a theology that reconciles the warring factions. Moltmann, who has been a granddaddy of liberation theology in many ways, in his very pointed and penetrating way asked me, "But can you embrace a *cetnik*?" *Cetniks* are notorious Serbian fighters. I paused—not because I didn't know what to say, but because it was difficult to say for me. It was at a time when a third of Croatia was occupied and





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when many of our cities and towns were being destroyed. Many people had been driven off their lands, and Croatia was full of refugees from many other countries. Finally, my response was, "I can't; but as a follower of Jesus Christ I ought to be able to." And in many ways, that question and my answer accompanied me as I was working through these issues. What would it take to embrace a *cetnik*? What would it take for me to have the will to embrace? What would it take then for that embrace to actually take place? I think those are some key issues with which we have to struggle.

Have you ever literally embraced a cetnik?

Actually, I've never met one, but if I did I think I would have the will to embrace him, though I also think that much would need to happen before the embrace—a full embrace, an embrace that is not a charade—could take place. Most of us, though, have our own *cetniks*. And yes, I've done the embracing of those whom I felt have wronged me deeply. It's hard. It's clumsy to do. It's like God's call to Abraham to "go to a land that I will show you." You have no idea where that land is, but you open your arms and you embrace, unsure about what's going to happen. It takes tremendous courage to do so. It takes practice to do so. It takes self-giving. It also takes suffering. That's the tragic side of it. And yet, in that tragedy there is incredible promise.

Miroslav Volf is the Henry B. Wright Professor of Theology at Yale Divinity School and the author of several books, including Exclusion & Embrace: The Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation (Abingdon). A full version of this interview appeared in the October 1998 issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY.





Reflect

- *Miroslav Volf's believes that "the embrace of the wrongdoer" lies at the center of Christian faith. He developed his "theology of embrace" out of the story of the Prodigal Son. Read Jesus' parable, found in **Luke 15:11–32**. What does this story reveal about God and God's character?*
- *Miroslav emphasizes that the father runs to embrace the son "without having heard a single word" of repentance. This image of God's grace is also exemplified on the cross; read **Romans 5:6–11**. How does this type of grace—embracing and loving those who are still "in sin" or who haven't yet asked for forgiveness—factor into the way we are to relate to our enemies? Explore this in practical terms, thinking of a specific person you feel hatred, bitterness, or anger toward.*
- *This challenging parable is not meant to push us toward a charade of forgiveness. This is "not cheap reconciliation, [as in] 'nothing that happened between us matters, so let's hug each other and everything's going to be okay.' Everything wouldn't be okay" in a forced or fake reconciliation scenario, according to Miroslav. Again in light of a specific situation you're dealing with, what could true reconciliation look like? How would you envision it (even if it seems impossible)?*
- *Miroslav breaks it down into two main ideas: the will to embrace and the embrace itself. Actually reconciling with someone who has wounded us deeply is extremely difficult. Miroslav is candid about the difficulty, speaking from his own experience: "It's hard. It's clumsy to do. . . . [Y]ou open your arms and you embrace, unsure about what's going to happen. It takes tremendous courage to do so. It takes practice to do so. It takes self-giving. It also takes suffering." Have you ever had an experience like this? If so, describe it. If not, imagine how you might take a first step (albeit a clumsy one) toward reconciling with someone who's wronged you.*



Breaking Free from Bitterness



6 myths that keep us from letting go

By Denise George

I listened quietly as my friend Jamie told me the frank details of the sexual abuse she'd suffered as a child.

"I hate my father!" she blurted out. "He abused me for more than a decade!" Jamie cried. "But my pastor said if I want to heal from my childhood pain, I have to forgive."

"What did you tell your pastor?" I asked.

"I told him I could *never* forgive my father, that I didn't *want* to forgive him, that no one—not even God—would *expect* me to forgive him!"



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Jamie told me all the reasons that kept her from forgiving her abusive father. I'd heard many of them before. In fact, I'd used some of them two years earlier, when a friend I'd trusted to keep a confidence told several women in my Sunday school class about a painful circumstance I was going through. I felt betrayed by my friend—as I should have. But *forgive* her? That was the last thing I wanted to do! I dropped out of the Sunday school class and avoided her at church. But a year later, when I reread what the apostle Paul said about forgiveness, his familiar words touched my heart in a special way: "Be kind and compassionate to one another, *forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you*" (Ephesians 4:32, my emphasis).

As I meditated on that verse, I knew I'd been forgiven much. I needed to forgive my friend, even if I didn't feel like it. I decided to do so. Later, when I met her and told her I'd forgiven her, she apologized, and we both cried. I wish I could say she and I became good friends again—but I can't. Her betrayal deeply hurt our friendship, and I was careful never to share another confidence with her. But God's Word and my decision to forgive set me free from bitterness.

Facing the challenge

Jamie and I are just two of a legion of Christian women who've struggled with forgiveness because it's difficult—almost impossible—to do. Yet in Luke 6:37, Jesus says, "Forgive, and you will be forgiven." He elaborates in Matthew 6:14–15: "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will





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not forgive your sins." The apostle Paul repeats Jesus' command: "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13). Surely Paul's "whatever grievances" covers any kind of hurt, betrayal, or injury another person could inflict!

In talking with hundreds of women about forgiveness, I've discovered six myths that cause us to hold on to bitterness and hatred, preventing us from experiencing the healing and freedom God desires for us.

Myth 1: Forgiving means the offender didn't really hurt you.

Jamie thought if she forgave her father, it lessened the severity of his abuse. Yet Jamie's forgiveness doesn't deny her father hurt her. In fact, it clearly recognizes the enormity of his evil—if Jamie's dad hadn't deliberately caused her pain, she'd have no reason to forgive him.

"Forgiveness is a redemptive response to having been wronged and wounded," wrote author Lewis B. Smedes. "Only those who have wronged and wounded us are candidates for forgiveness. If they injure us accidentally, we excuse them. We only forgive the ones we blame." Choosing to forgive her father acknowledges the pain Jamie endured at his hands. It also begins her healing.

Myth 2: Forgiving means you excuse the offender's hurtful act.

When I chose to forgive my friend, I didn't condone her cruel behavior. Forgiveness, I've discovered, is a response that seeks to redeem the hurt, not brush it off.





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An accidental "slip of the tongue" needs no forgiveness because it isn't deliberately caused. Intentional hurts—like my friend's betrayal—need forgiveness. When I forgave my friend, my forgiveness didn't lessen the impact of her painful action. But forgiveness unlocked my own "prison" of bitterness.

Myth 3: Before forgiving, you must first understand why the offender hurt you.

On December 1, 1997, Missy Jenkins, a sophomore at Heath High School in Paducah, Kentucky, stood with her classmates and prayed before school started. Before they said their final "amen," 14-year-old Michael Carneal pulled out a pistol and fired 11 shots into the student prayer group. One bullet severely damaged Missy's spinal cord. Paralyzed from the waist down, Missy will spend her life in a wheelchair.

Missy doesn't know the reason her classmate deliberately hurt her. Michael may not understand his reasons. But that didn't keep Missy from choosing to forgive him.

"I believe hating him is wasted emotion," Missy says. "Hating Michael won't make me walk again. Besides, I know it isn't what Jesus would do."

Our human mind yearns to make all the confusing puzzle pieces fit together neatly before we forgive. However, the truth is we can forgive an offender even if we never discover the reasons for the inflicted pain. Author Philip Yancey writes in *What's So Amazing About Grace*, "Not to forgive imprisons me in the past and locks out all potential for change. I thus yield control to another, my enemy, and doom myself to suffer the consequences of the wrong."





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Myth 4: Before forgiving the offender, you must feel forgiving.

Forgiveness has nothing to do with how you feel. You can feel hurt, betrayed, and angry, and still completely forgive the one who wounded you. Biblical forgiveness is an act of the will. It's a choice you make.

Can you still feel angry after you forgive? Yes! Anger means you're in touch with reality—it's part of being human. But be careful to aim that anger at what your offender did, not at the offender herself. Then let your anger push you toward justice.

Myth 5: Forgiving means the offender will face no consequences.

When we choose to forgive someone, our forgiveness doesn't "let him off the hook." Forgiveness also doesn't mean justice shouldn't be served.

In December 1983, Pope John Paul II visited a prisoner, Mehmet Ali Agca, at the Rebibbia prison in Rome. In May 1981, Agca had aimed a pistol at the pope and shot him in the chest. After much pain and agony, John Paul recovered, and now he looked Agca in the eye, extended his hand, and said, "I forgive you."

Even though the pope forgave him, Agca still faced the consequences of his crime. He served a lengthy prison sentence.

Myth 6: When your offender is punished, you'll find closure.

On June 13, 1990, Linda Purnhagen saw her two daughters, Gracie, 16, and Tiffany, 9, for the last time. Dennis Dowthitt, a dangerously sick psychopath, strangled Tiffany to death, then raped Gracie and slit her throat. When authorities discovered





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the girls' bodies, they arrested and convicted Dowthitt, and scheduled his execution.

A decade later, as executioners strapped him to his death gurney, Dowthitt apologized for the savage killings. But not even his confession, apology, and execution brought closure for Linda. She was disappointed after the execution, not relieved.

We think we can more easily forgive others if they confess the crime and apologize for the pain they caused. But don't look to justice, imprisonment, or execution to bring needed closure and healing. Only forgiveness will do that.

The choice to forgive

The decision to forgive an enemy is probably the hardest choice we can ever make. Some crimes seem too horrible to forgive. Our instincts tell us to avenge the person who caused us pain, not to release him from the debt he owes us. But as Christians, we can't afford to have unforgiving hearts, for we have been greatly forgiven by God in Christ (Ephesians 4:32).

Only forgiveness can release us from a life of hatred and bitterness. "Forgiving is a journey, sometimes a long one," wrote Lewis B. Smedes in *Shame and Grace*. "We may need some time before we get to the station of complete healing, but the nice thing is that we are being healed en route. When we genuinely forgive, we set a prisoner free and then discover the prisoner we set free was us."





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FORGIVENESS ABCs

Acknowledge the hurt. When someone deliberately hurts you, don't try to diminish the pain and its effect on you. Acknowledge your suffering—and express it aloud to God. Scripture promises: “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18), and “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (Psalm 147:3).

Blame the offender. If a person hurts you by mistake, she didn't mean to inflict pain, so she needs no forgiveness. But if a person intentionally hurts you, then the pain she caused was deliberate. Say aloud: “I personally blame you, (name of offender), because you hurt me on *purpose*.” Correctly placing the blame readies you to begin the forgiveness process.

Cancel the debt. You've acknowledged the hurt and rightly blamed the offender. Now you're ready to make the willful decision to “cancel the debt” your offender owes you. Find a quiet place to be alone and ask the Lord's help in forgiving the person who hurt you. You might pray the “Lord's Prayer” (Matthew 6:9–13) and meditate on verse 12: “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” After you've prayed and while you're still alone, speak aloud your decision to forgive: “(Name of offender), I've chosen to forgive you for hurting me; I've decided to cancel the debt you owe me.” You've now embarked on the process of forgiving the person who hurt you.

*Denise George (www.authordenisegeorge.com), is the author of many books, including *Cultivating a Forgiving Heart—Forgiveness Frees You to Flourish* (Zondervan). This article, originally titled “What Forgiveness Isn't,” was published in the July/August 2006 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*





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Reflect

- *What "feels good" about holding on to hatred or anger against those who've hurt us? On the other hand, what negative effects result from choosing an unloving and unforgiving response toward those who've offended us?*
- *When have you harbored bitterness, hatred, or an unforgiving attitude toward another person? How did it affect you? Share an example from your own life.*
- *Missy Jenkins, now paralyzed, said she believed hating her shooter was a "wasted emotion." What do you think she meant? When have you seen this truth in action? Share an example.*
- *Read **Ephesians 4:31–32**. In this passage, Paul first urges his readers to get rid of bitterness, rage, and anger. Next he challenges us to forgive "as Christ forgave." How can bitterness and anger block our ability to forgive? And what does Paul really mean when he asks us to forgive others as Jesus forgave us?*
- *In her article, Denise George quotes Philip Yancey: "Not to forgive imprisons me in the past and locks out all potential for change. I thus yield control to another, my enemy, and doom myself to suffer the consequences of the wrong." Do you think this is true? How does refusal to forgive yield power to one's enemy? On the other hand, what's powerful about the choice to love and to forgive?*





The Toughest Prayer Request

Why Jesus asked us to pray for our enemies

By Cheri Fuller

When my friend Karen was a director for a film festival, she hired an office assistant named Terry. Although Terry interviewed well, before long she was slamming doors, yelling, crying, and ignoring Karen's requests.

Karen told me that her repeated attempts to talk with Terry about her attitude did nothing. Finally one night, when Terry called Karen's home to complain that she'd had enough of her boss's "demands," Jim, Karen's husband, answered the phone. Terry was so rude to him that Karen said, "Tell her I've had enough. She does not need to come back to work." Terry flew into a rage and slammed down the phone.



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At first Karen told me she didn't feel anything but anger toward her "enemy." After all, Terry deserved to be fired. But in sheer obedience to a Bible passage she'd read in Matthew 5:44, "When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer" (*The Message*), Karen began praying for Terry. As she prayed, her anger dissipated. She sensed there must be a wounded person behind those outbursts. Three months and many prayers later, Karen invited Terry to lunch. There Karen learned about how Terry had been the victim of severe abuse and neglect while growing up. Both women cried; they experienced reconciliation, and amazingly, began a friendship.

Sooner or later, you'll be confronted with a person who rubs you the wrong way, as Karen did. Despite your best intentions, another person becomes your adversary. Perhaps she talked behind your back at church, mounted a campaign against you in the PTA, or hurt you in other ways. She could be your mother-in-law, a neighbor, or former friend.

What's in it for you?

As difficult as it is to pray for your "enemy," here's why it's important to do so:

You're drawn closer to God. Last year, I had an unexpected conflict with a woman during some preparations for a community event on which we were both working. Although I intended no harm, I inadvertently offended "Kim" by something I said, and she told me so in no uncertain terms. While I apologized, Kim remained aloof and unfriendly and said some hurtful things about me behind my back that I eventually heard. God and I had a few conversations about





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Kim. I would have loved for him to change her. In fact, I asked him to several times! But instead, he suggested I pray blessings on her life whenever her name came to mind. One day I said, "Lord, you could have reconciled us by now. What's up?" His quiet whisper seemed to say, *You wouldn't have come to me nearly so much lately were it not for Kim!* Nothing's changed yet with the relationship— but I've realized praying for her is drawing me closer to God.

You experience heart-change. Because of her commitment to prayer, by the time my friend Karen met her "enemy," Terry, for lunch and heard her story, she actually wanted to hug Terry! Three months before, Karen was nowhere near that response. In following Jesus' command to "pray for our enemies," God slowly filled Karen's heart with his love for Terry. She felt compassion when all she'd felt before was hurt, anger, and frustration.

You see God at work. When Karen invited God into her rocky relationship with Terry through prayer, he did more than she could have asked or thought (Ephesians 3:20) by paving the way for a friendship where hostility had once existed. Often this is what God does when we take our hands off and give a person or situation to him. When Karen saw in a tangible way how God could turn a bad situation into something good, her faith was boosted enormously.

You find forgiveness. Jesus says in the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:2–4) that by the measure we forgive others, we're forgiven. Praying for our enemies teaches us a real-life lesson in forgiveness. As I prayed daily for Kim, I was able to release my hurt instead of hold onto it. God gradually





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replaced my anger with forgiveness. No, it wasn't overnight—but in the process of praying for my enemy, God reminded me of how much he had forgiven me. And the conflict made me become aware anew of how much I need God's mercy and forgiveness every day.

You feel better emotionally and physically. Studies show that one minute of anger can sap the emotional energy of a normal eight-hour period. And most of us need all the energy we can muster! Elaine, a woman I know, learned through a painful divorce that she couldn't live with resentment. She experienced the physical toll of anger. As things got worse between Elaine and her ex-husband, she was plagued by insomnia, depression, and high blood pressure. It took months of counseling for her to deal with her anger, forgive her ex, and get her blood pressure back to normal.

So later, when a coworker named Bonnie spread lies about her, Elaine knew where to go—to her knees. Praying each morning before work, Elaine gave God her hurt feelings but also asked him to fill this woman with his peace. Although the barbs continued for several months, Elaine could sleep at night. And eventually she was promoted to a position that took her out of Bonnie's line of fire.

As you pray . . .

I've found the following tips help you when resentful feelings boil up:

Take a "time-out." Consider writing down the specific offenses and how you feel about them. Don't try to





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sugarcoat the situation or your feelings. Then commit the list to God, asking him to heal your heart—and the other person's as well.

Put feet to your prayers. As you pray, listen for God to tell you what action steps to take. In Elaine's case, when Christmas rolled around several months into her praying for Bonnie, she felt God nudging her to do something kind for her. She decided to buy a gift book by Bonnie's favorite artist and give it to her for Christmas. Another friend, Melinda, was betrayed by her best friend, Jane. Months passed with no communication between them. Even though she didn't "feel" like it, Melinda prayed for Jane. Then, after several nudgings by God, she decided to write a prayer of blessing and send it to Jane.

After receiving it, Jane called Melinda, and the walls between them crumbled. She thought Melinda had assumed the worst about her, but now saw how she really cared. Gradually the two women are re-building the relationship, but it was the prayer of blessing that brought the breakthrough.

Be expectant. Jesus declared that when we follow his way of dealing with our enemies, we'll never regret it. That's why he tells us to "live out this God-created identity the way our Father lives toward us, generously and graciously, even when we're at our worst. Our Father is kind; you be kind" (Luke 6:28, 35, *The Message*).

When we obey Christ's command to pray for our enemies, we not only receive rewards in heaven, but blessings in this





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life. We'll be freer emotionally, healthier physically, and more able to experience the joy of Jesus. We'll draw closer to him, see him work in amazing ways, and experience the power of forgiveness.

Cheri Fuller is the author of numerous books, including When Couples Pray: The Little Known Secret to Lifelong Happiness in Marriage (Multnomah). This article, originally titled "Do I Have to Pray for Her?" was first published in the November/December 2001 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.

Reflect

- *Have you intentionally prayed for an enemy? If so, how did God answer that prayer? How did that experience affect you?*
- *Re-read **Matthew 5:44**. Why do you think Jesus asks something so counterintuitive of his followers?*
- *How do "love" and "prayer" relate to each other? Explain.*
- *Which of the reasons Cheri highlights for praying an enemy stands out to you most? Why?*
- *Praying for an enemy doesn't guarantee a happy ending like Karen and Terry's. In your opinion, what makes this kind of prayer "worth it" even if the difficult situation with an enemy is never peaceably resolved?*



Additional Resources

Books, online articles, and a Bible study to help you further



Books

Exclusion and Embrace by Miroslav Volf (Abingdon Press, 1996; 336 pages). Miroslav Volf contends that if the healing word of the gospel is to be heard today, Christian theology must find ways of speaking that address the hatred of the "other." Reaching back to the New Testament metaphor of salvation as reconciliation, Volf proposes the idea of *embrace* as a theological response to the problem of *exclusion*.

Christians must learn that salvation comes, not only as we are reconciled to God, and not only as we "learn to live with one another," but as we take the dangerous and costly step of opening ourselves to the "other," of enfolding him or her in the same embrace with which we have been enfolded by God.

Forgive and Love Again: Healing Wounded Relationships

by John Nieder (Harvest House, 2003; 204 pages). This helpful guide deals with forgiveness in a variety of settings: family, workplace relationships, friendships, and extended family relationships. A warm and compassionate tone along with life-changing insights combine to make this book an invaluable resource to readers facing issues of forgiveness, and an excellent aid to pastors and counselors.



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Additional Resources

Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace by Miroslav Volf (Zondervan, 2005; 224 pages). In our increasingly graceless culture, where can we find the motivation to give? And how do we learn to forgive when forgiving seems counterintuitive or even futile? A deeply personal yet profoundly thoughtful book, *Free of Charge* explores these questions—and the further questions to which they give rise—in light of God’s generosity and Christ’s sacrifice for us. Miroslav Volf draws from popular culture as well as from a wealth of literary and theological sources, weaving his rich reflections around the sturdy frame of Paul’s vision of God’s grace and Martin Luther’s interpretation of that vision. Blending the best of theology and spirituality, he encourages us to echo in our own lives God’s generous giving and forgiving.

Love One Another: Becoming the Church Jesus Longs For by Jerry Sittser (InterVarsity Press, 2008; 180 pages). Jesus said that the world would know we were Christians by our love, but what does that look like in real life? In *Love One Another*, Gerald Sittser explores this love by looking at the “one another” statements in 1 John. By learning to forgive, encourage, and comfort one another, we become the church Jesus intended and thereby a church that draws the lost.

Online Articles

“Bless My Enemies, O Lord”—*A prayer for enemies*

By Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich (available on CTLibrary.com)

“Love Your Heavenly Enemy”—*How are we going to live eternally with those we can't stand now?*

By Miroslav Volf (from ChristianityToday.com)





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Additional Resources

“On Enemies”—*Quotations to stir the heart and mind on hatred and forgiveness*

Compiled by Richard A. Kauffman (from ChristianityToday.com)

“Redeeming Bitterness”—*Miroslav Volf tells how to stop the 'shield of memory' from turning into a sword.*

Interview by Collin Hansen (from ChristianityToday.com)

“That Woman Next Door”—*I really didn't feel like loving my neighbor.*

By Brenda Sprayue (from Kyria.com)

“To Embrace the Enemy”—*Is reconciliation possible in the wake of such evil?*

Interview with Miroslav Volf (from ChristianityToday.com)

“What is ‘Righteous Anger’?”—*How can I know whether I'm feeling that or just being a hothead?*

By Lisa Harper (from Kyria.com)

“Why Forgive?”—*It's more about you than you think.*

By Neil T. Anderson (from Kyria.com)

Bible Study

“When We're Afraid to Forgive”—This single-session study from ChristianBibleStudies.com explores the importance of extending mercy to those who've wronged us.



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