

# Introduction

You might have picked up this book because the title applies to your life. You might have someone in mind and you're saying, "I forgive you, but . . ."

Maybe you've tried to forgive, but you just couldn't.

Maybe you thought you forgave, but what happened just keeps coming back, and it feels so raw and painful, you wonder if you've failed in the forgiveness department.

Maybe you know you *should* forgive, but you're just plain mad, and you don't want to forgive.

Or maybe you've forgiven the same person again and again, and you don't want to do it anymore.

Here are just a few of the things I've heard (or even felt) that complete the sentence, *I forgive you, but . . .*

- you don't deserve it.
- I won't forget!
- I want you to be sorry.
- I still hate you.
- I don't want you to get away with it.
- I want you to admit you were wrong.
- I want you to understand the pain you've caused.
- someone has to pay.
- I want you to know how much you hurt me.
- I don't want you to be blessed.
- it's hard.

If any of those thoughts are your thoughts (or some variation thereof), then this book is for you. We're going to look at those thoughts

## “I Forgive You, But . . .”

and feelings, and see what God has to say about them. Because at the end of the day, what God wants for you is *freedom and peace and blessing*, and forgiveness is the way to get you there.

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*At the end of the day,  
what God wants for you is freedom and peace.*

.....

You *know* you should forgive, right? You may have even given it your best shot. Maybe you’ve given it lip service and said, “Yeah, yeah, I forgive them,” but deep inside you’re not buying it. You’ve tried and yet failed to forgive. Every time that person’s name (or that situation) comes up, the vein stands out in your neck, or the pain punches you in the stomach. Thoughts of what happened still swirl in your head in the wee hours of the night, making you toss and turn in your bed and lose sleep.

Maybe you still get that “rot gut” feeling every time something reminds you. Or maybe you’re just holding onto unforgiveness on purpose to teach them a lesson.

You may have taken a shot at forgiveness, but you know you’re not totally free.

## Have You Been Hurt?

Most of us Christians know that we’re supposed to forgive, right? We know from the Bible and years of sermons that we’re not supposed to hold a grudge.

Let’s say, for example, that someone has done you wrong, and you’re very upset about it. You’ve told a few friends, and if the name of the person comes up in conversation, you get that horrible feeling in the pit of your stomach. But if I were to ask you, “Are you harboring unforgiveness against that person?” your good Christian answer would be, “Oh no, I forgive them” because you know you’re supposed to say that.

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I've learned over the years not to ask that question anymore because I always get that same answer when it's plain to see that it's still very much an issue. People just don't *know* that they're still holding a grudge (and therefore they're not free from it).

So let me ask it this way: "Have you been hurt?"

I think we can all answer "yes!" to that question. I think anyone who's been alive longer than about 15 minutes has been hurt. Sadly, it's part of life in this world.

First, let me say I'm so sorry. I know your pain is real. You may think, "No one understands what I've gone through" (and that's true) and "How can I forgive the horrible things I've endured, the wounds and scars I wear every day?"

I haven't walked in your shoes, and I don't know exactly what has happened to you. But I have walked through some painful things, and I've walked through some painful things with other people.

Maybe your hurt came when someone wounded you in terrible ways, even tried to destroy you. Maybe you counted on someone and they let you down horribly, or you were stunned when someone you trusted just totally betrayed you. Maybe it was even a Christian, who should've known better! Maybe someone stole from you or was just plain rotten to you.

You may have suffered with unforgiveness for a long time. Maybe something happened to you long ago and, in spite of your efforts to forgive, you haven't been able to let it go all the way. Or maybe it's something recent, but the hurt goes so deep, you can't see your way to forgive. These are all very real, very painful realities.

In today's world, it seems there are a lot of good reasons to harbor a grudge. It's also a very socially acceptable concept to retaliate against those who have hurt us — revenge is a very popular theme for movies, books, TV, and news. But revenge is not God's way. His wish — and mine too — is freedom from the hurt, so you can have peace in your heart and mind. We want you to have freedom to move past the pain, and forgiveness is the way to get there.

.....  
*God’s wish for you is freedom from the hurt,  
so you can have peace.*  
.....

I want you to discover what I have about the power of forgiveness. Too many are walking around wounded or angry or even sick from the hurts of the past while God has the answer. It might not seem like it, but the answer is forgiveness. I’ve seen *miracles* happen when people forgive! And I want you to know about them, so they can happen in your life too.

There are stories in this book about people like you, people who have tried to forgive or thought they forgave or who didn’t want to forgive. But once they truly forgave, God was able to do great things in their lives!

Maybe you don’t want to forgive — you want people to get what they deserve!

I understand. I really do. Sometimes this world is a hard, hard place, and hurts come from other people, from situations and things beyond our control, from horrible circumstances and violated expectations. But God wants you to be free from the hurt, and that’s what this book is about.

## It’s Not Okay to Stay Hurt

While it’s fairly normal to *get* hurt as a Christian human being on planet Earth, it’s not okay to *stay* hurt. God doesn’t want that for you! In fact, can I put it to you in fairly harsh terms? Staying hurt is really harboring unforgiveness.

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*Staying hurt is really harboring unforgiveness.*  
.....

I know, I know! That’s a mean thing to say! Ouch! And you might be thinking, “Oh no, I’m not harboring unforgiveness, Karen. I know

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better than that.” Or you might even be thinking, “But you don’t know what they did to me!”

And of course, you’re right, I don’t know. I haven’t felt your particular pain. But one thing I know for sure is that I don’t want you to have to live with it a moment longer, and neither does God. He loves you! And he sent his Son, Jesus, to bear those pains for you, and to set you free.

When someone has done something hurtful or stupid or mean or ignorant to you and it’s affected your life, it just doesn’t seem like it’s possible to forgive them, especially when you’re living with the results. But here’s what I’ve learned: if you forgive, you can come out of it. When you choose to forgive, you’re choosing God’s way of acting and reacting, and that means you’re choosing to let him take over in the situation. Not only does forgiveness make your pain go away, but it allows God to move.

Don’t live a moment longer with the wrongs that others have done to you or with your own regrets and failures. You can’t hold onto the past and walk into the future God has for you! Today is a new day — a day to let it go and walk in freedom. We all have opportunities to hold onto things that have happened to us. I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to let what others do to me determine how I live. Unforgiveness only perpetuates pain, both in my life and the lives of those around me.

.....  
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.....

Not only can it poison my life, but it can poison my family, friends, and loved ones. If I refuse to forgive, I hurt myself *and* those around me. Let’s face it, hurt people can end up hurting people! Bitter people are no fun to be around. They can’t sleep. They get ulcers. They’re grumpy. They start to see only the negative in every situation because their life is filled with these feelings of resentment and anger.

## “I Forgive You, But . . .”

My friend, if you choose to hold on to bitterness, you can lose your peace, your joy, your friends, your family, and possibly even your health. It’s just not worth it. When you refuse to forgive, you may feel like you’re punishing the other person, but the only person paying the price is you and those around you. But through forgiveness, God can bring you into a future that is far better than you can even imagine!

## In This Book

So are you ready for peace and freedom? Are you ready to move past the pain and walk into your bright future? Are you ready to accept the challenge to forgive? Don’t cheat yourself out of a life of freedom and joy. The future God has planned for you is much better than your past.

God is saying to you *today*, “Let it go. Forgive them their debts, just as I have forgiven yours.”

In my own life, I’ve learned the power of forgiveness — both for myself and the many, many people I’ve ministered to. Miracles happen when we forgive!

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*Miracles happen when we forgive!*  
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God wants you to be free from hurt, and so do I. It’s what Jesus came for! Galatians 5:1 (NIV) says, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” There is freedom in forgiveness! Jesus doesn’t want you to be a slave to hurts for another moment.

It might feel impossible to forgive right now, but I invite you to read through the book. You’ve already taken the first step of the journey by reading this far. Hurray for you! Now keep going. By bathing your spirit in the truths of God’s Word in this book, you can cut the chains of past hurts and walk away free.

We’re going to go at it in three steps. I truly believe that following these steps can heal your heart forever!

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**Step 1: Read this.** This section contains stories of people who have also been hurt in their lives and how they found freedom through forgiveness (the names have been changed, but the stories are real). I believe that as you read their stories, you will receive the faith to forgive too.

**Step 2: Meditate and declare this.** In this section, the scriptures from step 1 are all written out, along with declarations that enable you to take hold of the Word for yourself and apply it to your own life. Here you can bathe your spirit in what God says about forgiveness, and you can return to it as often as needed.

**Step 3: Do this.** This is the “doing” part of forgiveness, where you’ll write down the name(s) of those you need to forgive and date it. This will be the proof you can point to, the reinforcement of your commitment to forgive that will stand the test of time.

In my experience as a pastor and Bible school instructor, I’ve gone through this process with a lot of people and have seen miraculous things happen. As they forgive, they walk into their future free from hurts of the past. I believe that can happen for you too! This book will give you the tools to overcome anything that has come against you or caused you pain.

You have what it takes, so *keep reading*. You can be free! Soak your spirit in these truths from God’s Word about forgiveness, follow the three steps outlined in this book, and you can get there.

Here we go.