



HOPE FOR THE TRAFFICKED



EXCERPT FROM
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INTRODUCTION

Dear Friend,

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

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

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

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

Here at Life Without Limbs, we love you and we're praying for you. We're here to be your Champions and to point you back to the true Champion: Jesus. We pray that these resources will help you through whatever challenges you may be facing and bring hope for the way forward.

Thank you and God Bless,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nick". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Nick Vujicic and the Life Without Limbs Team

HOPE

The Anchor for Your Soul

What Is God's Heart on Hope?

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

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

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

“In his name the nations will put their hope.”
(MATTHEW 12:21)

God is the God of hope.

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

God is the only lasting hope for everyone.

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

God wants your hope to be in Him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

God gives you hope during times of trouble and suffering.

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

God strengthens you with His hope.

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

God keeps you anchored with His hope.

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

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

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

ABUSE RECOVERY

From Surviving to Thriving

What Is God's Heart on Abuse?

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

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

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

God hears the cry of the battered and abused.

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

God understands the pain of abuse.

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

God strengthens and upholds the victim of abuse.

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

God confirms the abuse victim's value and worth.

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

God gives hope to victims of abuse.

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

God offers healing from the pain of abuse.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

God calls for abusive people to change.

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

God will one day end all abuse and pain.

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

Abuse Recovery: My Personalized Plan

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

“I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from?

My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.”

(PSALM 121:1–2)

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

Look to the Lord

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

— I will read God’s Word and pray regularly.

— I will get involved in a local church to deepen my relationship with God.

“Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always” (1 CHRONICLES 16:11).

Talk to someone & find support

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

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

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

Address physical issues

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

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

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

Process my emotions

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

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

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

Replace lies with truth

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

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

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

Help others

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

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

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

How to Support Survivors on the Road to Recovery

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

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

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

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

How to Support Survivors of Abuse

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

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

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

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

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

*“My life is consumed by anguish
and my years by groaning;
my strength fails because of my affliction.”*

(PSALM 31:10)

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

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

*“Everyone should be quick to listen,
slow to speak and slow to become angry.”*

(JAMES 1:19)

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

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

“Show proper respect to everyone.”

(1 PETER 2:17)

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

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

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

(JOB 2:13 NLT)

Don't dismiss feelings or experiences.

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

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

(EPHESIANS 4:29 NLT)

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

Do express sympathy and compassion.

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

(1 PETER 3:8)

Don't be critical or express judgment.

Do show your love and acceptance.

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

(ROMANS 15:7)

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

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

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

(GALATIANS 5:25 NLT)

Don't leave them to their own resources.

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

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

(PROVERBS 15:22)

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

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

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

(ROMANS 12:3)

Don't forget to pray *for* them and *with* them, as much as they are comfortable doing so.
Do lift them up before the Lord on a regular basis.

*“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions
with all kinds of prayers and requests.
With this in mind, be alert and always keep on
praying for all the Lord's people.”*
(EPHESIANS 6:18)

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

*“Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory
through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*
(1 CORINTHIANS 15:57)

VERBAL & EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Victory over the Power of Abuse

Finding Victory over Abuse: How to Replace Lies with Truth

If you've heard constant, cruel and condemning messages from your parents, spouse, partner, boss, or anyone close to you—it's understandable you may have come to believe those messages over time. Perhaps you've come to believe that you are unworthy or unlovable, incomplete or insignificant. No matter what harsh words you've been told, abuse does not have the final word about you—God does. His Word speaks of His love for you and the life-changing identity you have in Christ.

Healing and transformation can occur when you begin to see yourself through God's eyes, believing what He says about you. Therefore, it is important to identify the lies you've been led to believe and replace them with God's truth.

*“Teach me your way, O LORD,
that I may walk in your truth.”*

(PSALM 86:11)

Lie: “I am worthless and insignificant.”

Truth: You matter to God. You have God-given worth because God created you, and that worth can never be taken from you.

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (PSALM 139:13–14).

Lie: “No one will ever accept me.”

Truth: The Lord chose you, accepts you, and will never reject you.

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

Lie: “I am unlovable.”

Truth: God loves you, and nothing can separate you from His love.

“Nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (ROMANS 8:38–39 NLT).

Lie: “I deserve to be abused.”

Truth: No one deserves to be abused—no one. Each person should be treated with respect as God's image-bearer.

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

Lie: “There is no hope for me.”

Truth: No matter how deep the pain, with God, there is always hope.

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

Lie: “I have no control over what happens to me.”

Truth: God has given you free will, and you do have control over the choices you make and the actions you take.

“For we are each responsible for our own conduct” (GALATIANS 6:5 NLT).

Lie: “God doesn’t care about me.”

Truth: God cares deeply about you and wants you to come to Him with your burdens.

“Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you” (1 PETER 5:7 NLT).

Lie: “God is disappointed in me and wants nothing to do with me.”

Truth: God has compassion for you—He is with you and desires a close relationship with you.

“The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. . . . The LORD is near to all who call on him” (PSALM 145:8–9, 18).

You may have been led to believe other lies. As an exercise, write them down and then look in God’s Word to discover a passage or a truth that can speak directly to that lie. God wants you to *“take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”* (2 Corinthians 10:5). Over time, as you replace the lies with God’s truth, you will be transformed by His Word.

*“Do not conform to the pattern of this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.
Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—
his good, pleasing and perfect will.”
(ROMANS 12:2)*

SELF-WORTH

Discover Your God-Given Value

What Is God's Heart on Self-Worth?

The religious leaders of Jesus' day try to trap Him. They want to get Jesus to say something so they have grounds for arresting Him. After some flattery and compliments, they try to bait Him. *"Teacher,' they said, 'we know how honest you are. You are impartial and don't play favorites. You teach the way of God truthfully. Now tell us—is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay them, or shouldn't we?"* (Mark 12:14–15 NLT).

Their question is designed to place Jesus in a political and religious dilemma where, depending on His answer, He would upset the Jews or the Romans. Jesus, however, knows their malicious intent . . . *"Jesus saw through their hypocrisy and said, 'Why are you trying to trap me? Show me a Roman coin, and I'll tell you'"* (Mark 12:15 NLT).

After receiving a coin, Jesus asks, *"Whose image is this? And whose inscription?"*

"Caesar's,' they replied." (Mark 12:16).

Jesus concludes, *"Well, then . . . give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God"* (Mark 12:16 NLT).

The Bible says, *"His reply completely amazed them"* (Mark 12:17 NLT). His answer ought to amaze us, too—not because He wisely evades a trap, but because of what Jesus alludes to about our worth. By asking the religious leaders about the coin, "Whose image is this?" . . . He indirectly poses a question: Caesar's image may be on the coin, but whose image is on you?

You are made in *God's* image. Because of that, you have infinite worth—more than any coin or currency this world can afford. You belong to God. The Creator and King of the universe not only created you in His image, but He cares for you. He crowns you with glory and honor, showing your infinite, inherent, unchangeable worth.

*"When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?
You have made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honor."*

(PSALM 8:3–5)

God wants you to see yourself through His eyes—as His image-bearer with infinite worth.

"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (GENESIS 1:26–27, 31).

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

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

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

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

God wants you to know that you are fully accepted in Christ—not due to your performance but due to His grace.

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

God will not reject His people, His beloved possession.

“The Lord will not reject his people; he will not abandon his special possession” (PSALM 94:14 NLT).

God understands the pain of being devalued and held in low esteem.

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

God offers healing from past pain, guilt, and shame.

“Lord my God, I called to you for help, and you healed me” (PSALM 30:2).

God wants you to forgive those who hurt you and led you to feel worthless.

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

God wants you to show respect to everyone because we all bear His image.

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

God wants you to encourage others who have low self-worth.

“Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them” (EPHESIANS 4:29 NLT).

God wants you to look to Him and His Word to find your true worth.

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

“You are made in
God’s image.
Because of that,
you have
infinite worth.”

FORGIVENESS

Releasing You Is Freeing Me

What Is God's Heart on Forgiveness?

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

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

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

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

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

(HEBREWS 4:16)

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

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

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

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

God wants us to see unforgiveness as sin.

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

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

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

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

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

God wants us to overcome evil with good.

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

God wants us to be ministers of reconciliation.

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

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

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

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

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

What Is Forgiveness Not?

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

*“Let the wise listen and add to their learning,
and let the discerning get guidance.”*

(PROVERBS 1:5)

Forgiveness is not circumventing God’s justice.

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

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

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

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

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

Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation.

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

Forgiveness is not excusing wrong behavior.

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

Forgiveness is not explaining away the hurt.

- It is working through the hurt.

Forgiveness is not based on what is fair.

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

Forgiveness is not being weak.

- It is being strong enough to be Christlike.

Forgiveness is not stuffing your anger.

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

Forgiveness is not a natural response.

- It is a supernatural response, empowered by God.

Forgiveness is not denying the hurt.

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

Forgiveness is not being a doormat.

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

Forgiveness is not conditional.

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

Forgiveness is not forgetting.

- It is necessary to remember before you can forgive.

Forgiveness is not a feeling.

- It is a choice—an act of the will.

How to Truly Forgive

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

How to Handle “The Hook”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Prayer to Forgive Your Offender

*“Lord Jesus, thank you for caring about
how much my heart has been hurt.*

*You know the pain I have felt because of
(list every offense).*

Right now I release all that pain into your hands.

*Thank you, Lord, for dying on the cross for me
and extending your forgiveness to me.*

As an act of my will, I choose to forgive (name).

*Right now, I move (name) off of
my emotional hook to your hook.*

I refuse all thoughts of revenge.

*I trust that in your time and in your way
you will deal with (name) as you see fit.*

*And Lord, thank you for giving me your
power to forgive so that I can be set free.*

In your precious name I pray. Amen.”

4 POINTS OF GOD'S PLAN

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

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

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

God's Purpose for You: *Salvation*

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

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

The Problem: *Sin*

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

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

God's Provision for You: *The Savior*

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

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

Your Part: *Surrender*

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

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

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

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

What Can You Now Expect?

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

*“Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me
has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”*
(JOHN 5:24)

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What can you give thanks to God for today?

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

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Hope for the Heart

For more information on the topics in this resource, click on the topics to the right to find helpful books and videos from Hope for the Heart. The resources of Hope for the Heart provide clear answers from God's Word and concise, practical guidance on life's challenges so you can grow personally and be equipped to help others.

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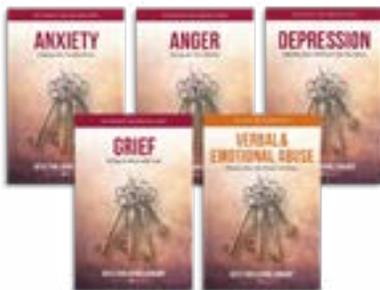
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