

HOW CAN WE BE FREE OF EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE THROUGH PRAYER?

Read [Matthew 6:9-13](#)

It's Torture (from [Matthew 18:21-35](#))

A 2004 *Readers Digest* article, “**The Power of Forgiving**,” told about a study at Hope College in Michigan. In 2001, psychologist **Charlotte vanOyen Witvliet, Ph.D.**, hooked 71 college men and women to sensors that would measure their pulse, blood pressure, sweat rates, and muscle tension as they relived past hurts—“lies, insults or betrayals by family members, friends or lovers.” They were asked to simulate a grudge, thinking about how those who had wronged them should suffer. As the participants focused on these past slights, their blood pressure rose, heart rate accelerated, muscles tightened, and nervous system activity spiked. In other words, holding a grudge was hard on their health.

When confronted with a crisis situation, the human body releases stress hormones. Their purpose is to stimulate a response that will save us in a dangerous situation. They raise the heart rate, send sugar to our muscles, and quicken our breath and thoughts.

The crisis can be any kind: a near miss on the freeway, a child’s cry for help, a fire alarm—or a simmering feud we rehash in our mind. The hormones don’t distinguish between crises. They just go to work.

When the crisis is temporary, the stress hormones do their job and go away—no problem. But when the crisis continues—as when we continue to relive a hurt in our mind—the stress hormones begin to harm us. Too much of the stress hormone cortisol, for example, leads to high blood pressure and elevated blood sugar, hardening of the arteries, and heart disease, according to **Bruce McEwen, Ph.D.**, director of the neuroendocrinology lab at Rockefeller University. It wears down the brain, and leads to cell atrophy and memory loss.

We are harming ourselves when we fail to forgive.

Jesus said this would be the case. He told a parable about a king who decided to collect his debts. He called in one man who owed him “*ten thousand talents*” ([Matthew 18:24](#)), which would be the equivalent of millions of dollars today. The man could not pay it, so the king “**But since he did not have *the means* to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made**” ([Matthew 18:25](#)).

In Bible times there were three ways delinquent debtors were dealt with—all of them harsh. The debtor or his family could be forced to work for the lender until the debt was paid. The debtor or his family could be jailed—in the hope that relatives would pay off

the debt to free them. Or the debtor and his family could be sold as slaves—to give the lender a chance to recoup at least some of his loss. As I said, all of the ways delinquent debtors were dealt with in Bible times were harsh. There was no Chapter 11 in those days, no filing for bankruptcy.

The king in Jesus' parable chose the third way of dealing with the man who owed him "*ten thousand talents*." He ordered that the man and his family be sold as slaves.

When the man heard this, he fell on his knees and asked for mercy:

Matthew 18:26 (NASB)

²⁶ **"So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.'"**

Then the king did a remarkable thing:

Matthew 18:27 (NASB)

²⁷ **"And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt."**

How incredible—the king cancelled the man's debt! The man had asked for time to repay it, but the king went ahead and cancelled it. He forgave the equivalent of millions of dollars of debt.

Imagine if the president of Visa called you up and said, "You know that \$3,500 you owe on your credit card? Forget about it. It's cancelled!" Or imagine if the bank called and said, "You know that \$185,000 you owe on your house, which you're scheduled to make monthly payments on for the next 20 years? Forget about it. It's cancelled!" Those scenarios take some imagining, don't they? But that is what this king did—he completely wiped out the man's debt.

Who does the king in this story represent? Who does the servant with the impossible debt represent?

The king represents:

The servant with the impossible debt represents:

The merciful king represents God, and the servant with the impossible debt represents you and me. God forgave us our debt of sin, a debt we would never be able to repay ourselves—other than with eternal separation from him. He forgave us just because we asked him. He forgave us freely—without asking us to go out and struggle to repay him somehow.

But that's not the end of Jesus' story. He said the man who had been forgiven his debt went out and ...

Matthew 18:28 (NASB)

²⁸ **"But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.'"**

A denarius was a small amount of money compared to a talent. (It took 6,000 denarii just to make up one talent. The first man owed the king 10,000 talents, the equivalent of 60 million denarii. The 100 denarii his fellow servant owed him was microscopic in comparison.) But the man grabbed his fellow servant around the throat and demanded his money.

Matthew 18:29-30 (NASB)

²⁹ “So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you.’”

³⁰ “But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed.”

The fellow servant made the same plea of him that he had made of the king, but he wouldn’t listen. He had the man thrown in jail.

Matthew 18:31-35 (NASB)

³¹ “So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened.”

³² “Then summoning him, his lord said to him, ‘You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.’”

³³ ‘Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?’”

³⁴ “And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.”

³⁵ “My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.”

The man the king had forgiven a great amount would not forgive his fellow servant a relatively small amount. The king was furious when he heard. The man was arrested and thrown into jail “*to be tortured.*” Jesus said the Heavenly Father will do the same to us if we don’t forgive.

We learned earlier in the chapter that when God says he won’t forgive us if we don’t forgive others, he is not referring to forgiveness in an eternal sense. He has promised we would be eternally saved if we put our faith in Jesus, and he won’t contradict himself ([John 5:24](#), [Acts 16:31](#), [Romans 10:9–10](#), [Ephesians 2:8–9](#)). He is referring to forgiveness in an experiential sense. We won’t experience the blessings that are ours because of his forgiveness of us if we fail to forgive others. We will, in fact, be “*tortured*” ([v.34](#)).

As we’ve seen, modern research has revealed what some of the torture consists of: accelerated heart rates, high blood pressure, heart disease, brain cell atrophy, memory loss, and so on. We inflict physical, mental, and emotional stress on ourselves when we refuse to forgive. We are our own torturers.

It is costly to hold a grudge. Peter Johnson, in *USA Today*, wrote about the legendary feud between the Hatfields and the McCoys. No one's sure how it got started, perhaps over the Civil War (the McCoys sympathized with the Union, the Hatfields with the South), or perhaps over an accusation that the Hatfields were stealing hogs. Whatever the cause, the two families fought each other for years across the Kentucky border. It lasted until May 1976 when Jim McCoy and Willis Hatfield—the last survivors of the original families—shook hands at a public ceremony dedicating a monument to the victims of the feud. When McCoy himself died in 1984 (at the age of 99), his burial was handled by the Hatfield Funeral Home in Toler, KY.

Peace at last, but peace too late: as many as 100 men, women, and children died in the fighting. It is costly to hold a grudge.

On the other hand, forgiveness sets us free, as the story of Holland's **Corrie ten Boom** demonstrates. **Corrie** was arrested along with her family for hiding Jews from the Nazis during World War II. She was sent with her sister to a concentration camp, where they experienced numerous horrors, and where her sister died. After the war, **Corrie** had a speaking ministry, telling of the miraculous ways God had seen her through the suffering. One evening, at a service, she saw one of the guards from the concentration camp! In her book *The Hiding Place* she recounts what happened:

“It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there—the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie's pain-blanching face.

He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. “How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein,” he said. “To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!”

His hand thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side.

Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him.

I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.

As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.

And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself.”

Bible Study: THE DOCTRINES OF THE BIBLE

Prayer Series: Survey of the Doctrines of Prayer

Pastor Eddie Idefonso

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When **Corrie** chose to forgive, God's love came on the scene and empowered her to do it. She was set free of the bitterness she felt for the former guard. Forgiveness set her free.

Is there someone you need to forgive? A parent who abused you? A son or daughter who spurned your love? A criminal who hurt you? A pastor or church who betrayed your trust?

“But they don't deserve it.” You are right. But we didn't deserve the forgiveness God gave us. “But they shouldn't get away with it.” You are right. But remember, it is God's job to bring the consequences ([Romans 12:19](#)). “I don't know if I can. It hurts too much.” You can—as an act of your will. When we choose to obey like **Corrie** did, we'll be the ones set free.