

“Seventy Times Seven”

JAMES M. HARPER

I am honored and deeply humbled to address you today. I pray that I may be a servant through whom our Lord’s words can flow. I seek that spirit identified in 2 Nephi 32:3, that spirit which empowers the speech of angels, even the Holy Ghost. I pray that that same spirit might flow from my words to your hearts and that together we will be edified and our testimonies nurtured.

In my work as a marriage and family therapist, I often see people who are searching for a transformation of their heart. How is your heart today? Is it a warm heart filled with the fruits of the Spirit? An aching heart? A broken heart? A grieving heart? A distracted heart? Are you so caught up in your thoughts and actions that it is difficult to feel? Do you have an overburdened heart? Are you so burdened by feelings that it is difficult to think?

Do you have a weary heart? Are you wishing that somehow, someday you could escape from your current condition? Or is yours a fluttering heart? Are you filled with the thrill of romantic love? Do you have an overflowing heart? A loving heart? Or could it possibly be a repentant heart? A giving heart? A forgiving heart?

Sometime ago a wife sat with her husband in my office. He had been unfaithful and had submitted himself to the loving influence of

Church discipline. I had seen them several times, and the damage to the “heart” of their relationship was slowly healing. He had made much progress with help from his bishop and stake president, and their relationship was perhaps better than it had been in a long time. With tears running down her cheeks, she looked deeply into my eyes and asked, “I know I need to forgive, but how do I do it? My heart does not seem to let go. I think I can learn to forgive my husband, but I feel damaged as though I can never possibly forgive the other woman.”

I gave an inadequate, inconsequential answer to her question, but her words have remained in my mind and surfaced on many different occasions since that time: “I know I need to forgive, but how do I do it?” She needed a transformation of her heart, and she wanted it to be immediate. Her husband wanted badly to be forgiven. She felt that she had made some progress, but when she slipped, he became upset. For him he was either forgiven or not, and it was difficult for him to see that she was making considerable

James M. Harper was the chair of the BYU Family Sciences Department when this devotional address was given on 24 June 1997.

progress on a continuum toward being more forgiving.

In one of his interactions with the Pharisees, Jesus accused them of ignoring the weightier matters of the law—judgment, mercy, and faith. Are you taking good care of your heart, especially with the natural healers of mercy and faith? Do you take daily doses of mercy and faith to guard your heart from damage?

During a discussion about conflict and offense in personal relationships, Peter asked Jesus:

How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but Until seventy times seven.
[Matthew 18:21–22]

Did he really mean seventy times seven, or 490 times? I am sure that Peter thought seven times was gracious, a generous outpouring of his heart and his patience to even consider forgiving seven times. But Christ's answer was seventy times more than what Peter had offered.

Then our older brother, the Firstborn of our Heavenly Father, told his disciples a story. It was time for a king to settle the accounts of those in his kingdom. One person owed the king a great deal of money—ten thousand talents. He had no means to pay, and so he was ordered to sell all that he had, and then he along with his wife and children were to be sold into slavery to pay their debt. As you and I might have done, he pleaded for mercy.

Can you imagine what you might have said, on your knees, your heart pounding with fear, begging for the freedom of your wife and your children?

Whatever this debtor said, the king's heart was moved with compassion. The pleading words of a father and husband softly invaded the heart of the king, and it was transformed. He forgave the debt.

This man and his family were free. Yet he would later be guilty of what psychologists call the "attribution error." When we are hurt, it is our natural tendency to assume that the offender intended to commit an offense against us, and so we blame them and their character. But when it comes to us, we attribute our shortcomings and our actions, which others may experience as hurtful, to some situation or circumstance outside of us. We should not be blamed, we cry. It is circumstance. So it was with this forgiven debtor.

You know the rest of the story. When another owed him money, a merciful heart eluded him, and he administered the law of justice and cast his fellowservant into prison until he would pay the debt. And as you know, when his lord discovered it, he was angry and administered the same fate to the man, once forgiven, who had become unforgiving.

Jesus summarized with a message to all of us: "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matthew 18:35).

The scriptures are replete with similar verses. Consider these, for example:

And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses. [Mark 11:25–26]

For, if ye forgive men their trespasses your heavenly Father will also forgive you;

But if ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. [3 Nephi 13:14–15]

And ye ought to say in your hearts—let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds. [D&C 64:11]

Jesus proposed a culture that would not be limited by ethnic, religious, political, or economic conditions. In his culture, our relationships with each other are regulated by our continual recognition of God's forgiving love for each of us. His is a radical proposal in which our desires to live out our forgiven-ness form the basic foundation of our interpersonal relationships (see McCullough, M. E., Sandage, S. J., and Worthington, E. L., *To Forgive Is Human: How to Put Your Past in the Past* [Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1997], p. 18).

Are you forgiven? In a faraway garden a long time ago, drops of blood oozed from every pore of our elder brother. His heart was a pained heart, full of burden for our mistakes, offenses, and, yes, even our pain and heartache. His heart hurt so much that he pleaded that the bitterness of the cup might be removed. His was a merciful heart, a heart that went beyond justice to recover you and me.

As you witness our Savior and what he was willing to suffer for us—as you watch the cruelty forced upon him, one so undeserving of such treatment in his utter innocence and total purity—does your own heart overflow with sorrow and love and gratitude for him? (See Carson, C., *Forgiveness: The Healing Gift We Give Ourselves* [Provo: Carson, 1995].) He invites us to partake of his love and the healing power of his atonement. Have you accepted his offering, his great gift? And if so, does it enervate every cell of your heart? Or have you rejected his invitation to carry your burdens, to take away your pain, and to allow yourself to partake of his peace?

Have you examined lately your principles governing your important relationships? Are you extending your forgiven-ness to your relationships with roommates? To your marriage partner? To your children? To your parents? Is yours a merciful, forgiving heart? Is yours a giving heart, especially to those close to you, rather than a critical or judging heart?

In today's world there are some, perhaps too many, who see evil and sin as relative or nonexistent. These people encourage us to be tolerant of diverse lifestyles and tempt us to make tolerance the basis of relationships rather than forgiveness.

In an address to the Twelve in 1839, the Prophet Joseph Smith encouraged:

Ever keep in exercise the principle of mercy, and be ready to forgive our brother on the first intimations of repentance, and asking forgiveness; and should we even forgive our brother, or even our enemy, before he repent or ask forgiveness, our heavenly Father would be equally merciful unto us. [Teachings, p. 155]

In addressing the Relief Society, Joseph taught:

The nearer we get to our heavenly Father, the more we are disposed to look with compassion on perishing souls; we feel that we want to take them upon our shoulders, and cast their sins behind our backs. . . . If you would have God have mercy on you, have mercy on one another. [Teachings, p. 241]

What Is Forgiveness?

What does forgiveness mean? Does forgiving mean that we forget the offense? No. Yet the adage "Forgive and forget" is frequently heard in our culture. In fact, it may be that our beliefs about forgetting sometimes get in the way of forgiving. Daniel Wegner, a psychologist, has conducted research on persistent thought. He had undergraduate students imagine a white bear. Then he told them to try not to think about the white bear. Each time they thought of the white bear, they were to ring a bell. The more students tried not to think about the bear, the more they rang the bell (see Wegner, D., *White Bears and Other Unwanted Thoughts: Suppression, Obsession, and the Psychology of Mental Control* [New York: Guilford, 1994]). Have you tried to put some unwanted event out of your

mind, only to find that your thoughts were even more filled with the event? It is possible that over time our memory of a hurtful event may fade, but it is not necessary for us to lose our memory of an event to transform our hearts to forgiveness.

But forgiveness means that we are able to put the offense in broad perspective with the rest of our life. Certainly all of us are much more than simply someone who has been hurt. There are many more events in our lives than hurtful ones. When we become forgiving, we are not obsessed with thinking about the offense all the time. Yes, we can remember it, but we are not obsessed with it, and it does not consume our emotional energy. Thoughts and feelings about it do not distract us from doing other important things. It means we do not spend time harboring fantasies of revenge, wishing another would suffer as much as we have. It means that we escape from becoming a cynic about the world and our relationships. It means that we become less focused on blame and judgment and more focused on transforming our own heart. Forgiveness means that we develop a mature understanding of what happened and leave punishment and judgment to a wise Heavenly Father.

Is forgiving more for the other person or for ourselves? Developing a forgiving heart will do far more for you than it ever will for the person who has hurt you. It is a gift you give yourself.

Are we required to forgive even mean, bad people who may never repent and may never come asking for forgiveness from us? Are we required to forgive even those who have knowingly sinned and in the process wounded our heart, our very soul? What if a person who has wronged me never comes to beg? If forgiving is more a gift we give ourselves rather than for the other person, the answer is yes, we are required to do all of this—for ourselves if for no one else. In D&C 64:10 the message is clear: “Of you it is required to forgive all men.”

Forgiving Is Necessary, Especially in Families

It is impossible for family members to live together without occasionally hurting each other. During our married life I have given my wife numerous opportunities to develop forgiveness. I have given so many opportunities that she has an enlarged heart, one crammed full of forgiving.

According to the First Presidency’s “Proclamation on the Family” to the world, forgiveness is one of the principles upon which happy marriages and families can be built. I have seen the results of unmerciful hearts in my clinical practice. Oh, if we would learn to be the first to seek forgiveness with our marriage partner! In my experience, focusing on others’ actions clouds our ability to transform our heart. It is easier to blame and judge than it is to work on major heart surgery. We often think the responsibility for such healing rests with the other person. He holds my heart in his hands, she says, and until he apologizes or pays for what he has done, I cannot free my heart from his grip. Is your heart captive in such a way to someone else?

Being quick to apologize, saying “I’m sorry,” and transforming our angry hearts to forgiving hearts overflowing with a mind-set of our own forgiven-ness are balms to open wounds. I determined early in our married life to use apology liberally, and my heart has thrived because of my decision. Through a forgiving temperament you make the Atonement a daily, even hourly, commitment in your relationships. Your own forgiven-ness permits you to forgive.

I have seen divorced persons struggle to get balance in their minds and hearts. They often find thoughts of bitterness and unforgiving occupying too much space in their minds. The anger and blame have pressed themselves into every crevice of their hearts, leaving little room for more healing feelings.

I have seen adult children who find that their pain, a consequence of imperfect parents,

takes over their lives. Of course parents are imperfect, even when they try to do their best.

This last year my teenage daughter registered for several AP and honors courses. At the end of a particularly difficult term, as she faced finals week and was under maximum stress, I asked one morning what I could do to help her. She replied that she needed to finish a sculpture, a covered bowl in the shape of a turtle, later after school. I could help by soaking the turtle in water so that the clay would be more pliable when she came home from school. She left for school, and I proceeded to unwrap the turtle dish. I filled the sink with water and submerged the turtle. My daughter had told me to let it soak for a few minutes. I determined that 10 minutes would be good and went about other business. I lost track of time, eventually realized my error, and returned to the bathroom sink. I reached into the water with both hands, and, as I removed them, the shapeless turtle dripped through my fingers and disappeared back into the water. In wanting to help, I had made things far worse. How would I explain this when my daughter came home? Would this be one of those events that would damage her for life? Would she look back on her high school years and remember nothing but how her father murdered the clay turtle by drowning it in the sink? You see, I believe our greatest fear as parents is that our children might in some way be like us. I wasn't sure that I would handle this situation particularly well if the sides were reversed.

When my daughter arrived home from school, I was anxiously waiting. I had practiced many speeches in my mind. Some of them were more filled with admissions of responsibility than others. I started by telling her that I had something awful to tell her. When she heard about the demise of the turtle, she smiled and simply said, "Dad, you really owe me one for this." She is by nature forgiving, and my imperfections had once again failed to damage her too much.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland once described a painful situation in his family:

Early in our married life my young family and I were laboring through graduate school at a university in New England. Pat was the Relief Society president in our ward, and I was serving in our stake presidency. I was going to school full-time and teaching half-time. We had two small children then, with little money and lots of pressures.

One evening I came home from long hours at school, feeling the proverbial weight of the world on my shoulders. Everything seemed to be especially demanding and discouraging and dark. I wondered if the dawn would ever come. Then, as I walked into our small student apartment, there was an unusual silence in the room.

"What's the trouble?" I asked.

"Matthew has something he wants to tell you," Pat said.

"Matt, what do you have to tell me?" He was quietly playing with his toys in the corner of the room, trying very hard not to hear me. "Matt," I said a little louder, "do you have something to tell me?"

He stopped playing, but for a moment he didn't look up. Then two enormous, tear-filled brown eyes turned toward me, and with the pain only a five-year-old can know, he said, "I didn't mind Mommy tonight, and I spoke back to her." With that he burst into tears, and his entire body shook with grief. A childish indiscretion had been noted, a painful confession had been offered, the growth of a five-year-old was continuing, and loving reconciliation could have been wonderfully underway.

Everything might have been just terrific—except for me. If you can imagine such an idiotic thing, I lost my temper. It wasn't that I lost it with Matt—it was with a hundred and one other things on my mind. But he didn't know that, and I wasn't disciplined enough to admit it. He got the whole load of bricks.

I told him how disappointed I was and how much more I thought I could have expected from him. I sounded like the parental pygmy I was. Then

I did what I had never done before in his life: I told him that he was to go straight to bed and that I would not be in to say his prayers with him or to tell him a bedtime story. Muffling his sobs, he obediently went to his bedside, where he knelt—alone—to say his prayers. Then he stained his little pillow with tears his father should have been wiping away.

If you think the silence upon my arrival was heavy, you should have felt it now. Pat did not say a word. She didn't have to. I felt terrible!

Later, as we knelt by our own bed, my feeble prayer for blessings upon my family fell back on my ears with a horrible, hollow ring. I wanted to get up off my knees right then and go to Matt and ask his forgiveness, but he was long since peacefully asleep.

My own relief was not so soon coming, but finally I fell asleep and began to dream, which I seldom do. I dreamed Matt and I were packing two cars for a move. For some reason his mother and baby sister were not present. As we finished I turned to him and said, "Okay, Matt, you drive one car and I'll drive the other."

This five-year-old very obediently crawled up on the seat and tried to grasp the massive steering wheel. I walked over to the other car and started the motor. As I began to pull away, I looked to see how my son was doing. He was trying—oh, how he was trying. He tried to reach the pedals, but he couldn't. He was also turning knobs and pushing buttons, trying to start the motor. He could scarcely be seen over the dashboard, but there staring out at me again were those same immense, tear-filled, beautiful brown eyes. As I pulled away, he cried out, "Daddy, don't leave me. I don't know how to do it. I'm too little." And I drove away.

A short time later, driving down that desert road in my dream, I suddenly realized in one stark, horrifying moment what I had done. I slammed my car to a stop, threw open the door, and started to run as fast as I could. I left car, keys, belongings, and all—and I ran. The pavement was so hot it burned my feet, and tears blinded my straining effort to see this child somewhere on the horizon. I kept running, praying, pleading to be forgiven and to find my boy safe and secure.

As I rounded a curve, nearly ready to drop from physical and emotional exhaustion, I saw the unfamiliar car I had left Matt to drive. It was pulled carefully off to the side of the road, and he was laughing and playing nearby. An older man was with him, playing and responding to his games. Matt saw me and cried out something like, "Hi, Dad. We're having fun." Obviously he had already forgiven and forgotten my terrible transgression against him.

But I dreaded the older man's gaze, which followed my every move. I tried to say "Thank you," but his eyes were filled with sorrow and disappointment. I muttered an awkward apology and the stranger said simply, "You should not have left him alone to do this difficult thing. It would not have been asked of you."

*With that, the dream ended, and I shot upright in bed. My pillow was stained, whether with perspiration or tears I do not know. I threw off the covers and ran to the little metal camp cot that was my son's bed. There on my knees and through my tears I cradled him in my arms and spoke to him while he slept. I told him that every dad makes mistakes but that they don't mean to. I told him it wasn't his fault I had had a bad day. I told him that when boys are five or fifteen, dads sometimes forget and think they are fifty. I told him that I wanted him to be a small boy for a long, long time, because all too soon he would grow up and be a man and wouldn't be playing on the floor with his toys when I came home. I told him that I loved him and his mother and his sister more than anything in the world, and that whatever challenges we had in life, we would face them together. I told him that never again would I withhold my affection or my forgiveness from him, and never, I prayed, would he withhold them from me. I told him I was honored to be his father and that I would try with all my heart to be worthy of such a great responsibility. [Jeffrey R. Holland and Patricia T. Holland, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1989), pp. 165–68]*

All parents are blessed when they have forgiving children.

I have seen parents who had difficulty forgiving themselves because they felt they had to be perfect. This belief made it difficult for them to ever say they were sorry to their children. They always had to be right, more knowledgeable, more grown-up. Such beliefs can constrain parents from seeking forgiveness from their children and from forgiving themselves.

I have seen survivors of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse struggle with the doctrine of forgiveness. They often feel that if they were to forgive, it would let the offender off the hook or would minimize the hurt and damage. Yet they fail to realize that transforming their heart to a forgiving heart is a gift they give themselves. It will do far more for them than it will ever do for their offender.

So How Do I Forgive?

I have noticed that I may be able to explain the doctrine of forgiveness and forgiving, but when I am on the highway and offended by another driver, I often act like Attila the Hun. Is it likewise difficult for you to eliminate blame and judgment from your relationships with your roommates, your spouse, your parents, or even your children? Do you find yourself saying, “They’ll get theirs,” and then fantasizing about possible punishments they might receive? Perhaps you even hope to be able to do the punishing to hurt another as much as they have hurt you. So how do we make this comprehensive change of heart called forgiving?

First, you must work to put the Atonement into the very cells of your heart so that your sense of your own forgiveness, his plea for you by name, is ever present.

You will only be able to do so with much sincere prayer.

If anyone ever had more reason to be bitter, it was the Prophet Joseph Smith. Yet his heart was forgiving. Prior to the dedication of the

Kirtland Temple, William Smith, the Prophet’s brother and a member of the Twelve, had been embittered. He had said vicious and vile things against his brother in public. His was a distracted, vengeful heart, and he had even physically attacked his brother Joseph and beat him with his fists. The Smith parents and other children were deeply pained. The Prophet described this time as Satan trying to divide his family and to thwart the work and the building of the Kirtland Temple.

Yet in the midst of all of this, Daniel Tyler, a member of the Church, recorded in his journal this description of the Prophet Joseph:

At the time William Smith and others rebelled against the Prophet at Kirtland, I attended a meeting “on the flats” where Joseph presided. Entering the school house a little before the meeting opened and gazing upon the man of God, I perceived sadness in his countenance and tears trickling down his cheeks. A few moments later a hymn was sung and he opened the meeting by prayer. Instead of facing the audience, however, he turned his back and bowed upon his knees, facing the wall. This, I suppose, was done to hide his sorrow and tears.

I had heard men and women pray—especially the former—from the most ignorant, both as to letters and intellect, to the most learned and eloquent. But never until then had I heard a man address his Maker as though He was present listening as a kind father would listen to the sorrows of a dutiful child. Joseph was at that time unlearned, but that prayer, which was to a considerable extent in behalf of those who accused him of having gone astray and fallen into sin, was that the Lord would forgive them and open their eyes that they might see aright. That prayer, I say, to my humble mind, partook of the learning and eloquence of heaven. There was no ostentation, no raising of the voice as by enthusiasm, but a plain conversational tone, as a man would address a present friend. It appeared to me as though, in case the veil were taken away, I could see the Lord standing facing His humblest of all servants I had ever seen. It was the crowning of all the

prayers I ever heard. [Hyrum L. Andrus and Helen Mae Andrus, *They Knew the Prophet* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1974), pp. 51–52]

Our attitude in prayer will help transform our grieving, angry hearts into forgiving hearts.

A third thing you can do is to develop more empathy for others in your life, especially for those who have hurt and offended you. In each of us is a child of God. Have you found yours? And are you nurturing this child to grow into godhood? We greatly improve our ability to forgive by improving our ability to understand others' circumstances, their feelings, their situation—in short, to empathize with them. Studies have shown that when people learn to be more empathetic with others, they automatically develop more forgiving temperaments. Likewise, marital partners who have more empathy for each other are more forgiving, more committed, report more trust, and are happier.

A couple once counseled with a priesthood leader. The wife's heart was weary, and she was tired of trying to keep their marriage alive. She blamed her husband for most of the lesions on her heart. The inspired leader responded, "If you could see him as he will be in his perfected state, you would give all the energy of your heart to be with him."

On several occasions different mothers have recounted a similar story to me. They were all survivors of sexual abuse. Forgiveness was a struggle for each of them. Then someone in their family was accused of abusing another—usually the accused was one of their children. Can you imagine what happens to a mother's insides when her child is so accused, especially when she has personally suffered at the hands of a similar transgressor? Yet all of these women have told me that eventually they were able to see their own transgressors in a new light—children of God who had made a terrible mistake but who someday may repent and receive God's forgiveness. Such transformation

had allowed them to sacrifice fantasies of revenge and turn judgment over to God. They permitted Christ's blood to surround their pain and cleanse their hearts with peace.

Enlarging our vision and interest about those who offend us can help us develop greater empathy. Consider someone who has recently offended you. Who is their mother? Do they have a family? Have they ever grieved over the loss of a loved one? What has been disappointing to them about their life? Do they like themselves? Where is the child of God in them? Can Christ's blood cleanse them as it can me? Forgiveness is a relational stance in which we accept the inherent worth of another person even after judging their actions to be wrong (see McCullough et al., p. 27).

Another thing you can do is to watch your storytelling about an offensive event. In retelling a story about how we have been offended, we can tell it in such a way that we either push pain, anger, and grief deeper into the cells of our heart or we free ourselves. When someone has hurt us, it seems obvious who needs to do the changing. Yet we seldom focus on our need to purify and transform our hearts so that they can be whole, open, and alive to goodness. Don't let the negative storytelling consume your relationships with others. Our own moral behavior, such as holding our tongue when we feel like gossiping about someone who has hurt us, can lead to a deeper moral understanding. Don't put energy into unforgiveness; rather put it into transforming your heart.

Social scientists have described how reasoning about forgiveness develops (see Enright, R. D., Gassin, E. A., and Wu, C. R., "Forgiveness: A Developmental View," *Journal of Moral Education* 21 [1992]: 99–114). At early developmental stages of reasoning, children develop "revengeful forgiveness." At this stage we reason that an offender must be punished to the degree of pain her or his offense has caused. As we get older we progress to reasoning that

sounds something like, “I feel guilty because an offender offers restitution, so I feel I must forgive them.” This is called “restitutional forgiveness.” Some of us may use “expectational forgiveness.” We forgive because society, parents, and religion expect us to offer forgiveness. However, the most mature form of reasoning is “forgiveness as love.” In this highest form of reasoning about forgiveness, we value others because we know in our minds and feel in our hearts that they have inherent worth as children of God. In this state we can value them even when they are selfish and inconsiderate—yes, even when they hurt us immensely. The heart-cleansing scrub of the Atonement permits us to envision them eventually transformed as people of repentance and even light.

Let me turn to perhaps the most difficult of struggles with forgiveness—forgiving ourselves. Some of us have bought into Satan’s ploy that whatever we have done has made us unworthy forever. We tell ourselves that we don’t deserve any good thing to happen to us because we are bad, flawed at the very core, polluted in some way beyond hope. Some of you continue to feel this way even after extensive confession and work with ecclesiastical leaders. The principles of transforming your heart are the same.

- You must put the Atonement into the cells of your heart.
- Sincere prayer will be an important ongoing balm.
- You must develop empathy for yourself. Has it ever occurred to you that good people repent because they have made a mistake? Yes, they feel guilty because they have violated a standard that is important. Guilt

can be healthy if it helps us change our behavior. But if we use shame instead of guilt to see ourselves as bad people, we may change our behavior—but does the change of behavior matter if we still feel bad, shamed at the core? When you repent it is important to get in touch with the inherent goodness inside of you—that child of God in you seeking for more attention.

- You must be careful of the stories you tell yourself in your mind about what you have done. You are not a bad person. You are a good person who has made a mistake and can change.

Transformation does not usually happen all at once. Forgiveness can take time, and it may be helpful to think of the process of forgiving on a continuum with unforgiveness at one extreme and forgiving at the other.

A forgiving heart will bless you in a number of ways. Research shows that people who are forgiving have better emotional and physical health, and their relationships with people are much more satisfying. Remember, you need a forgiving heart for yourself more than for your offender.

On a cross in Calvary, your brother and my brother hung in agony. His heart was full of physical pain. Yet he was transformed. He looked upon his offenders and said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). My testimony is that he lives, and I pray you will allow the chemistry of his blood to encircle your heart and transform your forgiveness to forgiving as a foundation for all of your relationships. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.