

**30 DAYS
TO VICTORY
THROUGH
FORGIVENESS**

T O N Y E V A N S



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INTRODUCTION

A few years ago, I came down with the flu. I rarely get sick, but this lasted for a week. On Sunday morning, I stumbled to my closet, threw on some clothes, and made it as far as the garage.

My wife, Lois, saw me sitting in the car looking flushed and weak, and she said, “Tony, please stay home just this once.” In nearly four decades of being a pastor, I had never missed a Sunday because of illness. But this time, she was right. I was in no position to drive to the church, let alone deliver two hour-long sermons.

The flu that gripped my body that week and knocked me to my knees illustrates what unforgiveness can do in your life. It can control your choices and actions.

Carrying the burden of yesterday can drain you of your energy until you can't live out the life God has in store for you. It's like lugging around your belongings in several backpacks and bags when traveling instead of

pulling them easily in a suitcase on wheels. The number of items you are carrying may be the same, but how you choose to carry them determines how tired you feel, how fast you walk, and how easily you can go up or down stairs. If you accumulate too many of these overstuffed backpacks, you become immobilized.

If this sounds like your life, be encouraged because God sees you worn-out and stumbling where you should be running. He sees you throwing stuff together instead of fully expressing your gifts and skills. He sees you lugging around more than you were ever designed to. If you will only rest in Him, He will show you the way to move through life more effortlessly.

I didn't preach that Sunday I was sick. Instead, I listened to my wife's advice. I got out of the car, went back to bed, and immediately fell asleep. The next week, I ate the healthy food she prepared for me and did what my doctor said to do. As a result, I got better. By the next Sunday, I was back in the pulpit again.

God has a plan for your life and energy too. It may take time and will surely require discipline. You need to rest in Him. You also need to eat the healthy food He has prepared for you, such as wisdom from His Word and times of intimacy with Him. If you will listen to Him and do what He says, He will restore you and give you strength to live the way He designed you to.

In 40 years of counseling people living in defeat, I've

found that unforgiveness has been the most common problem. We all need to forgive at some point. Unforgiveness affects everyone, often keeping people from fulfilling God's plan for their lives. That's why I'm so passionate about sharing these principles with you over the course of the next month. It's time to be free.

WEEK ONE

RESULTS OF UNFORGIVENESS

DAY ONE

The story is told about two monks who were traveling together and had to cross a river. An elderly, heavysset woman was seated at the bank of the river, waiting for someone to help her across.

The river was wide, so the monks decided to take turns carrying the woman across. One monk hoisted her onto his back and carried her halfway across, and the other monk carried her the rest of the way. The woman thanked them for their generous help, and they bid her farewell.

As the monks continued their walk, the first monk began to complain of pain in his back. The second monk assured him it was nothing. But before long the first monk began to complain again and had to stop to rest.

The second monk asked, “Why are we stopping?”

“It’s my back,” the first monk said. “It hurts from carrying that woman. Doesn’t yours?”

“No,” the second monk replied, “I set her down two miles ago.”

The first monk was still weighed down by the woman even though she was long gone. He was still feeling the effects of having her on his back. By continuing to think about what he had carried, he was unable to continue on his way and reach his destination.

Unforgiveness sits like a burden on your back. Even though the offense may be long gone, it can continue to weigh you down, keeping you from your destination. You can become immobilized by being caught up in the pain of the past. Yesterday’s burdens can weigh you down today and prevent you from reaching a brighter tomorrow.

I’m sure this comes as no surprise. Painful experiences in your past can easily burden your heart, mind, soul, and body today. These hurts could be from your distant childhood or from last week.

Having counseled hundreds of people, I’ve seen a repeated pattern of pain cropping up from the past. Most often, the pain is from someone’s childhood or young adult years. Time has moved on, but healing hasn’t progressed at the same pace. The memories and the impact are difficult to shake.

Some folks say that time heals all wounds, but I disagree. I’ve seen too many people carry too many wounds for too long. On the other hand, I’ve seen other people

heal from deep wounds in a relatively short time. Time doesn't heal all wounds—but God can. When you align your perspective with His perspective on pain, you can experience healing too. The first step to victory through forgiveness is to realize that God always has a purpose for your pain. Therefore, you don't need to carry the burdens of the past. You can let them go.

DAY TWO

The *Pelicano* was once the most unwelcome ship in the world. For more than two years it sailed the open seas—the *Flying Dutchman* of the twentieth century.

The massive ship was turned away from ports in Honduras, Costa Rica, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, the Bahamas, and many more. It wandered the Caribbean, crossed the Atlantic to West Africa, sailed the Mediterranean, and roamed the Indian Ocean. It was allowed to dock only long enough to refuel. During those years, the *Pelicano* changed names twice and owners once.

The widespread rejection of the *Pelicano* began in 1986 when sanitation workers in Philadelphia went on strike for almost a month. As trash accumulated, the city tried to ship it to Ohio and Georgia, but those states said no deal. Philadelphia eventually incinerated the

trash and dumped 28 million pounds of scrap and ash—including toxic elements, such as arsenic and lead—into the belly of a ship later named the *Pelicano*.

No port in the world wanted anything to do with it.

I didn't experience the strike in Philadelphia firsthand, but I did experience a similar situation when my wife and I took a trip to Venice. Throughout the city, we saw (and smelled) mounds of trash. The streets were already narrow, but now they were littered with trash heaps as well. The odor made alleys unbearable.

When we asked what had happened, we learned that sanitation workers were on strike in Venice.

Needless to say, I have very few fond memories of that trip. The stench of other people's debris caused everyone to suffer, including us. The beauty of the city's exquisite architecture and the tranquility of a gondola ride on a canal are difficult to enjoy when you are hit by such a horrible smell.

Unforgiveness can do that in your life as well. When left unattended and allowed to pile up, it begins to affect everything you do and everyone around you. The fresh, clean atmosphere of love for God and for other people becomes polluted by unforgiveness. Kind words become biting. Giving gestures are tied to expectations and demands. Sweetness is laced with bitterness.

In other words, you can no longer be the loving person God created you to be. Instead, the debris of rotting

regret, shame, and anger poison the air, causing difficulties in your relationships, your career, and other areas of your life. That's why forgiveness is so important. It restores the person who hurt you, it frees you from regret, and it empowers you to regain the life you were meant to have.

DAY THREE

Life sometimes has a way of unloading its junk on us, doesn't it? We might feel as if we are like the *Pelicano*, burdened with the toxic waste of poor choices (others' or our own).

The overpowering fumes of anger, guilt, pessimism, fear, and bitterness drive other people away from us, and we drift along aimlessly, just as the *Pelicano* did. We jump in and out of relationships, situations, jobs... only to discover that we are welcome long enough to take on a little fuel but no longer. No one wants our trash.

Living this way will make you weary, and weariness dictates how you will feel and what you will do. When you are weary, you can't relax. You can't feel at home with who you are. You lose your peace. You are no longer trusting, free, caring, and giving.

But as you begin experiencing victory through

forgiveness, you rediscover the beauty of being the person God created you to be. You see God turning your mess into a miracle. You realize He is transforming your tragedy into triumph, your burden into a blessing.

This is similar to what eventually happened with the *Pelicano*. No one knows exactly where the ship is today, but the story is that it was eventually retired.

Like most ships of its size, once it had served its time, it is believed to have been recycled into scrap metal. Pieces of its hull might be found in a car carrying a happy family around India today. Fragments of its deck might make up the shell of a tractor plowing a field of corn in Ohio. Portions of its bow might be in a schoolchild's desk in New Jersey or in the playground equipment in the schoolyard. And sections of its bulwark might be part of a bridge over a bay.

Wherever the *Pelicano* is, it no longer carries its weight. And because of that, it was set free to become more than anyone ever imagined it would.

It has become a blessing and no longer a burden.

God wants you to be a blessing too—to those around you, to Him, and to yourself. But that can happen only when you take the steps necessary to truly forgive.