

*Forgive,
Let Go, and
Live*

DEBORAH SMITH PEGUES



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS
EUGENE, OREGON

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Verses marked **NLT** are from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Verses marked **NIV** are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Verses marked **ESV** are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Verses marked **KJV** are from the King James Version of the Bible.

All the incidents described in this book are true. The author has changed people's names to protect their privacy except for the facts already published in a contributor's own works or in news accounts.

Cover by Franke Design and Illustration, Excelsior, Minnesota

Cover illustration © cundra / iStock

FORGIVE, LET GO, AND LIVE

Copyright © 2015 by Deborah Smith Pegues

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Pegues, Deborah Smith, 1950-

Forgive, let go, and live / Deborah Smith Pegues.

pages cm

ISBN 978-0-7369-6222-3 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-7369-6223-0 (eBook)

1. Forgiveness—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Forgiveness. I. Title.

BV4647.F55P44 2015

234'.5—dc23

2014048810

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 / BP-JH / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*This book is dedicated to my late spiritual mentor,
Dr. Juanita Smith,
who taught and modeled true forgiveness.*

Acknowledgments

People often say TEAM is an acronym for Together Everyone Accomplishes More; they are right. I could not have completed this project without the team of prayer intercessors and the anonymous and named people who told their stories. Special thanks to:

Pastor Edward and Vanessa Smith of the Zoe Christian Fellowship (ZCF) of Whittier, California, for their leadership and motivation to walk by faith in every endeavor.

My prayer team included: Jeanette Stone and my ZCF Life Group; Sandy Grubb, fellow member of the World Vision USA board of directors who reminded the board *daily* to pray for the completion of the manuscript; Suellen Roberts and members of the Christian Women in Media Association president's club, Raynae Hernandez, Sylvia Gardner, Yvonne Gibson Johnson, Billie Rodgers, Diane Gardner, Judge Mablean Ephraim, Marva Sykes, Verna Pierce, Cathy and Ralph Lawson, Diane Kelly, Darrell and Maisha Henry, and my social media community who constantly offered daily prayers and words of encouragement.

My long-time friends, Alvin and Pamela Kelley, and Kelvin and Delisa Kelley kept me balanced through the entire writing process by generously sharing their vacation facilities, planning short getaways, and being my ever-willing informal survey group when I needed immediate feedback on my ideas, assumptions, and conclusions. My "input team," informal editors, and reviewers deserve special recognition: Sheronne Burke, LaVerne Allen, Sylvia Malzman, Ennis Smith,

Karen Mace, Jennifer Hamner, T. Faye Griffin, Tammy V., Jeanetta Douglas, Alexis Davis, Marva Morrison, and Maisha Henry.

Of course, without the personal stories and contributions, there would be no book. I'm thankful for the brave and obedient men and women who have experienced freedom in forgiving and cared enough to share their victories with the world.

I offer high praise to my Harvest House publishing team. Bob Hawkins (president), Terry Glaspey (acquisitions director), Rod Morris (editor extraordinaire), and the entire staff give new meaning to the power of teamwork—all for the glory of God.

Finally, I'm eternally grateful to God for my husband, Darnell Pegues. From encouragement to technical support to research to manuscript proofing, he's a precious asset that I treasure deeply. Thank you, Sweetheart, for loving God and for loving me.

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Prologue: Why Forgiving Is So Hard | 11 |
|--|----|

PART 1: An Eye for an Eye: Stories from Revenge Row

1. Christopher Dorner:
Police Officer Turns Menace to Society 16
2. The Preacher's Son: From Church to Chains 21
3. A Wife's Revenge:
What's Good for the Goose Is Good for the Gander. . . 26
4. Samson Versus the Philistines:
A Vicious Cycle of Wrongs and Retaliation 30
5. Is Revenge Really Sweet? 35

PART 2: Stories of Forgiveness

6. Forgiving God: When the Divine Disappoints 42
7. Forgiving Yourself: Letting Go of Guilt 47
8. Forgiving Your Parents: Triumphant Over Expectations. . 52
9. Forgiving Your Adoptive Parents: Truth Revealed. 56
10. Forgiving a Runaway Father. 60
11. Forgiving an Emotionally Unavailable Stepfather. 65
12. Forgiving an Ex-Spouse:
Sharing the Blame for the Breakup. 69
13. Forgiving a Betraying Wife: Thriving After Adultery . . . 73
14. Forgiving an Irresponsible Brother:
Abandoning Judgment 77
15. Forgiving an Evil Sister: From Abuse to Adoration 82
16. Forgiving a Friend—
Without Restoring the Relationship. 87

| | |
|---|-----|
| 17. Forgiving an Insensitive Pastor: Dismantling the Pedestal | 91 |
| 18. Forgiving a Credit-Snatching Boss | 95 |
| 19. Forgiving a Husband's Killer: A Miscarriage of Justice. | 99 |
| 20. Forgiving a Molester: Surviving by the Grace of God | 103 |
| 21. Forgiving a Rapist: Justice Served | 108 |
| 22. Forgiving the Government: A Veteran's Plight | 116 |
| 23. Forgiving a Country and Its People: A Missionary's Nightmare | 120 |

PART 3: Decisions, Decisions: The Forgiveness Process

| | |
|---|-----|
| 24. What Forgiveness Is and What It's Not: Debunking the Myths | 126 |
| 25. Disconnecting the Ball and Chain: A 12-Step Forgiveness Strategy | 132 |
| 26. When to Restore, Redefine, or Release a Relationship . . . | 139 |
| 27. Seeking Forgiveness When You Are the Offender | 145 |

PART 4: Forgiveness Is Good for You: Exploring the Benefits and Rewards

| | |
|---|-----|
| 28. Spiritual Rewards: Preserving the Connection to the Almighty | 150 |
| 29. Emotional Benefits : Paving the Path to Inner Peace. . . . | 154 |
| 30. Physical Rewards: Mastering Resentment, Maintaining Health | 159 |
| 31. Relational Rewards : Extending Compassion, Abandoning Anger | 163 |
| 32. Financial Rewards: Releasing the Debt, Reaping the Return. | 167 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Epilogue: Forgiving Is Supernatural | 171 |
|---|-----|

Forgiveness Prayers for Life's Hurts and Injustices

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| Rejected | 176 |
| Falsely Accused | 178 |
| Unjustly Fired | 180 |
| Betrayed by Spouse | 182 |
| Betrayed by Another | 184 |
| Financially Disadvantaged | 186 |
| Verbally Abused | 188 |
| Sexually Abused | 190 |
| Physically Harmed | 192 |
| Victim of Domestic Violence | 194 |
| Loved One Harmed | 196 |
| Humiliated | 198 |
| Discriminated Against | 200 |
| Wrongly Incarcerated | 202 |
| Misunderstood | 204 |
| Manipulated | 206 |
| Passed Over | 208 |
| Offended | 210 |
| Taken for Granted | 212 |
| General Forgiveness Prayer | 214 |
| Notes | 217 |

Prologue

Why Forgiving Is So Hard

“Even as a little girl, when kids would cross me in any way, I never let them back into my good graces.”

My mom’s words echoed in my spirit and found rest there for many years of my life. Similarly, my father never forgot a single offense that anybody committed against him. He and my mom argued frequently about things that happened or had been said in the far distant past. They served faithfully and sacrificially inside and outside the walls of the church. Nevertheless, a spirit of unforgiveness plagued them.

Just days before my dad passed away at age 78, I had the privilege of reconciling him and his best friend after a three-year rift. They were fellow members of their church trustee board and had disagreed over a financial transaction. Prior to their split, they had enjoyed rich fellowship and great family fun over their 50-year history. Notwithstanding, Dad believed the church had treated him unfairly (I didn’t agree with him based on the facts *he* presented) and he was not going to let it go—especially in light of his extreme generosity and long-term service. Through much prayer and long conversations in which I reminded him of the consequences of unforgiveness, he finally relented—or, I should say, *repented*.

My mom, who passed away four years later at 82, frequently recounted the many instances of my dad’s physical and verbal abuse. After 21 years of marriage, she’d finally mustered the

courage to literally escape to another state with five dependent boys in tow (my older brother and I had already left the nest). They remained separated for 40 years but never divorced. I'm convinced it was bitterness that ushered her into her 10-year battle with dementia prior to her death. All of her imaginary conversations had an angry tone and centered on her painful issues with my dad.

My parents' legacy of holding on to offenses influenced how we, their seven children, dealt with people who offended or crossed us. With such a heritage, I knew unforgiveness was poised to become a stronghold in my life. The pattern had already started to evolve. If people offended me, I never viewed them the same. Depending on the nature of the relationship, I would either keep my emotional distance or make a mental note never to trust, favor, or include them again in my dealings. My most common tactic was to hide behind being "too busy" to interact with them again—ever. They finally got the message: Once you offend Deborah, you are out. No three strikes policy here!

Shortly after I married my wonderful husband, I sternly warned him, "Please try not to do anything where I'll have to forgive you because unforgiveness runs in my family. We do absolutely no forgiving!" This statement seems hilarious to me today, but I was dead serious at the time I said it.

It was not until I met one of my most beloved spiritual mentors, the late Dr. Juanita Smith, that I began to make headway in conquering this emotional giant. She taught and modeled forgiveness on a level I'd never seen. She frequently proclaimed, "I release everybody who has hurt me." She didn't just give lip service to the idea; I watched her walk it out many times.

I finally decided that unforgiveness had wreaked havoc in my life long enough. It had caused me to write off several relatives, friends, coworkers, and others. I spent way too much time in my head rehearsing the wrongs people perpetrated against me and imagining the awful things I could have said or done to retaliate if I weren't a Christian. I started to realize how counterproductive it is to engage in such thinking. So, as an act of faith and obedience to God, I declared my freedom from unforgiveness. It was and is a giant I could never conquer in my own strength.

You may be asking, "Why is forgiving others such a hard thing for so many to do—even strong Christians?" I believe when we have been damaged, deprived, or disadvantaged by another, we instinctively want to be compensated for our loss. The loss can take any number of forms, including property, affection, freedom, self-esteem, innocence, and physical well-being.

Every offense is an assault on our emotions. The root meaning of *emotion* is "to move." When our emotions are attacked, we want to move against the offender. But when the law or our better judgment or other circumstances prevent us from moving to exact revenge, to gain justice, or to be made whole, anger rears its head. Some people choose to bury their anger. In doing so, they develop a root of bitterness that can quickly infiltrate their hearts and minds—stealing their joy and turning them into someone they don't want to be.

This book will show you a better way to handle the inevitable offenses of life. I hope that as you read the following pages, you'll look at how you deal with your hurts and make a commitment to walk in forgiveness—no matter what!

In Part 1, we will take a brief walk down Revenge Row and

see how retaliation impacted the lives of those who refused to forgive, let go, and move forward.

In Part 2, a number of contributors share their heart-wrenching, as well as heartwarming, stories of deciding to release the perpetrator of their hurtful experiences. I have changed the names and circumstances to protect their privacy except where the facts are disclosed in their published writings or in news reports. I make no attempt to weigh the magnitude of the offenses as they are each so personal. From being a victim of gossip to enduring the horror of rape to financial rip-offs, these forgivers will inspire, challenge, and motivate you to let it go.

In Part 3, faith and practicality converge as we explore and debunk the myths of what forgiveness is and what it is not. I hope the guidelines I present for working through the forgiving process will transform your thinking and move you to a higher quality of life.

In Part 4, we'll look at the spiritual, emotional, relational, physical, and yes, even financial benefits of forgiveness. The Holy Spirit's illumination of these truths will challenge you to grow and to go forward as a model and ambassador of forgiveness in a revengeful world.

Finally, the "Forgiveness Prayers" at the back of the book address a variety of hurts and offenses and will guide you in praying to release the person who has harmed you and to stand in faith for your deliverance from unforgiveness. Through these Scripture-based, courageous prayers and faith declarations, God will surely turn your ashes into beauty.

Part 1

An Eye for an Eye
Stories from Revenge Row



1

Christopher Dorner Police Officer Turns Menace to Society

“Those who use the sword will die by the sword.”

MATTHEW 26:52 NLT

“Deborah, have you been watching the news about that fired police officer who’s out to get revenge?” It was my friend George. I had anticipated his call.

A few years ago I had counseled him through his extreme anger and frustration with the police department of a major US city. His dream of joining the police force had gone up in smoke during his training at the police academy. He had made the courageous but politically unwise decision to denounce police brutality against a recent victim. Shortly thereafter, he was kicked out of the academy on a flimsy excuse and flatly told off the record that he would *never* be hired to work for the police department in that city.

He was devastated. I had prayed earnestly with and for him that God would touch his heart and cause him not to seek revenge. The prayers worked. By the grace of God, I was able to convince him that the police department’s rejection was God’s protection. Who knows what negative detour his life would have taken had he made the police force?

Now, as I listened to his highly animated voice, I became

concerned that the Christopher Dorner situation would reopen old wounds.

“You know I was there mentally at one point,” George continued. “That could be me hunkered down in that cabin. But I thought about my mom, my children, and the rest of my family. I knew it would really hurt everybody if I’d done something like that. Dorner has a legitimate beef though, Deborah. Somebody has to bring the police department’s problems to light. If this is what it takes, so be it.”

I winced at the thought that my friend, like numerous others in the minority community who had weighed in on the drama that unfolded over the past 48 hours, might be condoning Dorner’s actions. I reminded him that nothing could justify the killings.

When our conversation ended, I went online to research more facts about the case and to read Dorner’s 11,000-word “manifesto” that he’d sent to various news organizations explaining his behavior. Here’s a quick review of the circumstances that led to the events that had the entire city on edge.

In July 2007, Officer Christopher Dorner and his partner were called to a public disturbance where a disorderly, mentally challenged man was creating a nuisance. Dorner later reported to department officials that his partner had used excessive force during the arrest, kicking the man in the face while he was handcuffed. The department investigated the incident and decided that Dorner’s claim was not true. They fired him in 2008 for making a false report.

He charged racism and appealed his case for job reinstatement. He exhausted every level of the police department’s

appeals process to no avail. He went on to file a wrongful termination lawsuit through local and state courts; they upheld the department's decision.

In February 2013, consumed with rage, Dorner decided his only option was to retaliate. He went on a shooting spree from February 2 through February 12 against specific officers and their families. He killed four people, including three police officers, and wounded four other officers. He became the subject of the largest manhunt in the history of that city's police. Acting on a tip, the police finally tracked him to a cabin in the mountains. He died there on February 12, 2013, from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head during a standoff with the police. He was 33 years old.

In reading Dorner's manifesto,¹ I observed five toxic, erroneous, and overall "bad beliefs" that ultimately derailed his destiny and caused untold heartache for his family and the families of his victims. The truth is that any of us could fall prey to these beliefs.

Bad Belief 1: The Bible is not a guidebook for everyday living. Referring to it as "that old book, made of fiction and limited non-fiction," Dorner pooh-poohed the idea of turning the other cheek—going as far to say that "Jesus was never called a nigger." No, He wasn't, but He was ridiculed, beaten, and crucified. Plus, He knew that only God has the right to avenge wrongs.

Bad Belief 2: The value of a person's life is measured by career success. Many people, especially men, define their worth by their work. Unfortunately, when an economic downturn, a firing, or other adverse circumstance brings their employment or ability to make money to a screeching halt, they feel worthless and

powerless. This response is a result of a bad belief system. Oh, that Dorner would have known and embraced the truth that we are all created with an intrinsic value and have a Divine destiny apart from our work.

Bad Belief 3: Life should be fair and no inequity should be tolerated. On Planet Earth, nobody is going to escape being treated unfairly, rejected, or disadvantaged in some way at one time or another. It's called *life* in a fallen world. Bad things happen to good people. We can make every effort to change a situation through proper channels—like Martin Luther King Jr., Gandhi, and countless other great men and women have done. However, in the final analysis, wisdom dictates that we sometimes just have to ignore some offenses.

Bad Belief 4: Forgiving a perpetrator is a sign of weakness. Dorner declared, “I have the *strength* and benefits of being unpredictable, unconventional, and unforgiving.” Yes, his grudge was indeed a mighty force; however, it propelled him in the wrong direction. It ultimately proved to be his weakness. Only the mentally and morally strong can keep moving forward when offended or treated unfairly, and that requires Divine empowerment. Simmering resentment doesn't strengthen you; it weakens your moral foundation, your ability to be rational, and your ability to succeed.

Bad Belief 5: Revenge is the only viable option. The subject line of Dorner's manifesto read: “Last Resort.” How could he possibly believe that revenge killings were his last option to get his name cleared? If he had embraced biblical principles, he would have followed the pattern of Jesus who never fought to protect His name or His reputation. He endured all the hardships and

fulfilled His purpose. Today, His name is the name above all names in heaven and on earth. In contrast, what will the masses remember when they hear the name Christopher Dorner?

One of the tragic outcomes of the Dorner case is that many will lose faith in the good, hardworking, honest law enforcement personnel dedicated to serving and protecting—many who are God-fearing and who are my personal friends and family members. The police department's current leadership has acknowledged its troubled past of racism and is making great strides to overcome it.

I pray that neither Dorner's death nor that of his victims has been in vain. I pray that you, dear reader, will remember that when you linger in the Pool of Victimization, your hopes and dreams can shrivel up. We must always believe that God can turn every offense, every disappointment, and every negative situation into something good! He has plans for us to prosper and to bring us to an expected end (Jeremiah 29:11). Let's commit to ridding ourselves of bad beliefs. Let's be transformed by the Word of God and finish well.