

burdened and I will give you rest". The burdens of sin which he had carried inside had weighed him down so heavily that he could not grow in his spiritual life. He felt such joy in his heart and thanked God for his precious gift of love which he had been given through Jesus suffering, death and resurrection. It was time for Joe to change and live his life anew. He returned home with a renewed outlook on life. He went out into the garden and to his surprise the rose bush had produced its first flower. It was a small bud tightly formed but beautiful. Joe felt a sense of excitement and called his wife to come and look at this new flower. Each day the two would go out into the garden and marvel at the rose as it blossomed into a fully formed scarlet rose. The scent it exuded was so beautiful that it filled the whole garden.

Mary had noticed a difference in Joe over the last few weeks. He seemed to be more loving and no longer annoyed when things didn't go his way. Joe sat in the garden and shared with Mary the story of the planting of the rose bush in rich soil and how it had a life changing affect on how he now lived his life. God's love and careful pruning had produced beautiful sweet smelling flowers of love in Joe's life and the inner beauty was now blossoming and bearing fruit which would be everlasting.



Through Mary
to Jesus

THE HOLY FAMILY HOUSE OF PRAYER

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Matthew 5:43-45 *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous."*

Forgiveness

One of my teachers had each one of us bring a clear plastic bag and a sack of potatoes. For every person we'd refuse to forgive in our life, we were told to choose a potato, write on it the name and date, and put it in the plastic bag. Some of our bags, as you can imagine, were quite heavy.

We were then told to carry this bag with us everywhere for one week, putting it beside our bed at night, on the car seat when driving, next to our desk at work.

The hassle of lugging this around with us made it clear what a weight we were carrying spiritually, and how we had to pay attention to it all the time to not forget, and keep leaving it in embarrassing places.

Naturally, the condition of the potatoes deteriorated to a nasty slime. This was a great metaphor for the price we pay for keeping our pain and heavy negativity!

Too often we think of forgiveness as a gift to the other person, and while that's true ... it clearly is also a gift for ourselves!

So the next time you decide you can't forgive someone, ask yourself ...
Isn't MY bag heavy enough? *Author unknown*

Plant the seed of faith in rich soil and you will reap a harvest which is hundredfold...



Love is the fairest of the flowers in God's garden.



The Carpenter

Once upon a time, two brothers who lived on adjoining farms fell into conflict. It was the first serious rift in 40 years of farming side by side, sharing machinery and trading labor and goods as needed without a hitch.

Then the long collaboration fell apart. It began with a small misunderstanding and it grew into a major difference, and finally it exploded into an exchange of bitter words followed by weeks of silence.

One morning there was a knock on John's door. He opened it to find a man with a carpenter's toolbox. "I'm looking for a few days' work" he said. "Perhaps you would have a few small jobs here and there I could help with? Could I help you?"

"Yes," said the older brother. "I do have a job for you. Look across the creek at that farm. That's my neighbor, in fact, it's my younger brother!

Last week there was a meadow between us and he took his bulldozer to the river levee and now there is a creek between us. Well, he may have done this to spite me, but I'll do him one better. See that pile of lumber by the barn? I want you to build me a fence - an 8-foot fence so I won't need to see his place or his face anymore." The carpenter said, "I think I understand the situation. Show me the nails and the post-hole digger and I'll be able to do a job that pleases you."

The older brother had to go to town, so he helped the carpenter get the materials ready and then he was off for the day. The carpenter worked hard all that day measuring, sawing, nailing.

About sunset when the farmer returned, the carpenter had just finished his job. The farmer's eyes opened wide, his jaw dropped. There was no fence there at all. It was a bridge -- a bridge stretching from one side of the creek to the other!

A fine piece of work, handrails and all, and the neighbor, his younger brother, was coming toward them, his hand outstretched. "You are quite a fellow to build this bridge after all I've said and done."

The two brothers stood at each end of the bridge, and then they met in the middle, taking each other's hand. They turned to see the carpenter hoist his toolbox onto his shoulder. "No, wait! Stay a few days. I've a lot of other projects for you," said the older brother.

"I'd love to stay on," the carpenter said, "but, I have many more bridges to build."

Author Unknown

The Beauty of the Rose

One day a man called Joe planted a red rose bush in his garden because his wife Mary's favourite flower was the scarlet rose. He pondered the reason for this love that his wife had for the red rose and felt perplexed. The thorns were sharp and pricked him as he put the bush into the soft ground he had prepared. Why would someone love a bush which had such sharp thorns. He sat back and thought and prayed and asked Jesus to give him the answer. The words of Scripture came to him *"they stripped him and made him wear a scarlet cloak and having twisted some thorns into a crown they put this on his head and place a reed in his right hand"*.

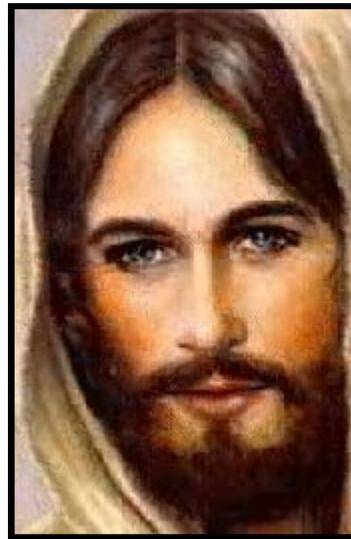
Joe looked to his hand and the drop of blood which the thorn had drawn and contemplated this small wound in comparison to the wounds which his Lord and Saviour had endured to give him a new life. This changed the way he now viewed the rose bush. He lovingly cared for this bush and no longer saw the thorns as something to despise but instead a sign of God's love. Before long the rose began to produce new growth. Each day he went to the garden and looked at the rose bush. He still seemed to have difficulty in seeing the beauty of the rose as all he could see were the branches with thorns. He thought of his own life and prayed to Jesus again to reveal to him some more of the mystery of the rose. There were times over the years when he had held grudges and unforgiveness to his family for the hurts he felt. He seemed to be like the rose tree— all thorns. His Saviour Jesus had endured these thorns of sin for him and for all.

He wanted more than ever to blossom and bloom and bear flowers which was lasting in God's spiritual garden. Jesus had said if he asked for help he would receive it. All he needed to do was seek and he would find. Knock and the door would be opened. He prayed fervently for God to reveal to him this unforgiveness and a solution to his problem. He wanted more than ever for God to be the gardener and he the branch which God his loving Father would prune to enable him to bring forth beautiful flowers. This healing of the wounds of unforgiveness were not something he could do alone. He needed help from Jesus. He knew that he needed to regularly water the rose to give it strength to grow. Jesus had told the Samaritan woman in Scripture that the water she needed to quench her thirst was living water. Joe knew in his heart that it was time for him to seek out this living water—the grace of the Holy Spirit to help him have the strength to grow in this new life of love. He could receive this grace through Reconciliation—seeking forgiveness from God and also forgiving those who had hurt him. From the wellspring of salvation (Jesus' heart) flows blood and water—the blood bring new life and the water cleansing and healing. He must trust in the Divine mercy of his Lord and Redeemer Jesus. It was time for him to put his life in right order. He went to church and asked the priest to hear his confession. He now understood the meaning of Jesus words "come to me all you who are heavily

beneath the parchment skin. Betsie, how thin you were!
 Betsie and I had been arrested for concealing Jews in our home during the Nazi occupation of Holland; this man had been a guard at Ravensbruck concentration camp where we were sent. ...
 "You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk," he was saying. "I was a guard in there."
 No, he did not remember me.
 "I had to do it — I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us." "But since that time," he went on, "I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein, ..." his hand came out, ... "will you forgive me?"
 And I stood there — I whose sins had every day to be forgiven — and could not. Betsie had died in that place — could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking? It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.
 For I had to do it — I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. "If you do not forgive men their trespasses," Jesus says, "neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses." ...
 And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion — I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. "Jesus, help me!" I prayed silently. "I can lift my hand, I can do that much. You supply the feeling."
 And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.
 "I forgive you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart!"
 For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then.
 Corrie died on April 15, 1983 in Orange, California, on her ninety-first birthday.



God cuts away every branch that bears no fruit, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more.



Prayer for Healing of Families

Heavenly Father, I ask you now to go back through all in my bloodlines connected to all my family and relatives and forgive the wrongs, heal the illnesses bind the evil deeds. I ask you Lord to break the chains, associations and links any of these may have to us here in the present. On their behalf Lord, I seek your forgiveness, your healing for me please and for all the family.

Prayer for Healing of Past Hurts

Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, guide me to go back into my memory as I sleep. I ask you to heal every hurt that has even been done to me. I ask you to heal every hurt that I have ever caused to another person. For all the relationships that have been damaged in my whole life that I am not aware of, I ask to heal those relationships. Lord, if there is anything that I need to do or I need to go to a person because they are still suffering from my hand, bring to my awareness that person. I choose to forgive, and I ask to be forgiven. Remove whatever bitterness may be in my heart, Lord and fill the empty spaces with your love. Thank you Jesus. Amen.



New Life in Jesus

*I am the resurrection and the life...
 Whoever lives and believes in me
 will never die. John 11: 25-26*

CORRIE TEN BOOM (1892–1983)

"My (parents) . . . had opened a small jewelry store in a narrow house in the heart of the Jewish section of Amsterdam. There, in Amsterdam in that narrow street in the ghetto they met many wonderful Jewish people. They were allowed to participate in their Sabbaths and in their feasts. They studied the Old Testament together... (Ten Boom, 1974, p. 133)

Corrie was living with her older sister and her father in Haarlem when Holland surrendered to the Nazis. She was 48, unmarried and worked as a watchmaker in the shop that her grandfather had started in 1837. Her family were devoted members of the Dutch Reformed Church. Her father was a kind man who was friends with half of the city of Haarlem. Her mother had been known for her kindness to others before her death from a stroke.

Corrie credits her father's example in inspiring her to help the Jews of Holland. She tells of an incident in which she asked a pastor who was visiting their home to help shield a mother and newborn infant. He replied, "No definitely not. We could lose our lives for that Jewish child." She went on to say, "Unseen by either of us, Father had appeared in the doorway. 'Give the child to me, Corrie,' he said. Father held the baby close, his white beard brushing its cheek, looking into the little face with eyes as blue and innocent as the baby's. 'You say we could lose our lives for this child. I would consider that the greatest honor that could come to my family'" (Ten Boom, 1971, p. 99). Corrie's involvement with the Dutch underground began with her acts of kindness in giving temporary shelter to her Jewish neighbors who were being driven out of their homes. She found places for them to stay in the Dutch countryside. Soon the word spread, and more and more people came to her home for shelter. As quickly as she would find places for them, more would arrive. She had a false wall constructed in her bedroom behind which people could hide.

After a year and a half, her home developed into the center of an underground ring that reached throughout Holland. Daily, dozens of reports, appeals, and people came in and out of their watch shop. Corrie found herself dealing with hundreds of stolen ration cards each month to feed the Jews that were hiding in underground homes all over Holland. She wondered how long this much activity and the seven Jews that they were hiding would remain a secret.

On February 28, 1944, a man came into their shop and asked Corrie to help him. He stated that he and his wife had been hiding Jews and that she had been arrested. He needed six hundred guilders to bribe a policeman for her freedom. Corrie promised to help. She found out later that he was a quisling, an informant that had worked with the Nazis from the first day of the occupation. He turned their family in to the Gestapo. Later that day, her home was raided, and Corrie and her family were arrested (their Jewish visitors made it to the secret room in time and later were able to escape to new quarters).

Corrie's father died within 10 days from illness, but Corrie and her older sister Betsie remained in a series of prisons and concentration camps, first in Holland and later in

Germany. Although for many people, the concentration camp would have been the end of their work, for Corrie and Betsie the months they spent in Ravensbruck became "their finest hour." In her book, Corrie described how she struggled with and overcame the hate that she had for the man who betrayed her family and how she and Betsie gave comfort to other inmates.

Corrie describes a typical evening in which they would use their secreted Bible to hold worship services: "At first Betsie and I called these meetings with great timidity. But as night after night went by and no guard ever came near us, we grew bolder. So many now wanted to join us that we held a second service after evening roll call. . . (These) were services like no others, these times in Barracks 28. A single meeting night might include a recital of the Magnificat in Latin by a group of Roman Catholics, a whispered hymn by some Lutherans, and a sotto-voce chant by Eastern Orthodox women. With each moment the crowd around us would swell, packing the nearby platforms, hanging over the edges, until the high structures groaned and swayed."

"At last either Betsie or I would open the Bible. Because only the Hollanders could understand the Dutch text we would translate aloud in German. And then we would hear the life-giving words passed back along the aisles in French, Polish, Russian, Czech, and back into Dutch. They were little previews of heaven, these evenings beneath the light bulb" (Ten Boom 1971, p. 201)

Betsie, never strong in health, grew steadily weaker and died on December 16, 1944. Some of her last words to Corrie were, "... (we) must tell them what we have learned here. We must tell them that there is no pit so deep that He is not deeper still. They will listen to us, Corrie, because we have been here." (Ten Boom, 1971, p. 217)

Due to a clerical error, Corrie was released from Ravensbruck one week before all women her age were killed. She made her way back to Haarlem, and tried for a while to go back to her profession of watchmaking, but found that she was no longer content doing that. She began traveling and telling the story of her family and what she and Betsie had learned in the concentration camp. Eventually, after the war was over, she was able to obtain a home for former inmates to come and heal from their experiences. And she continued to travel tirelessly over the world and tell to anyone who would listen the story of what she had learned.

A Guidepost article from 1972 relates a short story titled "*I'm Still Learning to Forgive*"

It was in a church in Munich that I saw him, a balding heavy-set man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands. People were filing out of the basement room where I had just spoken. It was 1947 and I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives. ...

And that's when I saw him, working his way forward against the others. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones. It came back with a rush: the huge room with its harsh overhead lights, the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor, the shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp