

FORGIVE and FORGET - Lewis B. Smedes

THE MAGIC EYES - A Little Fable

In the village of Faken in innermost Friesland there lived a long thin baker name Fouke, a righteous man, with a long thin chin and a long thin nose. Fouke was so upright that he seemed to spray righteousness from his thin lips over everyone who came near him; so the people of Faken preferred to stay away.

Fouke's wife, Hilda, was short and round, her arms were round, her bosom was round, her rump was round. Hilda did not keep people at bay with righteousness; her soft roundness seemed to invite them instead to come close to her in order to share the warm cheer of her open heart.

Hilda respected her righteous husband, and loved him too, as much as he allowed her; but her heart ached for something more from him than his worthy righteousness.

And there, in the bed of her need, lay the seed of sadness.

One morning, having worked since dawn to knead his dough for the ovens, Fouke came home and found a stranger in his bedroom lying on Hilda's round bosom.

Hilda's adultery soon became the talk of the tavern and the scandal of the Faken congregation. Everyone assumed that Fouke would cast Hilda out of his house, so righteous was he. But he surprised everyone by keeping Hilda as his wife, saying he forgave her as the Good Book said he should.

In his heart of hearts, however, Fouke could not forgive Hilda for bringing shame to his name. Whenever he thought about her, his feelings toward her were angry and hard; he despised her as if she were a common whore. When it came right down to it, he hated her for betraying him after he had been so good and so faithful a husband to her.

He only pretended to forgive Hilda so that he could punish her with his righteous mercy.

But Fouke's fakery did not sit well in heaven.

So each time that Fouke would feel his secret hatred toward Hilda, an angel came to him and dropped a small pebble, hardly the size of a shirt button, into Fouke's heart. Each time a pebble dropped, Fouke would feel a stab of pain like the

pain he felt the moment he came on Hilda feeding her hungry heart from a stranger's larder.

Thus he hated her the more; his hate brought him pain and his pain made him hate.

The pebbles multiplied. And Fouke's heart grew very heavy with the weight of them, so heavy that the top half of his body bent forward so far that he had to strain his neck upward in order to see straight ahead. Weary with hurt, Fouke began to wish he were dead.

The angel who dropped the pebbles into his heart came to Fouke one night and told him how he could be healed of his hurt.

There was *one remedy*, he said, only one, for the hurt of a wounded heart. Fouke would need the *miracle of the magic eyes*. He would need eyes that could look back to the beginning of his hurt and see his Hilda, not as a wife who betrayed him, but as a weak woman who needed him. *Only a new way of looking at things through the magic eyes could heal the hurt flowing from the wounds of yesterday.*

Fouke protested. "Nothing can change the past," he said. "Hilda is guilty, a fact that not even an angel can change."

"Yes, poor hurting man, you are right," the angel said. "You cannot change the past, you can only heal the hurt that comes to you from the past. And you can heal it only with the vision of the magic eyes."

"And how can I get your magic eyes?" pouted Fouke.

"*Only ask, desiring as you ask, and they will be given you. And each time you see Hilda through your new eyes, one pebble will be lifted from your aching heart.*"

Fouke could not ask at once, for he had grown to love his hatred. But the pain of his heart finally drove him to want and to ask for the magic eyes that the angel had promised. So he asked. And the angel gave.

Soon Hilda began to change in front of Fouke's eyes, wonderfully and mysteriously. *He began to see her as a needy woman who loved him instead of a wicked woman who betrayed him.*

The angel kept his promise; he lifted the pebbles from Fouke's heart, one by one, *though it took a long time* to take them all away. Fouke gradually felt his heart grow lighter; he began to walk straight again, and somehow his nose and his chin seemed less thin and sharp than before. He invited Hilda to come into his heart again, and she came, and together they began again a journey into their second season of humble joy.

PART I - The FOUR STAGES of FORGIVING

1 - WE HURT 3 A decision: do I want to be healed, or do I want to go on suffering from an unfair hurt lodged in my memory?

We need to sort out our hurts and *learn the difference* between *those* that call for the miracle of forgiveness and *those* that can be borne with a sense of humor... Forgiving must be preserved for the right occasion.

PERSONAL & UNFAIR PAIN: *PEOPLE HURT US*: BECAUSE THEY THINK WE DESERVE IT -- Unfairness can throw us into a crisis: did I want to let it fester in my memory, or would I use the *magic eyes* and *be healed..?* We cannot relate to the person who hurt us as a friend or lover *until we come to terms with the unfairness of the hurt*. COMPULSIVELY -- Because they cannot control themselves. WITH THE SPILL-OVERS OF THEIR PROBLEMS -- Sometimes our personal struggles, too turbulent to contain, spill over to affect innocent bystanders. WITH THEIR GOOD INTENTIONS -- BY THEIR MISTAKES.

The unfairness of the hurt often lies in the experience of the victim, not in the intention of the one who causes it... *Our need to forgive is for our own sakes*. Every human soul has a right to be free from hate, and we claim our rightful inheritance when we forgive people who hurt us unfairly, even if their intentions were pure.

DEEP PAINS -- ANNOYANCES -- Better to swallow annoyances and leave forgiveness for the deeper hurts. SLIGHTS -- Are for shrugging off, not for forgiveness. DISAPPOINTMENTS -- We are not betrayed and don't need to forgive. COMING IN SECOND -- It is not wise to turn all hurts into crisis of forgiving... We put everyone we love on guard when we turn personal misdemeanors into major felonies. DISLOYALTY -- I am disloyal when I belong to a person and I treat him or her like a stranger... Disloyalty is not acceptable; it is offensive. We must either separate and carry the hurt alone or forgive the person who was disloyal to us. BETRAYAL -- I am betrayed when I am treated like an enemy... We betray people we belong to whenever we sell them out for a price. BRUTALITY.

2 - WE HATE 20 *When you hate passively, you lose love's passion to bless. When you hate aggressively, you are driven by a passion to whip someone with a hurricane of hostility... Passive or aggressive, our hate separates us from those we ought to belong to... Sometimes hate divides our own souls... The point is that hate's searing flame coexists with love's soothing flow.*

Hate needs healing - it is a malignancy, it is dangerous and deadly if allowed to run its course. It hurts the hater more than it hurts the hated. It is hate and not anger that needs healing. Anger is a sign that we are alive and well. Hate is a sign that we are sick and need to be healed.

Healthy anger drives us to do something to change what makes us angry; anger can energize us to make things better. Hate does not want to change things for the better; it wants to make things worse. Hate wants to belch the foul breath of death over all life that love alone creates.

IT IS PEOPLE, NOT MERELY EVIL, THAT WE HATE -- WE MOST OFTEN AIM OUR HATRED AT PEOPLE WHO LIVE WITHIN THE CIRCLE OF OUR COMMITTED LOVE -- WE HATE PEOPLE WE BLAME

3 - WE HEAL OURSELVES 27 *When you forgive someone for hurting you, you perform spiritual surgery inside your soul; you cut away the wrong that was done to you so that you can see your "enemy" through the magic eyes that can heal your soul. Detach that person from the hurt and let it go, the way a child opens his hands and lets a trapped butterfly go free... Then invite that person back into your mind, fresh, as if a piece of history between you had been rewritten, its grip on your memory broken. Reverse the seemingly irreversible flow of pain within you.*

The first gift we get is a new insight. As we forgive people, we gradually come to see the deeper truth about them, a truth our hate blinds us to, a truth we can see only when we separate them from what they did to us... For the truth about those who hurt us is that they are weak, needy, and fallible human beings. They were people before they hurt us and they are people after they hurt us... But the magic eyes of forgiving look beneath the tattered rages and let us see the truth.

New insight brings new feeling. God changes His memory; what we once did is irrelevant to how He feels about what we are. So when you forgive you must often be content with the editing of our own memory. It is the editing of our memory that is your salvation.

If you cannot free people from their wrongs and see them as the needy people they are, you enslave yourself to your own painful past, and by fastening yourself to the past, you let your hate become your future. You can reverse your future only by releasing other people from their pasts.

Forgiving is an honest release even though it is done invisibly, within the forgiver's heart. It is honest because it happens along with honest judgment, honest pain, and honest hate. True forgivers do not pretend they don't suffer. They do not pretend the wrong does not matter much. Magic eyes are open eyes... You will know that forgiveness has begun when you recall those who hurt you and feel the power to wish them well.

4 - WE COME TOGETHER 31 FOR ONE THING, THEY MUST TRULY UNDERSTAND THE REALITY OF WHAT THEY DID TO HURT YOU -- THEY MUST BE TRUTHFUL WITH THE FEELINGS YOU HAVE FELT -- THEY MUST BE TRUTHFUL IN LISTENING TO YOU -- THEY OUGHT TO BE TRUTHFUL ABOUT YOUR FUTURE TOGETHER

We start over, too, in the semi-darkness of partial understanding. *We are asking too much if we want to understand everything at the beginning.*

5 - SOME NICE THINGS FORGIVING IS NOT 38 FORGIVING IS NOT FORGETTING -- Remembering is your storage of pain - it is why you need to be healed in the first place... The pains we dare not remember are the most dangerous pains of all... As a warning, never mistake forgetting for forgiving. Once we have forgiven, we get a new freedom to forget. We can forget because we have been healed... The test of forgiving lies with healing the lingering pain of the past, not with forgetting that the past ever happened. -- EXCUSING IS NOT FORGIVING -- We excuse people when we understand that they were not to blame. We forgive people for things we blame them for. -- FORGIVING IS NOT THE SAME AS SMOTHERING CONFLICT -- This is the technique of smoothing things over with the high art of forgiving those who transgress against us. -- ACCEPTING PEOPLE IS NOT FORGIVING THEM -- We accept each other because we are acceptable in spite of blemishes that sometimes make it hard... The difference between accepting and forgiving is very simple. We accept people because of the good people they are for us. We forgive people for the bad things they did to us. We accept people for the good they are, we forgive them for the bad they did. --

FORGIVING IS NOT TOLERANCE -- *Forgive me and you heal yourself.*
Tolerate everything I do and you are in for a lot of trouble.

PART II - FORGIVING PEOPLE WHO ARE HARD TO FORGIVE

6 - FORGIVING the INVISIBLE PEOPLE 54 THE PARENT WHO DIED --
NO PARENT IS PERFECT -- Even "ideal parents" are at best gentle folk, and
gentle people do cruel things. -- OUR PAINFUL FEELINGS ARE VALID --
There is a flow to feelings that can, if you follow it, carry you to its own *deep well*.
It will carry you to the depths if you are willing to put away your defenses.

If you let them, your feelings can take you into terrible nights of awesome
sadness. You will feel again the loneliness of your childhood struggle to be loved.
You will feel again the dread of not being good enough for a parent's love. You
may feel as if you are lost, without hope and without light, such feelings as you
would hardly dare admit to your best friends.

*And they can take you into an ugly place where you will feel the heat of your
hate. Even hatred for a salty mother or a beloved father! They may lead you into
your own private hell.. But there is no freedom to forgive your dead parents unless
you let yourself feel the pain you need to forgive them for.*

Your feelings, of course, may be exaggerated. They may also be distorted.
No matter. *They are what you feel. So they are valid. And you find freedom to
forgive your dead parents when you admit the validity of your feelings about them
and when you let yourself feel the pain you want to forgive them for.* -- YOU
NEVER COMPLETELY FORGIVE A DEAD PARENT -- YOU NEED TO
FORGIVE YOURSELF EVEN AS YOU FORGIVE YOUR DEAD PARENTS --
The hurt we get from parents almost always makes us feel guilty or ashamed of
ourselves; I have never met a person who hated his father or mother *who did not
also hate himself*. I discovered after she died that I could forgive the mother who
nurtured my self-hatred *only when I forgave the self I hated.* -- THE INVISIBLE
MOTHER WHO GAVE HER CHILD AWAY -- THE INVISIBLE GHOST
BEHIND THE ORGANIZATION - PEOPLE BADLY OUT OF FOCUS

7 - FORGIVING PEOPLE WHO DO NOT CARE 64 THE LEVEL OF
PERCEPTION -- The first awakening moment dawns when you see your own
action through another's eyes. You perceive that their feelings about what you did
are true. You have reached the *level of interpersonal perception.* -- THE LEVEL

OF FEELING -- Here you feel the pain that you made someone else feel. You share the hurt that you inflicted. You somehow enter another's soul and share his suffering. -- THE LEVEL OF CONFESSION -- When you can tell those you hurt that you realize what you did was intolerable and that you share their pain... You tell the person you hurt that you hurt too, with the very hurt that you hurt them with, and that you want terribly to be forgiven. -- THE LEVEL OF PROMISE - If you know and genuinely feel the wrong-ness of what you did, you also feel a passionate desire not to hurt again. So you make a promise.

My own guess is that God asks us to repent, not as a condition He needs, *but as a condition we need*. What God wants is not only that we be forgiven in His heart and mind, but that *we should also feel forgiven in our heart and mind*. He wants an honest coming together with his children. Asking for repentance was only a way of asking for truthfulness... Leave the avenging to God... *You do not always need a thing whole to enjoy it at all*. A blossom has real beauty even if it never becomes a flower. A climb can be successful though we do not reach the summit. Forgiving is real even if it stops at the healing of the forgiver.

8 - FORGIVING OURSELVES 71 We get the right to forgive ourselves only from the *entitlements of love*. And you dare forgive yourself only with the courage of love. Love is the ultimate source of both your right and your courage to ignore the indictment you level at yourself. *When you live as if yesterday's wrong is irrelevant to how you feel about yourself today, you are gambling on a love that frees you even from self-condemnation*.

But there must be truthfulness. Without honesty, self-forgiveness is psychological hocus-pocus. The rule is: we cannot really forgive ourselves unless we look at the failure in our past and call it by its right name... *We all hurt ourselves*. Unfairly at times.

What happens when you finally do forgive yourself: *You rewrite your script*. *What you are in your present scene is not tied down to what you did in an earlier scene*. The bad guy you played in Act One is *eliminated* and you *play* Act Two as a good guy. You release yourself today from yesterday's scenario. You walk into tomorrow, guilt gone.

The word that fits the case best is *irrelevance*. Look back into your past, admit the ugly facts, and declare that they are *irrelevant* to you present. *Irrelevant*

and *immaterial!* Your very own past has no bearing on your case. Or how you feel about it...

Release! Release by a discovery that the terrible past was irrelevant to how we are now and what is going to be in the future. *We can be free from our own judgment and this was why I can be free to love!!!*

Finally, the climax of self-forgiving; it comes when we feel at one with ourselves again. The split is healed. The self inside of you, who condemned you so fiercely, embraces you now. You are whole, single; you have come together.

How to forgive self: *The first thing you need is honesty.* There is no way to forgive yourself without it. Candor - a mind ready to forego fakery and to face facts - this is the first piece of spiritual equipment you need... *Then you need a clear head to make way for your forgiving heart.*

You need to see the *difference between self-esteem and self-forgiveness..* You can gain *esteem* for yourself when you discover that *you are esteem-able*, that *you are in fact worth esteeming.* To *esteem* ourselves is to feel in your deepest being that *you are a superb gift very much worth wanting, God's own art form, and a creature of magnificent beauty.* Blessed are the *self-esteemers, for they have seen the beauty of their own souls.*

Self-esteem is *not the same* as self-forgiveness. You *esteem* yourself when you *discover your own excellence.* Your *forgive* yourself after you discover your own faults. You *esteem* yourself for the *good* person you are. Your *forgive* yourself for the bad things you did. *You need a clear head about what it is you are doing... You also need courage. Forgiving ourselves is love's ultimate daring.* Forgive ourselves for one thing at a time... *Finally, you need to confirm your outrageous act of self-forgiveness with a reckless act of love.*

9 - FORGIVING MONSTERS 78 If we say that monsters are beyond forgiving, *we give them a power they should never have.* Monsters who are too evil to be forgiven get a stranglehold on their victims; they can sentence their victims to a lifetime of unhealed pain. If they are unforgivable monsters, they are given power to keep their evil alive in the hearts of those who suffered most. We give them power to condemn their victims to live forever with the hurting memory of their painful pasts. We give the monsters the last word... *When we refuse to forgive monster we give them exactly what they want.*

10 - FORGIVING GOD 82 FIRST, THE HURT -- THEN WE HATE GOD -- NEXT, WE DEFEND GOD -- Walk into any large shopping *plaza*, and you will see the mish-mash of gray and white and black tiles that make up the floor. They don't seem to be arranged in any pattern at all. But get up in the balcony, high above the plaza, and look at the whole floor. Now the splendid mosaic comes to view. Your scrambled little corners looks good within the grand design... So too with God's work; the dark shadows only underscore its shining glories. *We will see - from the high place - that God makes all things fit together. All our pains will make his later mercies seem more tender.*

FIRST, I REALIZE THAT GOD GIVES ME THE KIND OF WORLD I WANT TO LIVE IN - THEN, I THINK THAT GOD SUFFERS WITH ME -- *God is in me and that my pains hurt Him more than they hurt me. He is suffering with me, maybe to heal a small corner of His world through me. Maybe He suffers with us while He is working to bring about a new world where justice and peace embrace, and unfair pain is gone forever.* This thought helps when I wonder if I should forgive God. -- I BELIEVE THAT GOD FORGIVES -- I think we may need to forgive God after all. Now and then, but not often. Not for His sake, *for ours!*... When you forgive God, *you just live in the silence, and grope toward the goodness of life, and believe that, in spite of everything, He is your friend.*

PART III - HOW PEOPLE FORGIVE

11 - SLOWLY 95 - It takes time! A lot of time for some... *You know it because you find yourself wishing them well.*

12 - WITH A LITTLE UNDERSTANDING 97 - A little *understanding* makes forgiving a lot easier. If you understand everything, of course, you don't have to forgive at all. *But it helps to understand something when forgiving comes very hard...* It also helps if you can understand yourself a little better... *When you see your enemy and yourself in the weakness and silliness of the humanity you share, you will make the miracle of forgiving a little easier.*

13 - IN CONFUSION 105 - Tangled around that simple core of wrongful pain, we often find a skein of hurts and hates that is nearly impossible to unravel... We are also hampered by a bog of *emotional slough*. To expect two people caught in

mutual hate to sort out their pains is like asking a child to calculate the national debt. We often have to grope into forgiving through snarls of feelings as well as clogs of misunderstanding.

Three shifts in our feelings when we have *falling-outs*: *First, we reduce our stakes*. In the early stage of petty falling outs, we invest massive emotional resources in trivial offenses. We put our personal self-esteem on the block. We inflate the stakes beyond anything like their real worth. But time, that unsung colleague of ours, gives us a chance to reduce our investments. We let each other's faults, at least mine, melt down to their real size. Pain and anger can melt down too... *Second, we reduce what we expect from forgiveness*. We don't have to be close intimate friends. *The goal should be good-will and respect towards each other...* *Third, we reduce our desire for an even score*. We give up trying to keep score of who did what to whom and how badly it hurt. We learn to leave the loose ends dangling, the scales off balance, to accept a score that neither of us could make come out even.

Full forgiving did not come in the twinkling of an eye. It came in bits and pieces with an unexpected meeting here, a gesture there, the exchange of a greeting, and a hint that better feelings were beginning to flow. We floundered into forgiving. *Sometimes small mercies are tender enough*. We don't have to be virtuosos at the forgiving game to make it work.

14 - WITH ANGER LEFT OVER 108 There *can* be anger left after. Anger and forgiveness can live together in the same heart. You are not a failure at forgiving just because you are sill angry that a painful wrong was done to you... *It is terribly unrealistic to expect a single act of forgiving to get rid of all angry feelings*.

Anger is the executive power of human decency. If you do not get angry and stay angry when a bad thing happens, you lose a piece of your humanity. Remember, you cannot erase the past, *you can only heal the pain it has left behind...* you can be angry still, and you can have your anger without hate.

Once you start on your forgiving journey, you will begin to lose the passion of malice. Malice goes while anger lingers on... *We wish a blessing on the frail humanity of the person who hurt us, even if we were hurt unfairly and deeply...* *You have anger without malice - a sign that your forgiving is real*.

Anger minus malice gives hope. Malice, unrelieved, will gradually choke you. But anger can goad you to prevent the wrong from happening again. Malice

keeps the pain alive and raw inside your feelings, anger pushes you with hope toward a better future.

First, express your malice. Be specific. It doesn't help to let malice fester as an ugly glob of undirected misery - it only makes matters worse. You need to express it to somebody who can help you get rid of it. You can express it secretly to God, or to someone... *Then, you can let God handle those people you would like to manhandle in your hate. Whatever they need, let God handle it!* What you need is healing from the infection of malice left over from the open wounds they left in my life... *Try a prayer of peace for the person I have difficult feelings towards.* If you do, you may discover another secret of forgiving; you don't have to choke your anger, *you only have to surrender your malice. For your sake. Malice is misery that needs healing. Anger is energy that needs direction.* After malice, let anger do its reforming work. *Forgiving and anger can be partners in a good cause.*

15 - A LITTLE AT A TIME 111 *Wholesale forgiving is too much for anybody...*
UNDERSTANDING: "What do you want to forgive her for?" I asked. "Do you want to forgive her for suffering so much? Do you want to forgive her for hating herself? For condemning herself day and night because of the pain she knows she's caused you? Do you want to forgive her for being a person subject to depression? Must she be forgiven for letting you down by not being the classy young woman you need to impress your successful friends?"

We can use forgiveness as a quick and cheap nostrum for pains that forgiveness cannot cure. *It cannot heal our narcissistic resentments towards people for not being all that we expect them to be. Nobody can really forgive people for being what they are.* Forgiveness wasn't invented for such unfair maneuvering.

We have the power to forgive one for any of the specific things one *did* to help make one's life miserable. But we cannot forgive one for being the kind of "whatever person" they *are*.

We overload the circuits of forgiveness when we try to forgive people for being burdens to our existence, or for not being the sort of people we want them to be. There are other *means for coping* with the threads of tragedy that are woven into the fabric of our lives. *They go by such names as courage, empathy, patience, and hope.* God knows they come hard.

I believe that there is a natural law of forgiveness which requires a price from us when we try to forgive people for being what they are: *Those who forgive people for being what they are only increase their own pain.*

Pain compounds itself when we indulge ourselves with grandiose forgiving. The reason is simple to see. When we try - and fail, as we are bound to - to forgive someone for being what they are, resentment is added to resentment. We blame him for our failure to forgive him, as well as for wronging us.

We also end up feeling sorrier for ourselves than we did before, and guiltier too, because now, besides everything else, we are ashamed of ourselves for not being able to forgive. Our pain feeds on itself. It grows like an invisible carcinoma... *Forgiving that heals focuses on what people do, not on what people are.* The healing art of forgiving has to be practiced a little at a time... And the first rule for mere human beings in the forgiving game is to remember that we are not God.

16 - FREELY, OR NOT AT ALL 114 Three kinds of manipulative forgivers: *Trigger-happy forgivers* fire off forgiveness at a moment's notice; every time someone causes them some puny inconvenience, they clobber that person with punishing magnanimity. They need to be in control, so one intimidates through forgiveness. Then there is the *stalking forgivers*, who sniff out guilt and track it down, stalking it, like a hound dog on the trail of a rabbit. Next are the *entrappers*, who set people up to do the very thing they need to be forgiven for.

To set anyone free, forgiving must be freely given - an act of free love, not a devious power play. Forced forgiving makes matters worse for everybody.... A major ingredient in free forgiving is *respect* for the person being forgiven. This person is a magnificent creature. *You forgive only a superb being called a person.* In practice, respect means that you let a person do whatever one wants to do with your forgiving.

17 - WITH A FUNDAMENTAL FEELING 117 *We can't forgive until we feel forgiven ourselves.* Coming to terms with the pain of her mother's guilt must follow the pain of *coming to terms with her own.* *When she finally feels forgiven, fully and unconditionally forgiven, she will be free to forgive herself. And in forgiving herself, she will find freedom to forgive her mother.*

The fundamental feeling makes a difference to everything. You feel forgiven at the ground floor of your being, where everything else rests. It is a feeling of total acceptance, a feeling lodged in your deepest self, a feeling that no bad thing you do can take away. You feel totally affirmed, totally loved, totally received. Your entire being is rested because you feel that nothing can separate you from the

source of love, even though you cannot do enough good things to earn your right to be there. You know that nothing can really hurt you now.

One sure way of missing out on the fundamental feeling is to worry too much about being a *spiritual success*... PEOPLE: Sometimes we need to look at *ourselves* more honestly. *We* do well sometimes to follow our feelings into the darker regions of our lives where we are neither very pretty nor very pure. We are a mixed breed, shadow and light, weak and strong, foul and clean, hate and love, all at the same time. Our middle name is *ambiguity*. *Admitting this fundamental ambiguity opens us to the fundamental feeling of being forgiven*... *Obsession with spiritual success can take you on idiotic detours around the fundamental feelings*.

When I am most anxious about my personal worth I become an armed guard of my ego's imperial highness. If someone assaults my self-esteem, I call up all my reserves to defend myself. I get rigid, grim, frightened; I am poised for attack.

Our freedom to forgive must come from a fundamental feeling of personal freedom from any and all condemnation, our own or God's or anyone else's. The fundamental feeling has no soil for hate to grow in, no nourishment for hate to feed on; when we experience the fundamental feeling, hatred dies a natural death, and when hate dies we are free to forgive.

PART IV - WHY FORGIVE?

Forgiving is the only way we have to a *better fairness* in our unfair world; it is love's unexpected revolution against unfair pain and it alone offers strong hope for healing the hurts we so unfairly feel.

18 - FORGIVING MAKES LIFE FAIRER 125 The problem with *revenge* is that it never gets what it wants; it never evens the score. Fairness never comes. The chain reaction set off by every act of vengeance always takes its un-hindered course. It ties both the injured and the injurer to an escalator of pain. Both are stuck on the escalator as long as parity is demanded, and the escalator never stops, never lets anyone off.

Why do family feuds to on and on until everyone is dead - or gets too old and too tired to fight? No two people, no two families, ever weigh pain on the same scale. The pain a person causes me always feels heavier to me than it feels to the person who caused it. The pain I inflict on you always feels worse to you than it seems to me. Pains given and pains received never balance out. *The difference*

between pain given and pain suffered is like the difference between climbing a hill and scampering down, it never feels the same in both directions.

19 - FORGIVING IS A BETTER RISK

20 - FORGIVING IS STRONGER 138 *We* are never either strong or weak; *we are always both strong and weak*. And in that combination we find our *humanness*.

FORGIVING IS REALISM -- Forgiving comes equipped with the toughness of realism. To be able to forgive we must have the guts to look hard at the wrongness, the horridness, the sheer wickedness of what somebody did to us. We cannot camouflage; we cannot excuse; we cannot ignore. We eye the evil face to face and we call it what it is. Only realists can be forgivers. -- FORGIVING IS

CONFRONTATION -- FORGIVING IS FREEDOM -- FORGIVING IS

LOVE'S ULTIMATE POWER -- *Love has two ingredients that make it strong.*

One ingredient is *respect*. The other is *commitment*. *First, consider love's power to give you respect for yourself. If you love yourself truly, you will respect yourself truly.* And it is precisely your self-respect that gets you into situations where you are challenged to forgive... *Love will not let you lock yourself in the prison cell of your bitter memories.* It will not permit you the demeaning misery of wallowing in yesterday's pain. Your *love* for yourself will generate enough energy, finally, to say: *"I have had enough ; I am not going to put myself down by letting somebody's low blow keep hurting me forever."* And so you begin forgiving... Now you can reverse your focus and point your love toward the people who hurt you. *Love enables you to respect them too, no matter how mean, cruel, or terribly unfair they were.*

21 - FORGIVING FITS FAULTY PEOPLE 147 "There is a *labyrinth* [An intricate structure of interconnecting passages through which it is difficult to find one's way; a maze; something highly intricate or convoluted in character, composition, or construction] of motives in every heart; and every action, both good and evil, is the consequence of a complicated debate and tension within the soul." *We are all too complex to be pure.*

Moreover, we are seldom merely sinned against. *We often contribute to our own vulnerability. We set ourselves up for hurt. Sometimes we invite pain, not because we love somebody too much, but because we are too stupid. Maybe we contribute to our being ripped-off because we are too lazy to look hard before we leap into a deal. Maybe we contribute to our spouse's infidelity by our unfeeling*

ignorance of their needs and desires. *Maybe* we contribute to our children's rebellion by our cold judgments and hot tempers. *Surely, we know at least this much, that even if we are the hurt party, we are seldom a completely innocent party.*

Our virtue is always compromised; we are never as innocent as we feel when we taste our early hate for a person who hurt us... *Our own faults, therefore, reduce the gap between us and whoever did us wrong.* We do not toss our forgiving down from the peak of a holy mountain; *we are in the valley with those who hurt us.*

If only there were vile *people*... Committing evil deeds, and it were only necessary to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?

During the life of any heart this line keeps changing place; sometimes it is squeezed one way by exuberant evil and sometimes it shifts to allow enough space for good to flourish. One and the same human being is, at various ages, under various circumstances, a totally different human being. At times he is close to being a devil, at times to sainthood. But his name doesn't change, and to that name we ascribe the whole lot, good and evil.

I have a troubling habit of putting myself in the shoes of people who do wrong. When I read a true story about a villain who does great harm to people, I wonder what I might have done had I been subject to the same influences as he was. Take slave-holders for instance, including those who were cruelest to their slaves. What if I had been a Georgia plantation owner? Would I have had the moral sense to see how evil slavery was? I don't know for sure, but I suspect I would have done what most other white people did then.

When I am counseling a man who admits to having hurt someone he loved, I put myself in his place and wonder whether I would have done all that much better than he did. And I know in my heart that I may well have done no better... I am reminding myself that much of my apparent virtue is nothing but good luck and the grace of God. Put me in other circumstances, where to be honest or courageous requires a very high price, and I could not guarantee anyone that I would be a hero.

We are all a mixed breed. We have both Jezebel and the Virgin Mary inside our souls - *all of us* - and they are never far apart. So who are we to believe that we are too innocent to forgive the person who is guilty of hurting us?

If you are trying to forgive; even if you manage forgiving in fits and starts, if you forgive today, hate again tomorrow, and have to forgive again the day after,

you are a forgiver. Most of us are amateurs, bungling differs sometimes. So what?
In this game nobody is an expert. *We are all beginners.*