

**Forgiveness:** *The absence of malice.*

The most warped misconception of forgiveness is found in women who were molested as children. Many families, in their misguided understanding of forgiveness, do great harm to the victim.

**The Story of Sarah**

*A young girl named Sarah had been molested repeatedly as a young girl by her uncle. Both Sarah's husband and her family knew about what had happened but did nothing. They didn't even want to discuss it and urged her to "put it in her past." Family gatherings went on like always with the uncle as a welcome guest. This young woman understandably was having a very hard time with her feelings toward this uncle. She hated to be around him and felt dirty when he looked at her, knowing they shared such sordid memories. But overriding her very valid emotions was this message: "You are a Christian. You should forgive and forget. Put it in your past and love him." And so, she was locked in the destructive cycle of striving to change her heart, failing, and condemning herself. Sarah felt like a total failure as a Christian because she could not forgive or forget, and as a person because she was so emotionally unstable.*

*Her husband decided to help her healing along by suggesting that the "Christian thing to do" was to go out to a movie with this uncle—sort of a way to patch things up and get a new start. She wanted to be a good Christian. So, even though she felt revulsion and fear toward him, she went! When they got out of the car at the movies, he pinned her up against the door and gave her a passionate kiss. All of the feelings of self-loathing and guilt came rushing back with that kiss. As if in a rerun of her childhood, she pretended it didn't happen and continued the evening! Inside, however, she was shattered. Not only did she have to deal with her hatred toward this uncle, she was bitter toward her husband who was his unwitting accomplice!*

This is a perfect example of the burden that Christians place on each other. In the name of forgiveness her husband and family had unintentionally added to her despair and victimization. Since the husband and the family refused to talk about the incident and did not allow her to, Sarah could only come to one conclusion—*something was wrong with her.*

In Sarah's situation there are two separate issues: ***Sarah's heart*** and ***natural consequences***. If Sarah had understood how to work through her abuse by being honest and opening her heart to God in surrender, she could have forgiven her uncle through God's grace. Forgiveness did not require that she forget what he did to her. Restoration of the relationship with her uncle was not a requirement of forgiveness. Restoration and forgiveness are two different things.

**Weakness of the Flesh**

When Paul asked for healing for his "thorn in his flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7), God told him that, ***"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."*** Paul responded with this, ***"Most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong"***

(2 Cor 12:10–11). It is *knowing* and *surrendering* our weakness to God that brings about His strength in us. We have no claim to it and cannot take credit for it. It forces us to be brutally honest about the condition of our heart when we acknowledge our weaknesses and lay them at the foot of the cross.

The closer we get to God, the more aware we become of our **wretchedness**! It's like seeing yourself in a mirror with every intensifying light. We don't become more beautiful as the light becomes brighter. Instead, every little imperfection and blemish is glaringly obvious. But it doesn't mean we get uglier, either. It simply means that we are seeing what's already there. As we look at our own sinful nature in the light of God's perfection, we see how wretched our hearts are. But as we surrender each blemish and wrinkle of our heart to God, He replaces them with His beauty, His purity, His virtue, and His strength.

## Surrender's Message

The message of surrender is not readily embraced by everyone who hears it. We may turn our heads and say "that's not me". However, we as human beings share some remarkably similar traits. **One** is our total obsession with self. **The other** is our basic sinful nature. Our stories of anguish, sorrow, and failure are all different. But, the answer is the same: **dying to self that Christ might live through us**. The Bible tells us in Romans 6:6 "...knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." Crucifixion means death, and death to self means freedom from sin.

When we start getting honest with ourselves and with God, those very things that were so threatening to us lose their power. Instead of desperately trying to convince the world and ourselves that we are not a certain way, we are free to admit we are that way—and then surrender it to God.

**Truth is the balm for the hurting heart and the antidote to deceit.**

## Verses referenced in this lesson:

**2 Corinthians 12:7** So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

**2 Corinthians 12:9** But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest on me.

**2 Corinthians 12:10** For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

**2 Corinthians 12:11** I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing.

**John 8:32** and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

**Romans 6:6** ...knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.