

## Forgiving a Tormentor

One of the more remarkable personalities emerging from World War II was Corrie ten Boom, a Dutch Christian who, along with her father and other family members, helped many Jews escape the Nazi Holocaust and was imprisoned for it.

Her most famous book, *The Hiding Place*, describes the ordeal.

Years after her concentration camp experiences in Nazi Germany, she met face to face one of the cruelest and most heartless German guards whom she had ever contacted. He had humiliated and degraded her and her sister. He had jeered and visually raped them as they stood in the delousing shower.

Now he was standing before her with hand outstretched and said, "Will you forgive me?"

She writes: "I stood there with coldness clutching at my heart, but I know that the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. I prayed, Jesus, help me!"

Then she added: "Woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me and I experienced an incredible thing. The current started in my shoulder, raced down into my arms and sprang into our clutched hands. Then this warm reconciliation seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes."

She looked into the face of this man who had tormented her and said, "I forgive you, brother."

At that, she cried "with my whole heart," she wrote. "For a long moment, we grasped each other's hands, the former guard, the former prisoner. I have never known the love of God so intensely as I did in that moment!"

What an amazing description of the power and healing nature of forgiveness! Studies show that people who forgive are happier and healthier than those who hold resentments.

The first study to look at how forgiveness improves physical health showed that when people think about forgiving an offender it leads to improved functioning in their cardiovascular and nervous systems.

Another study at the University of Wisconsin found the more forgiving people were, the less they suffered from a wide range of illnesses. The less forgiving people reported a greater number of health problems.



(more)

In three separate studies done by Dr. Fred Lufkin of Stanford University – including one with Catholics and Protestants from Northern Ireland whose family members were murdered in the political violence there – he found that people who are taught how to forgive become less angry, feel less hurt, are more optimistic, become more forgiving in a variety of situations, and become more compassionate and self-confident. His studies show a reduction in experience of stress, physical manifestations of stress, and an increase in vitality.

From a spiritual perspective, the Bible is replete with verses emphasizing the importance of forgiving.

And Jesus Himself became the example, praying on the cross concerning His tormentors and those responsible for His crucifixion: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”

As Corrie ten Boom discovered, to forgive is to set a prisoner free and find that the prisoner was you.

*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:32 ESV).*

– Beecher Hunter