

JOURNAL

LYSA TERKEURST

#1 New York Times Bestselling Author

*The
forgiveness
journal*

A GUIDED JOURNEY TO
FORGIVING WHAT YOU CAN'T FORGET

The Forgiveness Journal

© 2020 Haven Place Ministries

A portion of the text in this book was taken from Forgiving What You Can't Forget © 2020 Lysa TerKeurst.

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning, or other—except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Published in Nashville, Tennessee, by Thomas Nelson. Thomas Nelson is a registered trademark of HarperCollins Christian Publishing, Inc.

Photos by Kelsie Johanna

Supplemental text written by Carrie Marrs

Special thanks to the following for their contributions to this journal:

Amanda Bacon
Leah Chabai

Joel Muddamalle
Shae Tate

Kimberly Henderson
Meredith Brock

Thomas Nelson titles may be purchased in bulk for educational, business, fund-raising, or sales promotional use. For information, please email SpecialMarkets@ThomasNelson.com.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.Zondervan.com. The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.®

Scripture quotations marked AMP are from the Amplified® Bible, copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Scripture quotations marked CSB are from the Christian Standard Bible. Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible®, and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Scripture quotations 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.

Scripture quotations marked ICB are from the International Children’s Bible®. Copyright © 1986, 1988, 1999, 2015 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NLT are from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation. © 1996, 2004, 2007, 2013, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Ministries, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked THE MESSAGE are from *The Message*. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, a Division of Tyndale House Ministries..

Any Internet addresses, phone numbers, or company or product information printed in this book are offered as a resource and are not intended in any way to be or to imply an endorsement by Thomas Nelson, nor does Thomas Nelson vouch for the existence, content, or services of these sites, phone numbers, companies, or products beyond the life of this book.

ISBN: 978-1-4002-2438-8

Printed in China

20 21 22 23 24 GRI 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

<i>Working Through Forgiveness Together</i>	vii
<i>How to Use This Journal</i>	xv
<i>Introduction: I Still Cry Over What Happened</i>	xvii
1. Forgiveness, the Double-Edged Word	1
2. Welcome to the Table	13
3. Is This Even Survivable?	29
4. How Is Forgiveness Even Possible When I Feel Like This?	43
5. Collecting the Dots	53
6. Connecting the Dots	69
7. Correcting the Dots	85
8. Unchangeable Feels Unforgivable	101
9. Boundaries That Help Us Stop Dancing with Dysfunction	113
10. Because They Thought God Would Save Them . . .	129
11. Forgiving God	143
12. The Part That Loss Plays	153
13. Bitterness Is a Bad Deal That Makes Big Promises . .	165
14. Living the Practice of Forgiveness Every Day . . .	177
Notes	198





WORKING THROUGH FORGIVENESS TOGETHER

DEAR FRIEND, WELCOME to a safe space. I'm so glad you're meeting with me here.

Maybe you picked up this journal because you're going through one of the most difficult seasons you've ever walked through. Your life seems to be defined by a series of events that has changed everything for you. Or maybe you're addressing a traumatic part of your past you can't avoid anymore. Or perhaps you've just been living with a general unsettledness and heaviness related to unresolved hurts.

I know you may be having some incredibly raw emotions. You might feel angry, unfairly treated, or paralyzed by pain. Or maybe a lot of those feelings are buried. You seem to be doing all right for the most part. Yes, every now and then strong feelings rise to the surface. But honestly, you don't really want those feelings to reveal something else that needs to be tended to, talked about, dealt with, or forgiven.

Whatever the details of your situation, if you feel stuck with circumstances and feelings you can't control, I understand. If you're at an utter loss at how to take even a tiny step forward from where you

are today. If you feel scared that you're hurting too much to ever be healed enough to see beautiful again.

I get all of that. I really do. I have felt a combination of all those things.

And for me, working through those thoughts and feelings, and processing the pain tangled with them, took time. So much time.

Journaling became critical for me as I was writing *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*. In the beginning, I was just working on

a book. Then it became very apparent that I needed a place to write and process all I was learning and feeling. So that's where the idea for this journal was born. I wanted you to have a place to work through everything just like I did.

But I also wanted to have a personal connection with you—a meeting place where we could come together in our journeys of forgiveness. All the pictures

throughout this journal are of places that are special to me. You'll see where I've spent time while writing this message and doing the work of forgiveness in my personal life. I want to invite you into my home and to these other significant spots where I have hurt and been honest, wrestled and prayed, cried and wondered if I'd ever get through this, and then over time, found healing. I want you to



come sit with me in these tender places. I want you to remember you are not alone.

If you were at my house, we'd be seated at my gray kitchen table breaking bread and sharing the stories that broke our hearts. And in the reality of shed tears and shared stories, we'd find that although our circumstances may be different, we are so very much alike. I'd hand you tissues and say, "I believe you" and "I'm so sorry." We'd keep opening our hearts and sharing and connecting as we took steps toward healing.

I want to do that with you as much as we can here in this journal.

Though we aren't actually seated at the gray table together today, I left a seat open for you. I knew that one day we'd process this message of forgiveness together—not only through reading the book but also through journaling our experiences.

I want you to have room to be yourself here. Processing can be messy, but when it gets us to healthier places, it's so worth it. Together we can move toward trusting God with our hearts and discovering the beauty He has for us.

We'll begin by just naming where we are. Any answer is okay. We're all bringing feelings to the gray table. We all come with issues to work through and feelings to sort out.



Describe some of the feelings of resistance, confusion, or fear you have about forgiving someone who has hurt you.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

I want to assure you of something vitally important: You won't be judged as you wrestle through this message. I will not shame you for your struggle or blame you for your skepticism.

But, at the same time, I care about you too much and have tasted too much freedom and healing in my own life not to encourage you to do the hard work of forgiveness.

That's why I want to share what I've learned forgiveness *is* and *is not* right here at the beginning. We'll be talking about these throughout the book, but I pray that hearing these things early on will help you press past some of the doubts and questions that may be making you feel resistant to the idea of forgiveness.

1. *Forgiveness doesn't always fix relationships, but it does help mend the hurting heart.* Forgiveness is making the decision that the ones who hurt you no longer get to limit you, label you, or project the lies they believe about themselves onto you. It is the decision that their offense will not define you or confine you by the smallness of bitterness.
2. *Forgiveness is both a decision and a process, and healing is a long journey.* When you get triggered, it does not mean your decision to forgive was fake. It just means there's more to be done. Your decision to forgive the facts of what happened is done in

a specific moment in time. But the process of working through all the emotions from the impact of what happened will likely take place over a period of time.

3. *Forgiveness doesn't let the other person off the hook. It actually places them in God's hands.* Forgiving the one who hurt you does not mean you are freeing them from the consequences of their sin. It does mean you refuse the burden of taking revenge and trust God to execute His justice with appropriate measures of mercy.
4. *Forgiveness does not justify or excuse abuse.* While the limitless grace of God provides a way for all to be forgiven, the truth of God provides parameters so that wrong behavior can be addressed. Abuse is not to be tolerated. It is right for you to establish boundaries with equal measures of mercy and tough love.
5. *Forgiveness is required by God, but reconciliation is conditional.* Forgiving someone doesn't mean that trust is immediately restored or that hard relational dynamics are instantly fixed. Reconciliation is dependent on two people being willing to work on the relationship. In some cases, reconciliation is simply not an option. But that doesn't make forgiveness any less healing for you.
6. *Forgiveness isn't an act of our determination. Forgiveness is only made possible by our cooperation.* When I wrongly think my ability to forgive rises and falls on all my efforts—mustered-up grit, conjured maturity, bossed-around resistance, and gentle feelings that feel real one moment and fake the next—I'll never be able to authentically give the kind of forgiveness Jesus has given me. In reality, my ability to forgive others rises and falls on this: leaning into what Jesus has already done, which allows His grace for me to flow freely through me (Ephesians 4:7).

7. *Forgiveness isn't adding on top of our pain a misery too great to bear.* It's exchanging our bound-up resentment for a life-giving freedom, thus making the mystery of the workings of God too great to deny. It is a complicated grace that uncomplicates our blinding pain and helps us see beautiful again.

Please know this isn't a message I've waltzed through writing or living.

When your heart has been shattered and reshaped into something that doesn't quite feel normal inside your own chest yet, forgiveness can feel a bit unrealistic.

But here is what I've learned and what I long for you to know too: *forgiveness is possible.* And it is good. Your heart is much too beautiful a place for unhealed pain. Your soul is much too deserving of new possibilities to stay stuck here. And today is the perfect day to start taking steps on this unexpected, miraculous pathway to healing.



Look back at the seven truths I listed above. Which ones resonate the most with your heart?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

What are you thankful that forgiveness is *not*? What are you thankful that forgiveness *is*?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Have you felt guilty or thought you're not a good Christian because you find forgiveness difficult in some situations? How does it feel to know that you are not alone in this struggle and that forgiveness and healing are processes that take time?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Take some time to write out a gut-honest prayer as you begin this journey. Feel free to pour out all your doubts and fears in this prayer. But then invite God to do what only He can do as you surrender your heart to Him through this process.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Have hope with me, friend. You and I are in the hands of a compassionate God. Believe with me that He will take care of us and do mighty works in our hearts.

With you on this journey,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Lys' with a decorative flourish.

HOW TO USE THIS JOURNAL

THIS JOURNAL IS MEANT to be used side by side with the book. Here I will guide you in digging deeper into what we are reading in each chapter of *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*.

Each chapter of this journal starts with a short reading to connect what you read in the book to what we will be processing in the journal, followed by these four sections:

Keep—quotes from that chapter of *Forgiving What You Can't Forget* that will be good to remember and repeat back to yourself.

Read—key scriptures found in that chapter or that relate to the topics discussed.

Journal—prompts that will help you respond, personally reflect, process, write about, and implement all that we'll be learning.

Pray—short prayers I've typed out to get you started in lifting everything you're working through up to the Lord.

These simple sections will help you work toward applying and living out the message of *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*.

This forgiveness message is not one to just read and then set aside, but one we will want to sit with and return to for years to come. This is where we're learning what to do with our pain and how to walk with God in the midst of it—how to root out our unresolved hurt and keep our hearts open so that healing and peace can come in. Here we are inviting God to turn our pain into a doorway of discovery and learning how to make compassion and forgiveness our way of life.



INTRODUCTION

I Still Cry Over What Happened

I THINK WE ALL have things about our lives that we feel we can count on no matter what. My marriage was one of those things for me. I remember thinking when other hard storms hit me and my family, “At least I know Art and I are good. And as long as we are okay, we can make it through anything together.”

And then one day I could no longer use that statement. I discovered that Art had been unfaithful, and all the devastating details that unfolded afterward left me reeling in shock and heartbreak.

It’s been a while since “the day everything changed,” yet emotions can stir within me that make the pain seem fresh all over again. And tears return.

Maybe you can relate. I wish I could hear your story.

Maybe you’ve been struggling to do normal life with soul-blinding pain and a confusing mix of emotions. I understand. Maybe you feel lost in your own life because the pain has permeated everything, reframing your entire life story. I get that too.

It feels like there was an enormous earthquake, and now we’re trying to find our footing on unstable ground with wide cracks and gaping holes. Yet we’re supposed to act like it’s all fine. The thought of being trapped here is terrifying, and there’s no running away because the pain is inside of us

This is how it feels. But the reality is we don’t have to be stuck here.

If we want something different, we can try to do something different. The very idea of that shines a bit of light and hope into our souls.

For now, we will just hold on to two truths: all is not lost, and while the pain can certainly refine us, it does not have to define us (from here on out).

KEEP

Staying here, blaming them, and forever defining your life by what they did will only increase the pain.

The more our pain consumes us,
the more it will control us.

What if it's possible to both let go of what we must but still carry with us what is beautiful and meaningful and true to us?

It is necessary for you to not let pain rewrite your memories. And it's absolutely necessary to not let pain ruin your future.

Write any other sentences that personally spoke to you from the introduction of *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

READ

The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? . . . Your face, LORD, I will seek. . . . Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.

—PSALM 27:1-2, 8, 10

As the deer longs for streams of water, so I long for you, O God. . . . Day and night I have only tears for food. . . . [I'm] praying to God who gives me life. . . . Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God!

—PSALM 42:1, 3, 8, 11 NLT

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea. . . . The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

—PSALM 46:1-2, 7



JOURNAL

What is the defining moment in your life dividing the before and after of the deep hurt? If you can't think of one defining moment, what are some other painful experiences you've had that could be accumulating hurt?

The painful event in your life has the potential to darken all of your memories related to it. But it doesn't have to. In reality, your memories are a mix of delightful and awful, and you get to choose what you do with them. Beautiful or painful, they are all your own authentic experiences.

Can you see any ways that your pain could be "rewriting your memories"? Which ones do you want to reclaim as real and beautiful and completely worth treasuring?



How might it look for you to move on without letting go of what is meaningful and true to you?

When you read the statement “You get to decide how you’ll move forward,” how does that open up possibilities in your mind for the future? How would you like to move forward?

PRAY

Father, help me believe that change is possible. Give me hope about the future, not because of how I feel or because of any sign of change, but because You are good. Inspire my imagination as I think about moving forward. You are my Rescuer and my Healer, and my faith is in You. I believe You can restore my heart and redeem the broken parts of my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.



FORGIVENESS, THE DOUBLE- EDGED WORD

FORGIVENESS FELT LIKE SOMETHING I might consider far into the future.

Yes, I knew I needed to forgive, but I just *wasn't there yet*. I couldn't imagine ever recovering from the discovery of my husband's affair. The devastation from the relationship implosion impacted every area of my life—my kids, my health, my finances.

Forgiveness? No. Not for a long while. The pain was too overwhelming, the injustice too outrageous, the distrust and resentment in my heart too severe. My life had shattered to pieces after a devastating betrayal . . . how else was I supposed to feel?!

Do you feel it too?

After the blur and shock of the first months, I was still struggling to cope with harsh realities. I was dealing with anxiety and panic attacks. Bitterness and cynicism had set in, and they seemed to hold me together and rip me apart simultaneously.

A heaviness I couldn't shake was always there.

Alone in my darkened world, my feelings kept telling me forgiveness wasn't possible. Forgiveness seemed to hinge on me starting to feel differently or getting my act together. And neither of those were on the horizon.

All the while, God knew I couldn't do it on my own. He actually had something much better ready for me.

You may be right in the thick of that heavy soul feeling right now. I'm so sorry if you are.

Just consider with me right now whether you're thinking of forgiveness wrongly, like I was. It's not something we can muster up on our own. It's all about leaning into what Jesus has already done, which allows His grace *for us* to flow freely *through us*.

And maybe you'll discover what I did. That what our beat-up, bitter, and fearful hearts have been starving for most are the life-giving nourishment of receiving grace and the life-saving satisfaction of giving grace.



STUDIES SHOW THAT CONTINUALLY REVISITING HURTFUL MEMORIES AND HOLDING A GRUDGE WORSEN A PERSON'S HEALTH, WHILE GRANTING FORGIVENESS IMPROVES IT. EVEN IMAGINING THE ACT OF FORGIVING AND CULTIVATING EMPATHY BRINGS EMOTIONAL AND PHYSIOLOGICAL BENEFITS.¹

KEEP

Forgiveness isn't something hard we have the option to do or not to do. Forgiveness is something hard-won we have the opportunity to participate in.

Forgiveness isn't an act of my determination. Forgiveness is only made possible by my cooperation.

God can redeem your life, even if damaged human relationships don't come back together.

The scenery for your life should not be the pit of pain that person dragged you down into. There's so much more to see and discover and experience.

Those who cooperate most fully with forgiveness are those who dance most freely in the beauty of redemption.

*Forgiveness is
the giving, and
so the receiving,
of life.*

—GEORGE MACDONALD



Write any other sentences that personally spoke to you from chapter 1 of *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

READ

Even when I walk through the darkest valley,
I will not be afraid, for you are close beside
me. . . . Surely your goodness and unfailing
love will pursue me all the days of my life.

—PSALM 23:4, 6 NLT

He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and
mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm
place to stand. . . . May your love and faithfulness
always protect me. . . . I am poor and needy. . . .
[Lord,] you are my help and my deliverer.

—PSALM 40:2, 11, 17



“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

—JOHN 8:32

To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

—EPHESIANS 4:7

A Note from Lysa

“You prepare a table before me . . . [and] anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows,” reads Psalm 23. “Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life” (vv. 5–6).

We are in relationship with a pursuing God who has a relentless love.

This is the love that seeks out the one lost sheep. This is the love that fights to rescue His people, Israel, out of slavery and pursues them with mercy when they rebel. Moved by compassion, He said, “I will heal their waywardness and love them freely” (Hosea 14:4).

This is the love that sent His Son to die to save His treasured people, the love that overpowers everything else.

Here we are with our sorrow and fear, our sin and resentments overwhelming us. And He has come running. He stands at the top of the pit we’re stuck in, reaching down to pull us up into the orbit of His all-conquering love.

He wants us to grab hold of Him so He can do in our lives what only He can do.

JOURNAL

Is there any part of you that is stuck living in unforgiveness? How are you experiencing the effects of that?

Pursuing forgiveness involves the decision to take away the power from the people who hurt you. How would things change for you if you no longer felt like they had that power?

God offers you an exchange: release your demand for the people who hurt you to repent, pay you back, be reprimanded, or suffer like you have, and you'll receive the freedom to move on. How does that sound to you today? What does it make you think and feel?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

In this chapter of *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*, we read, "Forgiveness isn't always about doing something for a human relationship but rather being obedient to what God has instructed us to do." In what way does this idea affect your thinking about forgiveness?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

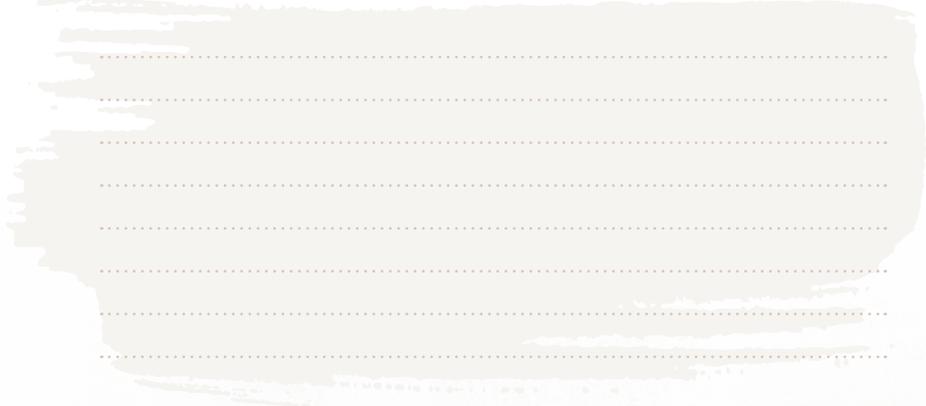
.....



This one is a tough one, and it's okay to come back to it later or skip it if you're not ready.

Reread these statements: "My first inclination most of the time isn't to bless those who hurt me. . . . My first inclination is to do the very thing I'm so critical of them doing. . . . And when sin is my choice, the cover of darkness is my preference."

I am not bringing this up to stir up more hardship or pain for you. I can name many ways I have done this, and I know how hard it is to admit. How have you seen yourself doing this too? What do you see resulting from it?



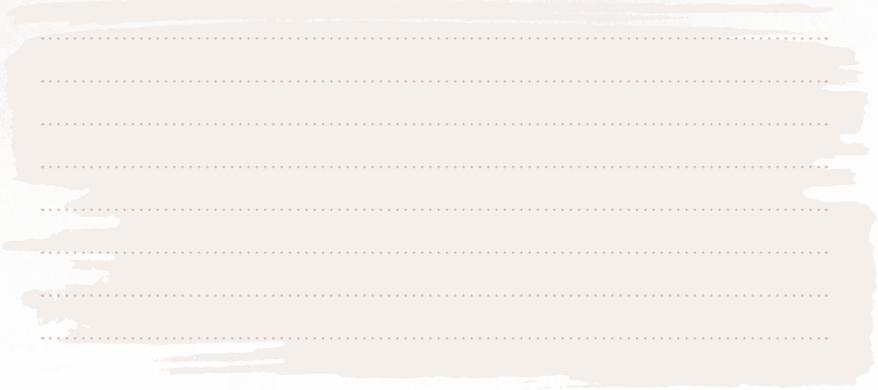
God invites you to *join Him* in His work of forgiveness. He wants to bring it into your life and to the people around you. He's not asking you to muscle your way to "being nice," or pretend things are fine, or even tidy up your internal mess. He's asking for your willingness to depend on His strength for every part of it.

He's offering you forgiveness and a way for you to offer that forgiveness to others. *He is the source for both.*

You can move in this direction without fully understanding it. And you can do it while you're feeling everything you're feeling right now. Emotional healing is a separate issue that will take

time. For now, you just need to grab God's hand. Let Him pull you out of that pit of pain, free you from unforgiveness, and lead you in the way of healing from here.

Forgiveness is one of our best weapons against the enemy. How does that speak to you, and what do you think it means?



How could the experience of forgiveness be good for your heart in this season?



How can you begin to cooperate with God in this process of forgiveness?

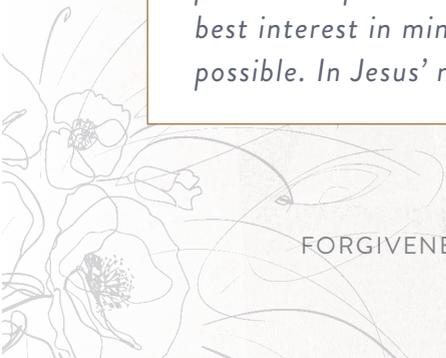


Give yourself time to sit with your difficult emotions—not to wallow in them but to fully acknowledge them. It’s important to do this before you rush past them to the next step. What might that look like for you?



PRAY

Father, I want to be a person who walks in the freedom of forgiveness with no hinderance or weight holding me down. I've got questions, some lingering confusion, and hurts that are stacked up in my life. Will You open my mind and heart as I read, and show me the truth You offer me in Your Word as I move toward forgiveness? Thank You for caring about my heart and having such compassion for the pain I've experienced. Knowing You only have my best interest in mind helps me believe forgiveness is possible. In Jesus' name, amen.







FORGIVING WHAT YOU CAN'T FORGET

by **LYSA TERKEURST**

Why should I have to be the one who forgives when I'm the one who has already suffered the most?

We know God commands us to forgive. But **how**, when the hurt plays over and over in our mind? And **why**, when we have already suffered so much? And, **are there exceptions**, such as when the other person keeps inflicting pain?

Lysa TerKeurst has walked this journey, carrying so many wounds that felt unforgivable, that she at first refused to write this book! But after more than 1,000 hours of theological study, Lysa has discovered that Scripture not only offers the truth about forgiveness that our souls desperately need, but practical ways to let go of our bound-up resentment and finally heal.

If you have felt stuck in a cycle of unresolved pain, or resistant to forgiving people who aren't willing to make things right, you need the life-giving freedom that comes with learning how to *forgive what you can't forget*.

LEARN MORE