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"A WOMAN NOT ASHAMED"**

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Announcement of the winner will be made February 1.**

**DAY 8 – The Wealth of Forgiveness**

One thing is clear – Christians are expected to forgive. But it is the hardest thing to ever do. Even when we say the words, our hearts are so tender and wounded, that the pain often comes up to remind us of the damage that was done and the flood of emotions come trailing along right behind it. I often wondered why it is so hard to forgive. Isn't that what Christ taught the disciples? Isn't that what He did on the cross for us? Where did He get his superpowers to forgive those Jewish religious leaders that plotted to kill him, or the disciples who tucked tail and ran when the going got tough? Or the Roman soldiers who whipped him mercilessly and stripped Him of His clothes and humiliated Him by spitting on Him like He was trash and gambling for his clothes to mock him even more? Where did He get the power to still sacrifice His life for them and even utter before death to intercede on their behalf? Just thinking about all of this as I type it makes me feel some type of way; I mean, I get all up in my emotions and I go from 0 to 100 from angry to humble to ashamed.

In 2009, I experienced a blow to my spirit like never before. Someone I trusted and respected turned their back on me and sold me for less than thirty pieces of silver. I was never the same with that person after that. So many people preached forgiveness to me that I wanted to slap them – no, I'm going to tell the truth – I wanted to punch them in the face, like real hard. I was hurting, angry, trying to do what was right, and I was being betrayed and then placed on the stake. But even in my anger and frustration, I did realize that I had to forgive the person. And it was because it was 'the Christian thing to do.' But that wasn't enough for me. I said the words, but deep inside I seethed thinking of what they had done.

I grew up handling many hurts and betrayals, and to think that someone I truly respected decided that to justify wrong for the sake of blood was better than to be impartial to the truth, was something that damned my soul. I was already in hell in my marriage at the time, and then for the people that I clung onto for strength to start cutting away at me piece by piece was enough to send me over the edge. I was ready to hate everyone in my path – no matter who it was. My walls were back up in full force and I was getting ready to throw away the key to a faraway place never to be retrieved again.

But forgiveness stepped in. God knew my pain, He knew my heart. He knew what I had been trying to do, and He knew that I needed healing.... And that was the key. Healing. Forgiveness is a healing agent. It's like when you get a cut and you put on some of that soothing antibiotic cream? You know that it's going to start protecting your cut from germs, infection, and start healing the wound. That's what I needed and God knew how to give it to me. He started taking me gently (because I was oh, so fragile) by the hand and leading me through His word. And on days when I just was so overwhelmed with anger, frustration and hurt and couldn't crack open my bible, He would send people my way to love on me in ways that were unexpected, but necessary.

God didn't browbeat me to say that I needed to forgive people so I wouldn't go to hell. He showed me the wealth in forgiveness. He showed me what I would be missing in my life if I didn't forgive. He revealed the love, compassion, and strength that I would miss out on. Because when you really forgive, and what I mean by that is you no longer hold that person "guilty" for offending you, even if it crosses your mind every now and again, you have freed them of being guilty and condemned. You may have to forgive them over and over again. Some offenses are so deep that it takes time to heal. But God is merciful, and as long

as we are seeking to forgive, seeking to heal, seeking to let go, seeking to learn from it, seeking to grow in it, seeking to love past it, then God is there to get you through the process.

Forgiveness is an ugly process. I don't mean the kind where somebody step on your shoe and you say, "Oh, it's okay. I know you didn't mean it." No, I'm talking about the kind where you have given your heart to someone and they take it and cut it up in little pieces and have the nerve to sprinkle those pieces in your face and have no remorse for it. I'm talking about the kind that do that junk and say, "Well, you're a Christian, so it doesn't matter what I do, you have to let me off the hook about it." Those are the kinds of hurt that comes from family, friends, and the church.

But don't get discouraged in the process. God is there, and He's not there to condemn you and remind you of hellfire if you don't do it right then. He's there to show you the wealth in it. When you finally can forgive, you gain a new strength that you never knew existed. You can handle just about anything. You grow so much in knowing how to love – I mean truly love. And it doesn't make you a pushover, but it increases your wisdom on how and when to just let go and not waste your pearls on people who don't appreciate them. Forgiveness heals you. You are no longer bound by that wound. It helps you to let it go! It no longer has control over you and dictates every relationship you have after the offense. Forgiveness helps you to truly experience joy. That was the oddest thing to me, that God would give me joy in forgiveness. I mean the kind of joy that you get when you've been cooped up in the house for several days and a long-time friend calls you up and says we're going to the mall and out to your favorite restaurant; that kind of joy. The kind that makes you feel free and happy.

I'm thankful for the wealth of forgiveness, and how as long as I'm *seeking* it, He will walk me to it. Let that be your prayer today. You may be holding onto some hurts that have kept you bound, messed up some relationships, or kept you brooding. Don't feel that God is standing over you with a looming bolt of lightning ready to erase your name from the Book of Life because you're hurting. Doggone it, someone hurt you! Admit that; admit that you're mad, and you want to hurt them back, then give it over to God. Tell Him you want to start forgiving, not because it's the Christian thing to do but because you want to experience the wealth in forgiveness.

**Psalm 146:7-8** "He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord **sets prisoners free**, the Lord **gives sight** to the blind, the Lord **lifts up those who are bowed down**, the Lord loves the righteous."

**John 8:36** "So if the Son, **sets you free, you are free indeed.**"