

RECONCILIATION: WHEN ENEMIES BECOME FRIENDS

I. Romans 5:6-11 + Various Other Scriptures

A. Reconciliation is when two people at enmity are restored to friendship. God has reconciled us, former enemies, to Himself through the sacrifice of His Son who bore His wrath which we deserved. God did not just forgive our sins, He paid for them with the precious blood of His only Son. Love compelled Him. And that same love is meant to move us to reconcile with others. Is that possible? Yes! Even expected...

B. Romans 5:6-11 (ESV) 6 *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7* *For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— 8* *but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9* *Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God. 10* *For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life. 11* *More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (Has God turned your enmity towards Him into friendship?)*

C. Before the Apostle Paul was apprehended by Christ on the road to Damascus, his name was *Saul*. He was a fierce opponent of Jesus' followers. He was a zealous Pharisee who went on a rampage to wipe out Christianity which he viewed as an errant sect. Saul was a Jewish terrorist. He was an enemy of God.

D. Before *Philip* the evangelist took the Gospel to Samaria and other places beyond Jerusalem, he was one of the *Seven* chosen to oversee the ministry of feeding poor widows. Philip's love manifested in serving. He was *faithful in a little and made faithful in much*. Philip & Paul (formerly Saul) will meet in today's text.

E. Acts 6:1-7 (ESV) introduces us to Philip...

1) V1: 1 *Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists (Greek-speaking Jews who'd become believers) arose against the Hebrews (Aramaic-speaking believers) because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. (The cost package for becoming a follower of Christ, coupled with no public assistance for those in need, caused monumental challenges for those disenfranchised. But it also presented enormous opportunities to tangibly demonstrate the love of Christ.)*

2) V2-3: 2 *And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3* *Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ('You choose them, we'll ordain them, then we'll release them to serve with their talents, gifts, & graces.)*

3) V4-5: 4 *But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5* *And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. (Notice their names have a Greek ring to them. The goal is not only to shift a burden off the shoulders of the *Twelve*, but to make sure the most needy are fed and cared for, regardless of the barriers of language or culture.)*

4) V6-7: 6 *These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. 7* *And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. (But soon Camelot would be interrupted and the church would be scattered.)*

F. First among these Seven servant-leaders, predecessors to church deacons, was a brother named Stephen. He not only served in the widow-feeding, he was proclaiming the Good News of Jesus with signs following. Acts 6:8 says: "And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people." But because of the conversions and miracles, Jewish opposition arose. Stephen was seized by angry Jews. Given the chance to speak, he preached the Gospel and Luke recorded Stephen's powerful sermon in full. (See Acts 7:1-60)

G. Acts 7:54-60 (ESV) is the response to Stephen's preaching: 54 *Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. 55* *But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56* *And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." 57* *But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. 58* *Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59* *And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60* *And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (What's next?)*

H. Acts 8:1-8 (ESV) Luke's narrative continues...

1) **V1-2: 1** And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. **2** Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. (Perhaps Philip was among them?)

2) **V3: 3** But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. (Acts 22:4-5 (ESV) is Paul's own confession: "I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished." (Ever wondered how many children witnessed Saul's treachery against their mommies & daddies & grandparents?))

3) **V4: 4** Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. (They were 'led' outta town-like with shotgun lead! Remember Jesus had told the disciples they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the utter most parts of the earth. Persecution was apt motivation to engage in obedience.)

4) **V5-6: 5** Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. **6** And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. **7** For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. **8** So there was much joy in that city. (Samaria was experiencing their own great awakening!)

I. The Samaritan awakening continued. Peter & John were summoned. Scores were baptized. The Holy Spirit fell upon the Samaritans. A magician named Simon offered to pay for the Spirit's power and was rebuked by Peter. In the midst of all that, Philip was visited by an angel who instructed him to leave Samaria and head down a desert road towards Africa. There he encountered an Ethiopian Official who *happened* to be reading Isaiah 53. Philip shared the Gospel and baptized him. Acts 8:39-40 (ESV) is what happens next for Philip: **39** And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. **40** But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea. (Philip apparently settles in Caesarea on the Mediterranean. He takes a wife. They raise four Godly daughters. 20-some years pass. Then one day word spreads that the one once called Saul, now the Apostle Paul, is coming to Caesarea bound for Jerusalem. Acts 21:8-9 (ESV) Luke reports: **8** On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. **9** He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied.

J. Had Paul (as Saul) ever met Philip prior to this? We don't know. Did they know of each other? Most likely. Had Philip witnessed Stephen's stoning some 20+ years before? Likely. Did he see those cloaks piled at Saul's feet while the stones flew? Probably. Did Philip personally know others impacted by Saul's rampage of terror? Certainly. Did Philip ever look over his back when preaching in Samaria? Maybe. And when Paul entered Philip's house and they greeted one another, was it awkward or was it joyful and redemptive? Can you imagine Paul saying to Philip, "Hey what brought you from Jerusalem to Caesarea?" And maybe Philip smiles at Paul and says, "Sir, you had something to do with that!"

K. Meanwhile we see how reconciliation took place between two men who were once at enmity. They were now friends, brothers in Christ, forever linked with the birth of Christianity following Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and ascension.

II. So how might reconciliation play out in our own lives?

A. We often say, "It's a small world!" But it's an even smaller town! A small county! So what if you have an enemy walk into this church some Sunday? What if it's the boss who fired you or the coach who benched you or the thief who stole from you or the neighbor who cursed at you? What if your ex-spouse or an ex-in-law shows up? If regeneration leads to reconciliation vertically, should it not lead to reconciliation horizontally? If there's no difference in such matters between the world and us, what impact will we ever have? If grudges are maintained and feuds rage on, will anyone thirst for what we have to offer? How many victims of Saul had to be reconciled to Paul?

B. Corrie ten Boom and her sister, Betsie, were placed in the Ravensbrück concentration camp for secretly hiding Jews during the German occupation of Holland. Conditions there were horrible. Betsie died there shortly before the Allies liberated the camp. After the war, Corrie shared a message on forgiveness at a church in Munich. Her message was immediately tested when one of her former Nazi guards approached her after she spoke. Here's Corrie in her own words:

"It was the first time since my release that I had been face to face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze. "You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk," he was saying. "I was a guard in there." No, he did not remember me. "But since that time," he went on, "I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fräulein"—again the hand came out—"will you forgive me?" And I stood there—I whose sins had every day to be forgiven—and could not. Betsie had died in that place—could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do. For I had to do it—I knew that... "Jesus, help me!" I prayed silently. "I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling." And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. "I forgive you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart!" For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then."

C. 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (AMP) will take us home today. May the Holy Spirit deliver these words to His home within your hearts: **14** For the love of Christ controls and compels us, because we have concluded this, that One died for all, therefore all died; **15** and He died for all, so that all those who live would no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and was raised for their sake. **16** So from now on we regard no one from a human point of view [according to worldly standards and values]. Though we have known Christ from a human point of view, now we no longer know Him in this way. **17** Therefore if anyone is in Christ [that is, grafted in, joined to Him by faith in Him as Savior], he is a new creature [reborn and renewed by the Holy Spirit]; the old things [the previous moral and spiritual condition] have passed away. Behold, new things have come [because spiritual awakening brings a new life]. **18** But all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ [making us acceptable to Him] and gave us the ministry of reconciliation [so that by our example we might bring others to Him], **19** that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting people's sins against them [but canceling them]. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation [that is, restoration to favor with God]. **20** So we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making His appeal through us; we [as Christ's representatives] plead with you on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God. **21** He made Christ who knew no sin to [judicially] be sin on our behalf, so that in Him we would become the righteousness of God [that is, we would be made acceptable to Him and placed in a right relationship with Him by His gracious lovingkindness].

* Close with Prayer...

[Scriptures, Videos, & Bonus Stuff](#)

[Romans 5:6-11 \(ESV\)](#)

6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. **7** For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— **8** but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. **9** Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God. **10** For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life. **11** More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

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1 Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. **2** And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. **3** Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. **4** But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." **5** And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. **6** These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. **7** And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

[Acts 7:54-60 \(ESV\)](#)

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Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." **60** And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

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Acts 21:8-9 (ESV)

8 On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. **9** He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied.

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (AMP)

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Film Clips & Article Links

Corrie ten Boom: A Message on Forgiveness (In Her Own Words)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hH9nwFb87u4>

Corrie ten Boom Forgives Nazi Guard - Preposterous Project

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ue8msG9HgDM>

Bitterness, Justice, & Forgiveness - John Piper

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCoptz67tCA>

What is the Difference Between Forgiveness and Reconciliation - Mark Driscoll

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDvaqfJ39Co>

Biblical Peacemaking / Reconciling and Amending - Matt Chandler (Full Sermon)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OdTdkPyhQA>

Bonus Stuff

Luke 6:27-36 (ESV)

27 "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, **28** bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. **29** To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. **30** Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. **31** And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. **32** "If you love

those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. **33** And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. **34** And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. **35** But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. **36** Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

Romans 12:9-21 (ESV)

9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. **10** Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. **11** Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. **12** Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. **13** Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. **14** Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. **15** Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. **16** Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. **17** Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. **18** If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. **19** Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord." **20** To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." **21** Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Ephesians 4:17-32 (ESV)

17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. **18** They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. **19** They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. **20** But that is not the way you learned Christ!— **21** assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus, **22** to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, **23** and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, **24** and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. **25** Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. **26** Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, **27** and give no opportunity to the devil. **28** Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. **29** Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. **30** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. **31** Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. **32** Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Corrie ten Boom on Forgiveness

Excerpt from, *The Hiding Place*.

It was in a church in Munich that I saw him, a balding heavysset man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands. People were filing out of the basement room where I had just spoken, moving along the rows of wooden chairs to the door at the rear. It was 1947 and I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives. It was the truth they needed most to hear in that bitter, bombed-out land, and I gave them my favorite mental picture. Maybe because the sea is never far from a Hollander's mind, I liked to think that that's where forgiven sins were thrown. "When we confess our sins," I said, "God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever."

The solemn faces stared back at me, not quite daring to believe. There were never questions after a talk in Germany in 1947. People stood up in silence, in silence collected their wraps, in silence left the room. And that's when I saw him, working his way forward against the others. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones. It came back with a rush: the huge room with its harsh overhead lights, the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor, the shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment skin. Betsie, how thin you were!

Betsie and I had been arrested for concealing Jews in our home during the Nazi occupation of Holland; this man had been a guard at Ravensbrück concentration camp where we were sent. Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: "A fine message, fräulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!" And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course—how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women? But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. It was the first time since my release that I had been face to face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.

"You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk," he was saying. "I was a guard in there." No, he did not remember me. "But since that time," he went on, "I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fräulein"—again the hand came out—"will you forgive me?"

And I stood there—I whose sins had every day to be forgiven—and could not. Betsie had died in that place—could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do. For I had to do it—I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. "If you do not forgive men their trespasses," Jesus says, "neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

I knew it not only as a commandment of God, but as a daily experience. Since the end of the war I had had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that.

And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.

"Jesus, help me!" I prayed silently. "I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling." And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. "I forgive you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart!" For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then.

And having thus learned to forgive in this hardest of situations, I never again had difficulty in forgiving: I wish I could say it! I wish I could say that merciful and charitable thoughts just naturally flowed from me from then on. But they didn't. If there's one thing I've learned at 80 years of age, it's that I can't store up good feelings and behavior—but only draw them fresh from God each day. Maybe I'm glad it's that way. For every time I go to Him, He teaches me something else.

I recall the time, some 15 years ago, when some Christian friends whom I loved and trusted did something which hurt me. You would have thought that, having forgiven the Nazi guard, this would have been child's play. It wasn't. For weeks I seethed inside. But at last I asked God again to work His miracle in me. And again it happened: first the cold-blooded decision, then the flood of joy and peace. I had forgiven my friends; I was restored to my Father.

Then, why was I suddenly awake in the middle of the night, hashing over the whole affair again? My friends! I thought. People I loved! If it had been strangers, I wouldn't have minded so. I sat up and switched on the light. "Father, I thought it was all forgiven! Please help me do it!"

But the next night I woke up again. They'd talked so sweetly too! Never a hint of what they were planning. "Father!" I cried in alarm. "Help me!"

His help came in the form of a kindly Lutheran pastor to whom I confessed my failure after two sleepless weeks. "Up in that church tower," he said, nodding out the window, "is a bell which is rung by pulling on a rope. But you know what? After the sexton lets go of the rope, the bell keeps on swinging. First ding then dong. Slower and slower until there's a final dong and it stops. "I believe the same thing is true of forgiveness. When we forgive someone, we take our hand off the rope. But if we've been tugging at our grievances for a long time, we mustn't be surprised if the old angry thoughts keep coming for a while. They're just the ding-dongs of the old bell slowing down."

And so it proved to be. There were a few more midnight reverberations, a couple of dings when the subject came up in my conversation. But the force—which was my willingness in the matter—had gone out of them. They came less and less often and at last stopped altogether. And so I discovered another secret of forgiveness: that we can trust God not only above our emotions, but also above our thoughts.

And still He had more to teach me, even in this single episode. Because many years later, in 1970, an American with whom I had shared the ding-dong principle came to visit me in Holland and met the people involved. "Aren't those the friends who let you down?" he asked as they left my apartment. "Yes," I said a little smugly. "You can see it's all forgiven." "By you, yes," he said. "But what about them? Have they accepted your forgiveness?" "They say there's nothing to forgive! They deny it ever happened. But I can prove it!" I went eagerly to my desk. "I have it in black and white! I saved all their letters and I can show you where—" "Corrie!" My friend slipped his arm through mine and gently closed the drawer. "Aren't you the one whose sins are at the bottom of the sea? And are the sins of your friends etched in black and white?"

For an anguishing moment I could not find my voice. "Lord Jesus," I whispered at last, "who takes all my sins away, forgive me for preserving all these years the evidence against others! Give me grace to burn all the blacks and whites as a sweet-smelling sacrifice to Your glory."

I did not go to sleep that night until I had gone through my desk and pulled out those letters—curling now with age—and fed them all into my little coal-burning grate. As the flames leaped and glowed, so did my heart. "Forgive us our trespasses," Jesus taught us to pray, "as we forgive those who trespass against us." In the ashes of those letters I was seeing yet another facet of His mercy. What more He would teach me about forgiveness in the days ahead I didn't know, but tonight's was good news enough.

When we bring our sins to Jesus, He not only forgives them, He makes them as if they had never been.

- Corrie ten Boom, excerpt from, *The Hiding Place*. Posted in Guidepost Magazine, on Jul 24, 2014. To read the article online, go to: <https://www.guideposts.org/better-living/positive-living/guideposts-classics-corrie-ten-boom-on-forgiveness>