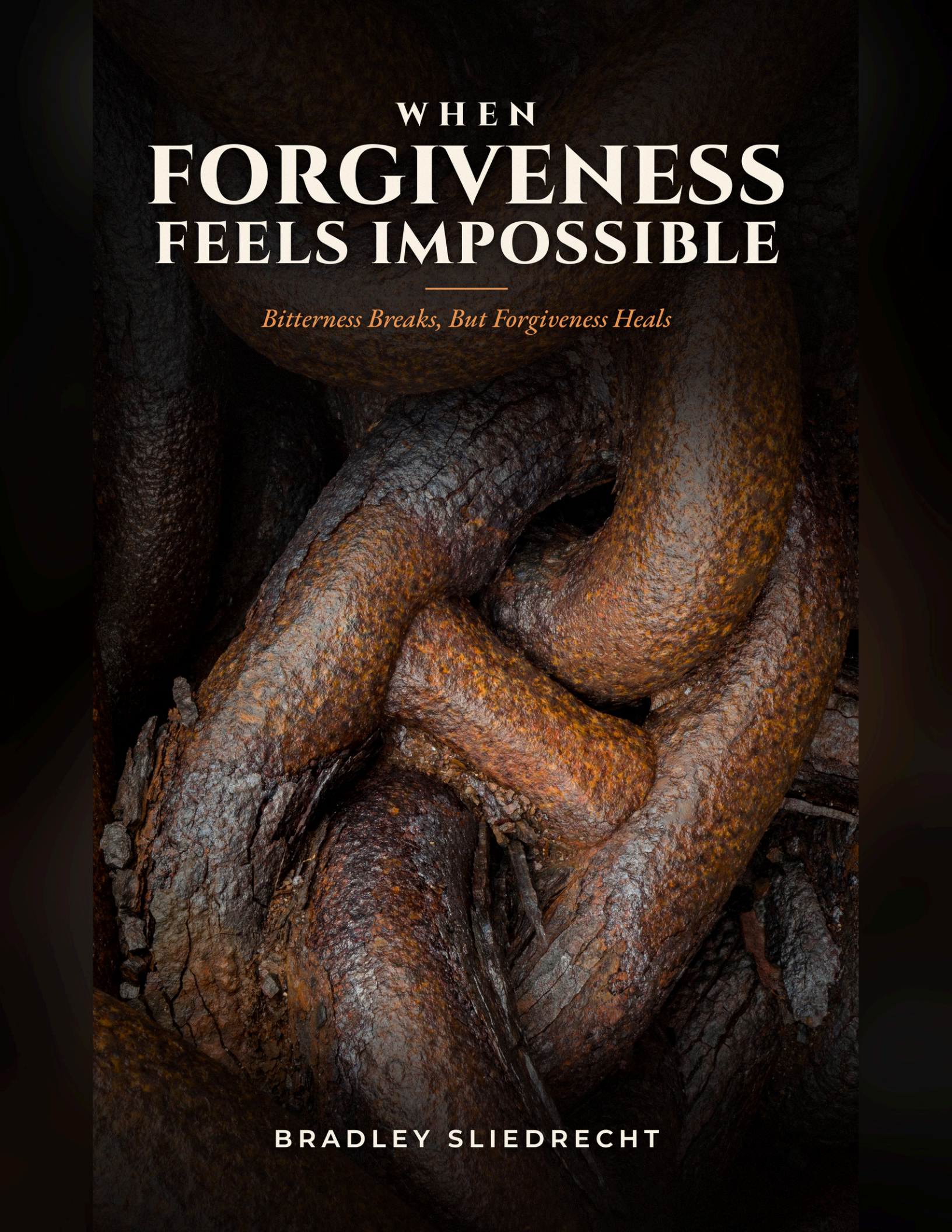

WHEN
FORGIVENESS
FEELS IMPOSSIBLE
Bitterness Breaks, But Forgiveness Heals
BRADLEY SLIEDRECHT

Bitterness Breaks, But Forgiveness Heals:

Break Free from the Cycle of Offence and Walk in Healing

Bradley Sliedrecht

www.presentingthegospel.com

Disclaimer

The content of this book, **Bitterness Breaks, But Forgiveness Heals,** is intended for educational and informational purposes and is based on the author's personal study, research, and understanding of Scripture. Readers are encouraged to study the Bible for themselves and seek additional insights from trusted spiritual leaders, mentors, and theological resources.

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Dedication

To my wife, **Vanessa Sliedrecht**—
Thank you for walking with me through every storm. Your love, grace, and strength have been a reflection of Christ to me in ways words cannot fully express.

To my children, **Sarah, Calum, Joshua, and Shanna**—
You are a constant reminder of God's mercy and purpose. May you always choose healing over hurt and love over offence. I pray this book becomes part of the legacy we pass on—not of bitterness, but of freedom.

To my family—
Even though many of us are distant because of the past, this book was born from the hope that what was broken can still be redeemed.

Lies have divided us. Deep pains have carved gorges between us that feel impassable. In some cases, the pain we've carried has implanted realities that never truly existed. But I still believe in healing. I think grace can reach across every divide. And I still love each of you, even from afar.

About the Author

Bradley Sliedrecht is an evangelist, Bible teacher, and global minister of the Gospel. He holds an Associate and a Bachelor's degree in Christian Leadership, with concentrations in Advanced Biblical Studies and Christian Philosophy. He also earned a Bachelor's and a Master of Divinity. He is currently completing a Ph.D. through Karunya Bible Institute in India, with his dissertation titled *The Prosperity Gospel: An Analysis of Its Evolution and Influence in Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity, 1940–2024*. He is also pursuing a Master's in Pastoral Ministry with Pentecostal Biblical Seminary in the USA.

Bradley has ministered across continents, equipping the Church with sound doctrine and passionately proclaiming the Gospel to the unreached. His teaching is marked by theological clarity, hermeneutical depth, and a Spirit-led passion for truth.

He has authored multiple books to strengthen believers and correct doctrinal confusion in today's Church.

Bradley has been married to Vanessa since 2000. They are the proud parents of four children. Together, they continue to obey God's call to serve His Kingdom with integrity, courage, and compassion.

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Introduction

When Forgiveness Feels Impossible

This book was not born from theory or distant reflection. It was born from pain—real, unresolved, generational pain.

I come from a family that never fully recovered. The wounds remained long after childhood ended, and each sibling grew up, married, and had their own children. We carried the scars of old offences like silent badges. Some of us wore them in anger, others in silence. But the effect was the same: a family bound by history instead of healing.

Over time, I found myself trying to help others forgive while still learning what forgiveness meant for me. I preached about mercy, taught about grace, and prayed with those crushed by betrayal. But behind the ministry, I still wrestled with the bitterness I had absorbed and the pain I hadn't fully surrendered.

This book is the result of that journey.

If you're reading this, you may be in that same place. Maybe the wound was from a parent who never affirmed you. Perhaps it was a spouse who broke a sacred trust. Maybe it's a sibling who weaponizes the past, or a friend who turned distance into resentment. Perhaps you're not the one holding the offence—you're just trying to live with someone who does, and the weight of their unforgiveness keeps spilling into your life.

Bitterness doesn't need to shout to destroy. Sometimes it's quiet. It seeps into conversations, twists intentions, and builds walls where there should be doors. Over time, it hardens the heart and rewrites the truth. It convinces us that we're protecting ourselves when, in fact, we're imprisoning ourselves.

Forgiveness, on the other hand, can feel impossible. It feels like surrendering power, like letting go of justice. It feels like betraying our pain. But here's the truth: forgiveness is not weakness. It is not denial. And it is not saying what happened was okay.

Forgiveness is refusing to carry what Christ already carried to the cross. It's letting go of what poisons the soul. It's not about forgetting what happened—it's about refusing to let it define who you become.

This book is written for both sides of the story.

To the one who cannot seem to let go, I pray you find the courage to open your heart again, to release not because they deserve it, but because you need to live free.

To the one who is being hurt by someone who won't let go, I pray you find peace and clarity, to draw wise boundaries without letting your heart grow cold.

And to every person who has ever asked, *"How can I forgive when it still hurts?"*—this book is for you.

As you walk through these pages, my prayer is not that you forget what happened. I pray that you find healing so deep that the past no longer holds your future hostage.

Let's walk this road together—into the kind of freedom only forgiveness can offer.

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Chapter 1

Bitterness Breaks

"See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many."

— Hebrews 12:15 (NIV)

Bitterness doesn't begin as bitterness. It begins as hurt.

Someone said something that pierced you. Someone did something- or failed to do something—and the wound went deeper than you expected. And for a while, you carried it. Quietly. Maybe even righteously. You had every reason to be upset. You were betrayed. You were misunderstood. You were abandoned, dismissed, or wronged.

But somewhere along the way, that pain began to change shape. Instead of healing, it hardened. Instead of leading you to the cross, it built a wall around your heart. And now, long after the moment passed, the impact still lingers—not just in memory, but in behaviour, relationships, and even how you view yourself and others.

Bitterness breaks. It doesn't simply wound—it infects. It poisons the well of our soul and distorts how we see the world. It causes us to speak with suspicion, remember with revision, and live with reaction.

Worse still, bitterness spreads. Hebrews 12 warns that it "defiles many." Bitterness rarely stays isolated. It leaks. It becomes the lens through which we see family, friends, church, and God Himself. It becomes the voice that says, *"You'll never change,"* or *"They'll always hurt you,"* or *"This is why you keep your guard up."*

Some people mistake bitterness for strength. They think holding onto offence means they're setting a boundary or staying wise. But the truth is: bitterness isn't a boundary—it's a burden. And sooner or later, it begins to break the one carrying it.

It breaks families, shatters marriages, divides siblings, and prevents generations from reconciliation. It turns godly correction into a personal attack, rewrites the past to protect the present, and refuses to admit where healing is needed.

It also hardens the heart.

What begins as righteous anger can quietly become self-righteous defence. Instead of seeking understanding, we justify our walls. Instead of pursuing healing, we collect evidence to stay hurt. We say things like, *"They don't deserve my forgiveness,"* or *"I've forgiven, but I'll never forget,"* but deep down, we know we're still rehearsing the pain.

If that's where you find yourself, let this be a moment of honesty.

- Are you rehearsing pain more than you're pursuing healing?
- Have you become suspicious of people who genuinely love you, simply because they remind you of someone who didn't?
- Have your conversations become shaped more by who hurt you than by who healed you?

Bitterness cannot coexist with healing. One will eventually drive out the other.

But the good news is this: what bitterness breaks, forgiveness can begin to heal. Not by pretending nothing happened, not by excusing sin or minimizing damage, but by allowing the grace of God to reach the places we've tried to keep hidden, guarded, or hardened.

Bitterness grows in the soil of pain that's never surrendered. But forgiveness begins when we say, "God, I can't carry this anymore."

And He says, "I already carried it to the cross."

Where Am I in This?

1. What pain am I still holding onto that I haven't brought fully to God?
2. Have I noticed bitterness leaking into my words, assumptions, or relationships?
3. What would change if I truly believed Jesus could heal this wound?

Prayer

Father,
I don't want bitterness to define me. I don't want pain to shape how I see people or how I treat those you've placed in my life. I bring you the wounds that still linger—whether they're fresh or decades old. Search my heart. Expose what I've buried. Uproot every bitter root and replace it with your healing. I trust You to begin a work in me that only You can finish. Help me walk in forgiveness—not in my own strength, but in Yours.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Chapter 2

The Lie of "Letting It Go"

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."
— Romans 12:17–18 (NIV)

"Just let it go."

That's the advice people give when they don't know what else to say. Sometimes it's well-meaning. Sometimes it's dismissive. But often, it's unhelpful—especially when what you're trying to "let go" has wrapped itself around your identity, your history, and your heart.

Forgiveness is not the same thing as letting it go. In fact, the idea that we should simply release the offence without dealing with the pain can be more damaging than the offence itself. It leads people to suppress wounds instead of healing them. It pressures believers to act like nothing happened, while they're still bleeding inside.

You don't let go of betrayal like you let go of a grudge over a parking space. You don't let go of abandonment or abuse the same way you let go of someone forgetting your birthday. Deep wounds require deep healing—and that healing begins with honesty, not denial.

Forgiveness isn't about pretending. It's not about minimizing. And it certainly isn't about enabling further abuse. Forgiveness is about refusing to let that moment in time dictate the rest of your story. It's choosing to surrender the offence to God—not because they've made it right, but because God is just and your soul is worth more than the weight of resentment.

The apostle Paul tells us, *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."* That statement acknowledges something vital—peace isn't always possible with everyone. But it is always possible within you.

Letting go, in the way the world defines it, sounds like moving on without processing. But biblically, peace comes after surrender. Not surrendering to the offender—but to God. To His justice, His wisdom, His timing, and His mercy.

That kind of surrender does two things:

1. **It frees us from the illusion of control.**
   We can't change the past. We can't make someone apologize. But we can refuse to be chained to their choices.
2. **It invites God into the pain.**
   We stop pretending to be strong, and we let the Comforter do what only He can do.

If "letting it go" means pushing the pain away, we're still carrying it. If it means minimizing the hurt to keep the peace, we've traded truth for pretense. But if it means laying it at the feet of

Jesus, acknowledging its weight and trusting Him to carry it—then we've begun the real work of forgiveness.

Forgiveness doesn't deny justice. It hands justice over to God. It doesn't erase the wound. It welcomes the Healer. And when done through the power of the Holy Spirit, forgiveness leads to something far greater than "letting go"—it leads to freedom.

Where Am I in This?

1. Have I confused forgiveness with pretending it didn't hurt?
2. Am I trying to "let it go" without truly surrendering it to God?
3. What would it look like to invite God into this specific pain?

Prayer

Lord,
You see the parts of me that are still hurting. You know the weight I've carried and the pressure I've felt to move on too quickly. I don't want to pretend anymore. I want to heal. I choose to lay this offence at Your feet—not because it didn't hurt, but because I can't carry it alone. You are my Defender and my Healer. Teach me to forgive as You have forgiven me. I trust You with justice. I trust You with my heart.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Chapter 3

When You're the One Who Can't Forgive

"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."
— Colossians 3:13 (NIV)

What if you've tried? What if you've prayed the prayers, spoken the words, and told yourself you've forgiven—but the moment you see their face, or hear their name, or remember what happened, something in you tightens again?

This is the struggle so many believers silently carry: they want to forgive—but they feel like they can't.

Forgiveness doesn't come naturally. It feels unfair. It feels like we're letting them off the hook. And when the offence is deep—abandonment, betrayal, abuse, manipulation—the idea of releasing that person can feel like betraying ourselves. It feels like saying what they did didn't matter.

But forgiveness is not denial. It's not weakness. It's not injustice. Forgiveness is an act of obedience that acknowledges the wrong—and still chooses the cross.

Let's be honest: sometimes the wound is old but still open. You thought you moved on. You told yourself you were over it. But then something triggered the memory, and the emotions came back like it happened yesterday. Does that mean you failed? Not necessarily. It may mean that the forgiveness needs to go deeper. You forgave as far as you understood. But God is inviting you to surrender what still lingers.

And sometimes the problem isn't just the pain—it's the narrative. The longer we hold on to offence, the more we rewrite what happened in our own favor. Bitterness distorts memory. It reinforces our innocence and magnifies their guilt. And over time, we don't just remember what they did—we relive it in a way that keeps us from seeing our own need for grace.

Ask yourself:

- Do I rehearse their offence more than I pray for their healing?
- Do I talk about them more than I talk to God about my heart?
- Do I need to be right, even if it means someone else gets hurt?

The truth is, you can't truly forgive without the Holy Spirit. You might be able to suppress anger. You might distance yourself. You might convince yourself that you've moved on. But deep, biblical forgiveness—"as the Lord forgave you"—is not a human achievement. It is the work of God within a surrendered heart.

Jesus didn't forgive from a place of emotional detachment. He forgave from the cross, while being wounded. *"Father, forgive them,"* He said, *"for they do not know what they are doing."* That was not passive acceptance—it was active surrender. He didn't just forgive because it was easy. He forgave because love demanded it.

If you feel like you can't forgive, you're in the right place to experience grace. You were never meant to do this in your own strength. You were meant to lean into Christ—to ask His Spirit to do in you what you cannot do yourself.

Forgiveness is not a feeling. It is a decision to trust God with justice, with healing, and with the outcome.

And if that's where you are right now, start here:

God, I can't. But I believe you can.

Where Am I in This?

1. Have I confused emotional pain with failure to forgive?
2. Am I willing to invite the Holy Spirit into the parts of me that still resist forgiveness?
3. What would change if I stopped trying to forgive on my own and started surrendering the process to God?

Prayer

Father,
You know how hard this is. You see the places in me that still hold onto pain—not because I want to, but because I don't know how to let go. I confess that I need Your help. I can't forgive like You do unless You change my heart. So, I surrender—not just the pain, but the pride, the fear, and the control. Teach me to forgive. Remind me of the mercy You showed me. And by Your Spirit, set me free.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Chapter 4

When You're the One Being Hurt by Bitterness

"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."
— Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)

Bitterness doesn't always live in you. Sometimes, it lives in someone close to you, and their refusal to forgive keeps piercing your life.

Maybe it's a spouse who won't let go of something from years ago. Maybe it's a parent who constantly brings up your failures. Maybe it's a sibling who twists your words, withholds affection, or attacks your character when you speak the truth.

When you're on the receiving end of someone else's bitterness, every conversation can feel like walking through a minefield. Even when you try to bring peace, they hear accusation. When you express pain, they feel threatened. And when you set boundaries, they call it rejection.

Bitterness often disguises itself as strength. It postures as clarity, control, or even protection. But at its core, it is fear—fear that healing will require letting go of identity, power, or justification. And when someone builds their life around their pain, they begin to see every person around them through the lens of past wounds.

But here's the truth: their bitterness is not your responsibility.

Yes, you may love them. Yes, you may have tried to make things right. But if someone clings to offence and uses it to manipulate, accuse, or divide—your job is not to carry their burden. Your job is to guard your own heart.

That doesn't mean becoming cold or distant. It doesn't mean refusing to love or pray. It means refusing to be controlled by their unresolved pain.

Here's what this might look like in your life:

- You stop trying to earn their peace by sacrificing your own.
- You speak truth in love, even when they twist your motives.
- You protect your children from emotional manipulation or spiritual confusion.
- You maintain boundaries—not out of spite, but out of wisdom.

Proverbs 4:23 doesn't say, *"Guard your relationships."* It says, *"Guard your heart."* Because what lives in your heart shapes everything else. If you allow someone else's bitterness to define your identity, your hope, or your view of yourself, you will eventually begin to act from pain instead of peace.

You cannot fix someone else's unwillingness to forgive. You can pray for them. You can love them. You can be available when they are ready. But you cannot change their heart—and it is not your calling to carry the weight of their offence.

So, what do you do?

You entrust them to God. You ask Him to soften what you cannot reach. You ask Him to protect your spirit from becoming bitter in return. You ask Him to show you how to remain tender without being manipulated.

And you walk in the freedom Christ gave you—even if they're not ready to walk in it with you.

Where Am I in This?

1. Have I taken on the responsibility of someone else's emotional healing?
2. Am I living in reaction to their pain—or in obedience to God's Word?
3. What boundaries need to be prayerfully considered so I can love well without being controlled?

Prayer

Lord,
You see the weight I've been carrying—the tension, the confusion, and the grief of trying to love someone who won't let go of the past. I lift them up to You now. I surrender their pain to You. I ask You to soften their heart, to heal what I cannot, and to free me from false guilt or misplaced responsibility. Help me guard my heart without becoming hardened. Teach me how to love without losing clarity. And give me strength to walk in truth, peace, and grace.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Chapter 5

The Cost of Carrying the Past

"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!"
— Isaiah 43:18–19 (NIV)

Some people don't realize how heavy the past is until it starts slowing down the present.

We think we're managing, we think we've moved on. But then a disagreement triggers an old wound, a conversation reopens a buried memory, or a name we haven't heard in years brings our peace to a halt. What we carried silently now speaks loudly—interrupting joy, stalling growth, and shaping our relationships.

The past becomes more than a memory. It becomes our interpreter.

We begin to project old pain onto new people. We assume motives. We overreact to minor issues because they echo past betrayals. We sabotage intimacy—not because others are untrustworthy, but because we've trained our hearts to expect rejection.

Bitterness isn't always loud. It can hide beneath high standards, sarcasm, or spiritual language. It might sound like, "I'm just being cautious," or "I know how people are," or "I've forgiven, but I'll never forget." But the root hasn't been healed—it's just been managed.

The cost of carrying the past is that it keeps us from embracing the new thing God is trying to do.

"Forget the former things," God says through the prophet Isaiah. Not because they didn't matter, but because they don't get to define the future. God doesn't dismiss the pain of the past—He invites us to surrender it. Why? Because He's doing a new thing, and the old thing will blind us to it.

Bitterness keeps us anchored to what was. Healing invites us into what could be.

But here's the hard part: letting go of the past means letting go of how it shaped you. It means re-learning how to think, how to trust, how to love. It means allowing God to redefine your story—not by erasing the pain, but by redeeming it.

It also means we have to stop rehearsing the story in a way that justifies our anger and vilifies everyone else. We must tell the truth—not just about what they did, but about how we responded. We must allow the Holy Spirit to reveal what we've buried under sarcasm, control, or independence.

That process isn't easy. But it's worth it.

The longer we hold onto the past, the more it costs us:

- The peace of the present
- The joy of genuine connection
- The clarity of truth over emotion
- The ability to grow beyond survival

You may not be able to forget what happened. But by the grace of God, you don't have to carry it anymore.

Jesus carried your sin. He also carried your sorrow. And in His hands, even the worst chapter of your life can be transformed into a testimony of redemption.

Where Am I in This?

1. Am I interpreting the present through the lens of past wounds?
2. What would I lose if I chose to stop rehearsing the past—and what might I gain?
3. Have I allowed the Holy Spirit to speak truth into the story I keep retelling?

Prayer

Father,
You know every detail of my past. You saw the moments I was wronged—and the moments I got stuck in what happened. I bring it all to You now. I don't want the past to steal my future. I don't want bitterness to speak louder than Your promises. Help me stop rehearsing what You've already offered to redeem. I choose today to believe that You are doing a new thing in me. And I surrender everything that stands in the way of that.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Chapter 6

Forgiving Without Reconciliation

"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."
— Romans 12:18 (NIV)

One of the most painful truths about forgiveness is this: not every story ends in reconciliation.

We long for it. We pray for it. We imagine the moment when the relationship is restored, the apologies are made, and everything is set right. But sometimes, that moment never comes. Sometimes the other person refuses to change. Sometimes they won't admit they were wrong. And sometimes, reconciliation would mean stepping back into a relationship that is still toxic, manipulative, or abusive.

So, what does forgiveness look like when reconciliation isn't possible—or safe?

It looks like obedience to God, even when peace with others is out of reach.

Paul's words in Romans 12 are full of both grace and realism: *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you…"* That means two things:

1. Peace isn't always possible.
2. But as far as it depends on you, your heart can still be right.

Forgiveness is your responsibility. Reconciliation is not. Forgiveness is a decision to release someone from the debt they owe you, to surrender your right to revenge, and to entrust the situation to God. Reconciliation requires two people. It requires trust to be rebuilt. It requires repentance, humility, and ongoing change.

Sometimes that happens. And when it does, it's beautiful. But sometimes, it doesn't. And when it doesn't, your call to forgive remains—because forgiveness isn't based on their actions, it's based on God's mercy in you.

This is where many people get stuck. They think, *"If I forgive, I have to let them back in."* But that's not true.

Forgiveness is not permission for repeated harm.
Forgiveness is not the same as trust.
Forgiveness does not remove the need for boundaries.

Jesus forgave fully, yet He didn't entrust Himself to everyone (John 2:24). He loved people, but He also walked away when their hearts were hard. He offered grace, but He spoke the truth without compromise. In doing so, He showed us how to forgive—and walk in wisdom.

Forgiveness without reconciliation may mean:

- You forgive a parent who still refuses to acknowledge what they did.
- You release a friend who betrayed you, even though they never apologized.
- You walk in peace with someone from a distance, not because you hate them—but because you've learned to love yourself enough to stay whole.

Boundaries are not a sign of unforgiveness. They are often the evidence that healing is beginning. They protect what God is restoring in you.

So, if reconciliation isn't possible right now, don't confuse that with failure. God sees your heart. He knows what you've released. And He will honour your obedience—even when the other person doesn't.

Where Am I in This?

1. Have I confused forgiveness with reconciliation?
2. Am I carrying guilt for setting a boundary God never asked me to feel guilty about?
3. What would it look like to walk in forgiveness while still honouring wisdom?

Prayer

Lord,
You know the complexity of this relationship. You see both the longing for reconciliation and the reality that it may not happen. I choose to forgive—not because it's easy, but because it's right. I release this person into Your hands. I entrust justice and healing to You. And I ask You to help me walk in both grace and truth. Teach me where to set boundaries and when to leave the door open. Heal my heart, and guard my peace.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Chapter 7

When You've Hurt Someone You Love

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."
— 1 John 1:9 (NIV)

There's a unique kind of grief that comes when you realize you were the one who caused the pain.

Sometimes it's sudden—a conversation turns, a decision is made, and you know in your heart, *I went too far.* Other times, the damage is revealed slowly. You look back and begin to see that what you once excused or justified actually wounded someone you loved. Their distance, their silence, their guardedness—it all traces back to a moment, a pattern, or a season where your actions left a mark.

This chapter is for the one who knows they were wrong.

What do you do when you've hurt someone deeply, and they may never look at you the same again?

First, you begin with humility.

True humility doesn't defend. It doesn't shift blame or explain away pain. It listens. It owns what happened. It sees the other person not through the lens of your intentions, but through the lens of their experience. You may not have meant to hurt them, but they were hurt. And healing begins by acknowledging that without trying to control how they respond.

You also begin with confession—first to God, then to the one you hurt. The promise of 1 John 1:9 is that when we confess, God is faithful. He doesn't shame. He doesn't condemn. He cleanses. But confession is more than saying, *"I'm sorry."* It's saying, *"I was wrong."* There's a difference.

"I'm sorry you feel that way" is not the same as *"I was wrong for how I treated you."*
"Let's just move on" is not the same as *"I acknowledge the damage I caused."*

Some people offer apologies to regain access—not to rebuild trust. They want reconciliation without repentance. But trust cannot grow where truth has not been fully embraced.

So, what does repentance look like?

- It accepts consequences without resentment.
- It gives space for healing without pressure.
- It chooses consistent change, not temporary remorse.
- It invites God to do a deeper work, not just fix the situation.

You may feel helpless right now. Maybe the other person has walked away. Maybe your attempts to make things right have been rejected. Or maybe they're watching quietly to see if your change is real.

This is where grace steps in.

You cannot undo the past. But you can submit your future to Christ. You can allow Him to transform your heart. You can become the kind of person who no longer lives out of pride, fear, or control—but out of brokenness made whole by mercy.

Even if they never forgive you, God offers you forgiveness. And from that place, you can live differently—not to earn anything back, but to reflect the One who has forgiven you much.

There is healing for the one who did the hurting. There is redemption on the other side of repentance. But it begins with a surrendered heart—and a willingness to let God finish the work you cannot.

Where Am I in This?

1. Have I truly owned the impact of my actions, or have I only offered surface apologies?
2. Am I trying to control the outcome—or surrendering to God's timing and mercy?
3. What would repentance look like in my life today?

Prayer

Father,
I admit I've hurt someone You love. I confess what I've done—not just in words, but in truth. I ask for Your forgiveness and Your cleansing. I surrender my need to defend, to explain, or to control. Change me, Lord—not just for their sake, but for Yours. Teach me to walk humbly, to repent fully, and to reflect Your grace in how I live moving forward. Where reconciliation is possible, lead the way. And where it is not, give me peace and purpose to keep growing in You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Chapter 8

How the Cross Speaks to Both the Offended and the Offender

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
— Romans 5:8 (NIV)

At the foot of the cross, every excuse is silenced.

The one who was wounded comes face to face with the One who bore the ultimate wound. The one who caused pain meets the One who took all sin upon Himself. The cross does not favour the offended or the offender—it speaks to both. And it speaks with the same message: mercy.

That's why the cross offends the flesh. It humbles the proud and lifts the broken. It calls the bitter to surrender and the guilty to repentance. No one stands before the cross with a sense of superiority. We all kneel.

While we were still sinners... Those words are not just theological—they are personal. They mean God did not wait for us to change before loving us. He did not demand restitution before extending forgiveness. He saw our rebellion, our self-righteousness, our wounds, and our wandering—and still chose to carry the weight of it all.

And because of that, the cross becomes the bridge between those who hurt and those who were hurt.

To the one carrying offence, the cross says:

You don't need to carry it anymore. The justice you long for has been satisfied in Christ. The pain you feel has not been ignored—it was taken seriously enough that Jesus bore it in His body. You can release what was done to you, not because it didn't matter, but because it already mattered enough to be nailed to a cross.

To the one burdened by guilt, the cross says:

You are not beyond redemption. The sin that weighs on you, the shame you carry, the damage you've done—Jesus saw it all and chose to die in your place. You don't need to earn your way back. You need only surrender to the One who already paid the price.

The cross is not the end of the story. It's the beginning of healing.

It tells us that justice and mercy can coexist—that sin can be dealt with without destroying the sinner. It tells us that bitterness does not have to rule the heart of the offended, and shame does not have to define the heart of the offender.

This is where both sides meet—where the walls come down, where pride is laid aside, and where healing begins.

But you must choose to look. You must choose to listen. You must choose to believe that what Christ did on that hill over two thousand years ago is enough for this very moment.

No matter how deep the wound or how long the pain, the cross still speaks. And what it says is this:

You are forgiven—so you can forgive.
You are healed—so you can be made whole.
You are loved—so you can love again.

Where Am I in This?

1. Have I truly allowed the message of the cross to confront both my pain and my pride?
2. Am I still trying to achieve justice or redemption apart from what Jesus already provided?
3. What would it mean for me to see the person who hurt me—or the person I hurt—through the lens of the cross?

Prayer

Jesus,
Thank You for the cross. Thank You for taking the weight of sin—both mine and others'—and nailing it to that tree. I bring You my pain, my guilt, my resentment, and my regret. Speak over both the offended and the offender in me. Remind me that what You did is enough. Teach me to live as one who has been forgiven, and to extend that same grace to others. Let the cross redefine my story, restore my soul, and resurrect what was broken.
In Your name, Amen.

Chapter 9

Guarding Your Heart Without Hardening It

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."
— Psalm 51:10 (NIV)

When you've been hurt—especially by those you trusted—protecting your heart feels essential. But over time, protection can quietly become hardness. And what once was a boundary of wisdom becomes a wall of fear.

You don't want to be hurt again. So, you become cautious. You choose distance over vulnerability. You hold back in relationships. You smile, but you don't fully trust. You serve, but you don't fully open up. And somewhere along the way, your guarded heart stops being just a defense—it starts becoming your default.

It's a subtle shift, but a costly one.

God tells us to *guard* our hearts (Proverbs 4:23)—not *harden* them. There's a difference.

A guarded heart is wise.
A hardened heart is wounded.

A guarded heart listens carefully and loves freely.
A hardened heart assumes the worst and withholds affection.

A guarded heart says, "I've learned from the past, but I trust God for the future."
A hardened heart says, "I'll never let anyone close enough to hurt me again."

David, in Psalm 51, didn't ask for thicker skin. He asked for a *pure heart* and a *steadfast spirit.* Why? Because he knew that what we let live in our hearts will eventually shape who we become.

Some of the hardest people weren't always that way. They once had soft, open spirits. They once believed the best. But bitterness crept in, pain was never processed, and eventually, the shell they built became a prison. They stopped trusting, hoping, forgiving—and soon, they stopped healing.

So how do you guard your heart without hardening it?

1. **Stay honest with God.**
   Tell Him when you're tempted to shut down. Tell Him when you're afraid to trust again. He won't shame you—He will shape you.
2. **Invite the Holy Spirit to renew your heart daily.**
   Bitterness hardens. But the Spirit softens. He convicts, restores, and reawakens your capacity to love—even after loss.

3. **Set boundaries without losing tenderness.**
   Wisdom says, "Not everyone gets access to my heart." But grace says, "I won't let their actions define my character."
4. **Stay rooted in God's love—not people's behavior.**
   Your softness doesn't depend on others doing right by you. It depends on you staying anchored in the One who never changes.

You don't have to become hardened to survive. Christ didn't. Even as He was betrayed, He kept loving. Even as He was wounded, He kept forgiving. Even as He was dying, He kept reaching. That same Spirit lives in you.

You can guard your heart—without closing it.

You can live in wisdom—without forfeiting tenderness.

You can walk in freedom—without surrendering compassion.

The key is staying close to the One who makes your heart new.

Where Am I in This?

1. Have I mistaken emotional distance for spiritual maturity?
2. Am I letting past pain control how much of my heart I give to people now?
3. What would it look like to guard my heart through wisdom, not fear?

Prayer

Lord,
You see the parts of me that have grown cautious, closed off, and cold. You know the moments I chose silence instead of trust, distance instead of connection. I don't want to live behind walls. I want to live in Your freedom. Create in me a pure heart. Renew a steadfast spirit. Teach me to walk with both strength and softness, wisdom and love. I choose today to guard my heart—without letting it grow hard.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Chapter 10

Living Healed, Not Hardened

"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."
— Psalm 147:3 (NIV)

There comes a point in the journey where you're no longer just surviving the pain—you're living beyond it.

Not because the memory disappeared. Not because the people changed. But because *you* did.

You stopped letting bitterness narrate your story. You stopped replaying conversations that never brought closure. You stopped defining yourself by what someone else did or didn't do. And you started walking in the kind of healing only Jesus can bring.

This chapter isn't about going back. It's about going forward.

To live healed means, you've let God do in you what you couldn't do on your own. It means the wound that once dictated your every thought has become a scar—something that speaks of healing, not damage.

But living healed doesn't mean you'll never feel the sting again. It means the sting no longer rules your responses. It means your identity is no longer shaped by what broke you, but by the One who restored you.

Many people never get to this place—not because it's impossible, but because they settle for being numb instead of being new. They exchange healing for hiding. They build resilience instead of seeking restoration. But numbness is not healing. And survival is not the same as freedom.

To live healed is to live soft-hearted and clear-minded. It is to love without suspicion, to lead without fear, and to serve without needing to prove anything.

It is to say:

- "Yes, I've been hurt. But I am not a victim."
- "Yes, I've made mistakes. But I am not condemned."
- "Yes, it still hurts sometimes. But I am not stuck."

Living healed means, you've embraced the cross, received forgiveness, extended mercy, and chosen peace—even when others choose chaos.

It doesn't mean you're perfect. It doesn't mean you'll never wrestle with anger or grief again. But it means your anchor is deeper than the storm. It means Christ is your center, not your pain, not your past, not your performance.

Living healed is what the enemy fears most—because healed people heal others. Free people free others. And people who have tasted mercy become messengers of it.

This is what Jesus died for—not just to save your soul, but to restore your life.

So, choose it. Every day.

Choose humility over pride.
Compassion over revenge.
Peace over chaos.
Truth over comfort.
Healing over hardness.

You don't have to be who they said you were. You don't have to stay in the pattern of pain. You don't have to live bracing for the next wound.

You were made to live healed.

Where Am I in This?

1. Have I settled for survival instead of surrendering to true healing?
2. What fruit is growing in my life that reflects a healed heart?
3. How can I live in a way that reflects the mercy I've received?

Prayer

Jesus,
Thank You for not only saving me—but for healing me. Thank You for walking with me through the process, for carrying what I couldn't, and for showing me that my past doesn't get the final word. I choose today to live healed. I choose to let my story reflect Your goodness, not my wounds. Use my scars for Your glory. Let others see in me the freedom only You can give.
In Your name, Amen.

Conclusion

Forgive Anyway

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."
— Ephesians 4:32 (NIV)

Forgive anyway.
Even when it still hurts.
Even if they never change.
Even if you're the only one who wants peace—**forgiveness is your freedom.**

You will not always feel ready. You will not always feel strong. Some wounds ache long after the apology never comes. Some people may never see what they did. Some relationships may never be restored. But still—**forgive anyway.**

Why?

Because forgiveness isn't a reward for others, it's a release for you. It breaks the grip the past has on your present. It silences the voice of bitterness and makes room for the voice of the Holy Spirit. It allows you to live unchained—even when the person who hurt you keeps choosing their chains.

You don't have to carry this anymore. Not the anger. Not the shame. Not the memory of what went wrong, or the fear that healing will never come. Jesus didn't just die to save your soul—He died to heal your heart.

Forgiveness does not deny what happened. It declares that what Jesus did is greater.

Bitterness says, "They don't deserve it."
Grace says, "Neither did I."
Bitterness says, "I'll never be whole again."
Healing says, "God makes all things new."

And you don't have to walk this path alone. The same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is the same Spirit who empowers you to forgive. To release. To love again. To live again.

Yes, you may have to choose forgiveness more than once. You may have to wrestle through emotions you thought you'd already settled. But with each choice, you are walking in freedom. With each surrender, the weight grows lighter.

This is not weakness. This is strength.
This is not denial. This is obedience.
This is not the end of your story. This is the beginning of your healing.

So today, forgive anyway.

Not because they earned it.
Not because you forgot what happened.
But because you were made for freedom.

And in Christ, **you are free indeed**.

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus,
I choose to forgive. Again. Still. Anyway.
Not because I feel like it, but because You asked me to—and because You forgave me first. I lay down the weight. I release the anger. I surrender my right to hold onto what You already carried to the cross. Fill me with Your Spirit. Heal what still hurts. Restore what was broken. And teach me to walk, every day, in the freedom of forgiveness.
In Your name, Amen.

Annexure 1

Small Group Study Guide

Bitterness Breaks, But Forgiveness Heals
Break Free from the Cycle of Offence and Walk in Healing

Each session includes a Scripture focus, chapter reading, discussion questions, personal reflection, and a closing prayer.

Session 1 – When Forgiveness Feels Impossible

Scripture: Colossians 3:13
Chapter Reading: *Introduction: When Forgiveness Feels Impossible* & *Chapter 1 – Bitterness Breaks*
Focus: Why is forgiveness so hard when the pain is so deep?

Discussion Questions:

- What is one situation where forgiveness felt impossible for you?
- What does bitterness often disguise itself as in our lives?
- Why is it hard to see ourselves as the one who needs to forgive?

Reflection:
What's one memory you keep rehearsing instead of releasing?

Prayer Focus:
Ask the Holy Spirit to begin softening your heart where it's been hardened.

Session 2 – When Bitterness Isn't Yours but Theirs

Scripture: Proverbs 4:23
Chapter Reading: *Chapter 2 – The Heavy Chain: How the Past Keeps Repeating Itself*
Focus: Living with or loving someone who refuses to let go of offence.

Discussion Questions:

- How does someone else's bitterness affect your peace?
- What are some signs you've internalized their offence?
- How can you protect your heart while still walking in love?

Reflection:
What boundary might God be inviting you to draw—not out of anger, but wisdom?

Prayer Focus:
Pray for the courage to guard your heart without shutting it off.

Session 3 – The Cost of Carrying the Past

Scripture: Isaiah 43:18–19
Chapter Reading: *Chapter 5 – The Cost of Carrying the Past*
Focus: Are we letting old pain dictate new seasons?

Discussion Questions:

- How has unhealed pain shaped your relationships?
- What lies have you believed because of past wounds?
- What does it mean for God to "do a new thing" in your heart?

Reflection:
What part of your story have you refused to surrender to Christ?

Prayer Focus:
Pray for God's healing power to uproot bitterness and make space for joy.

Session 4 – Forgiveness Without Reconciliation

Scripture: Romans 12:18
Chapter Reading: *Chapter 6 – Forgiving Without Reconciliation*
Focus: Is peace still possible even when the relationship isn't?

Discussion Questions:

- Why do we often confuse forgiveness with reconciliation?
- How do we honor Christ and still walk wisely with others?
- Can you forgive someone who remains unchanged?

Reflection:
Where do you need to release someone into God's hands and stop holding on?

Prayer Focus:
Ask God to give you peace without needing full closure from others.

Session 5 – When You've Hurt Someone You Love

Scripture: 1 John 1:9
Chapter Reading: *Chapter 7 – When You've Hurt Someone You Love*
Focus: Owning the damage we've caused and seeking godly change.

Discussion Questions:

- Why is "I was wrong" more powerful than "I'm sorry"?
- What does repentance look like when someone doesn't forgive you?
- Are you seeking change or just relief?

Reflection:
Is there someone you need to ask forgiveness from—and mean it?

Prayer Focus:
Pray for humility, healing, and the grace to walk in true repentance.

Session 6 – How the Cross Speaks to Both Sides

Scripture: Romans 5:8
Chapter Reading: *Chapter 8 – How the Cross Speaks to Both the Offended and the Offender*
Focus: What does the cross say to our pain and our guilt?

Discussion Questions:

- How does the cross reshape how we see ourselves and others?
- What do we gain by bringing offence and regret to Jesus?
- How does grace challenge our sense of justice?

Reflection:
Are you still trying to carry something Jesus already paid for?

Prayer Focus:
Thank Jesus for carrying both the weight of sin and the path to peace.

Session 7 – Guarding Your Heart Without Hardening It

Scripture: Psalm 51:10
Chapter Reading: *Chapter 9 – Guarding Your Heart Without Hardening It*
Focus: How to remain soft-hearted in a hard world.

Discussion Questions:

- What are the dangers of becoming emotionally numb?
- How can you set boundaries and still love deeply?
- What's the difference between guarded and hardened?

Reflection:
Have you confused strength with self-protection?

Prayer Focus:
Ask God to keep your heart tender while giving you wisdom in relationships.

Session 8 – Living Healed, Not Hardened

Scripture: Psalm 147:3
Chapter Reading: *Chapter 10 – Living Healed, Not Hardened* & *Conclusion – Forgive Anyway*
Focus: Stepping into freedom, not just from pain—but for purpose.

Discussion Questions:

- What is the fruit of healing in your life right now?
- How can you begin helping others heal as you walk in freedom?
- Why is forgiveness a lifestyle, not a one-time decision?

Reflection:
What story will your healing tell to those who follow after you?

Prayer Focus:
Commit to being a vessel of peace, healing, and grace—no matter what comes.

Session 9 – Forgive Anyway

Scripture: Luke 23:34
Chapter Reading: *Conclusion – Forgive Anyway*
Focus: Choosing freedom—even if they never change.

Session Theme:
Forgiveness is a decision that may not change the other person, but it will change you. As you close this study, this session is a call to live from healing, not hurt; from mercy, not memory; from grace, not grievance.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean to “forgive anyway” when the pain still lingers?
2. Have you expected healing to feel like forgetting? How is biblical healing different?
3. Why is forgiveness an act of strength, not weakness?
4. Which chapter in this journey challenged or changed you the most?
5. What habits or heart-postures can help you stay free from bitterness in the future?

Reflection:
What does the next season of your life look like if you walk in forgiveness—not just as a one-time act, but as a way of living?

Prayer Focus:
Ask God to seal the work He has begun in your heart. Thank Him for the grace to forgive. Commit to living in His freedom. Pray for others in your life who may still be struggling under the weight of offence, and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you as a witness of healing.

Annexure 2

Recommended Reading, Blogs, and Resources

For deeper study and practical guidance on living out your faith, the following books and resources by Bradley Sliedrecht are recommended. Each work addresses key aspects of the Christian life—offering biblical insight, Spirit-led application, and encouragement for spiritual growth in today's world.

Explore the *Truth in an Age of Compromise* Series
This ongoing teaching series includes more than 30 titles designed to equip believers with doctrinal clarity, biblical conviction, and spiritual resilience. Topics include:

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Each book in this series has been prayerfully written with a commitment to the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. While my life experiences shape my passion, the content of these books is not drawn from personal testimony or tradition but from the careful study of God's Word using sound hermeneutical principles. I strive to teach not from experience but from Scripture—believing that the Word of God alone is the true and trustworthy foundation for life and godliness.

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