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How Forgiveness Finally Made Me Free

I'd held on to unforgiveness for too long. It was time to finally forgive my father.

Time to move past the hurt, the rejection, the anger. It was time.

I can't tell you how many times I said that to myself. And it never happened.

Days wrestling with my feelings turned into weeks, which turned into months, and eventually years. Layers of failed attempts or flat out refusals to do so had hardened my heart. Would I ever be able to forgive him?

Or had those years actually softened my heart? Had they actually prepared me for that night recently when I would read about breaking generational chains and forgiving my dad?

As I stood brushing my teeth, getting ready for bed on the night before Easter, a voice said:

Write to him.

Write to him? Write what?

Write 'Dad, I forgive you.' That is all it takes.

Just go to bed, I thought. Sleep it off, wake up, and this will all go away. You won't have to go *through* the pain again to get to the other side.

That's what I was afraid of. To get to the other side (forgiveness), I had to go through the pain again. It would have to get worse, for a moment, before it would get better.

Was I willing? Was I able?

And then pen somehow made its way to paper and I finally found freedom.

Dear Dad,

I forgive you.

I forgive you for leaving when I was two.

I forgive you for being gone for seven years.

I forgive you for leaving every night to drink.

I forgive you to breaking my heart and never putting it back together.

Dad, all this time I've thought I needed a reason to forgive you. I thought I needed to understand why you did what you did. I thought I needed to feel sorry for you the way I did Mom, to put myself in your shoes and say "how could I have done any better?" I thought I needed to understand you. But I don't.

I don't know why you destroyed our family. I don't know why you just left us. I don't know why time with me was never good enough. I will never understand.

But I forgive you.

And I *do* have a reason.

My reason is a three-year old girl sleeping as I write this. Her name is Aracelli and she needs me. She needs a dad who is there for her.

She needs a dad who isn't shackled by the chains of unforgiveness. She needs a dad who isn't eaten up by hatred...hatred for you and hatred for myself. She needs a dad who is a man, not a boy like you remained for so long. She needs a dad who stays, who loves her, who never breaks her heart.

She is my reason, Dad. I'm sorry you never got to meet her.

My wife is my reason. You would have loved her.

I am my reason.

I will no longer be held captive by your mistakes. I will no longer be a prisoner of my own anger.

I am free, Dad. Finally free!

I forgive you. I even thank you. Because of my pain, I can help others. Because of your example, I know what not to do.

I forgive you for everything.

Your Son,

Matt

I plead with you, if you have unforgiveness in any area of your life, *let it go*.

You don't have to understand what the other person did. You just need to forgive him or her.

Action item: Write those first words which I wrote to someone you need to forgive. Just write the person's name and "I forgive you." That's how it started for me. That was the beginning of my freedom.

I won't dramatize what happened and suggest that my life instantly became a walk in the park. I didn't. But I am free. And I do know joy now.

It is impossible for joy and unforgiveness to coexist. An unforgiving heart is too dark a place for light to shine.

Forgiveness finally made me free. It can do the same for you.

Will you choose to find freedom today? Will you choose to forgive someone who hurt you?