

# Faith



**Life Actually** By Kari Kampakis

## Forgiveness does the body, soul good

*“God doesn’t always give you the people you would have chosen to be in your life. He gives you the people you need — to help you, to hurt you, to leave you, to love you and to make you into the person God meant you to be.”*

**FRANCINE RIVERS, AUTHOR OF “REDEEMING LOVE”**

When I was younger, I tended to let messages about forgiveness go in one ear and out the other. Quite honestly, it didn’t make sense for me to forgive people who had wronged me or done something to justify my distaste for them.

And while I never intentionally hurt anyone, I didn’t mind seeing my least favorite people struggle. When others talked about them, I secretly delighted. And if they went through a rough patch ... well, that was karma kicking in. That was them getting what they deserved, a lesson on why they should be nicer to people.

But the problem with holding grudges, wishing ill-will or forgiving someone only when it comes easily is that this mindset takes a toll over time. It hardens our heart and creates

layers of bitterness and resentment that build up like plaque. The more plaque we add, the harder it is to clear out.

It’s easier to understand this as we age and feel the emotional damage that resentment can create in our bodies. Holding a grudge is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. It hurts us more than the person we refuse to forgive. It makes our heart hard and bitter instead of soft and loving.

And this is why forgiveness is as much for us as it is the offender. It is why we’re called to forgive people even when we don’t feel like it or when it seems unnecessary.

As my priest, Father Bob Sullivan, once said in a sermon, “We’re told to practice forgiveness on a small level every day, so that when something big happens, we know what to do.”

To me, the operative word here is practice. Forgiveness is an art, and like any art, it takes time to learn. It requires patience, hard work and prayers. Only with God’s help can we acquire the strength to genuinely forgive others and the wisdom to discern how.

Let’s be clear: Forgiveness doesn’t always mean you should let an offender back into your life, your house or your trusted circle of friends. It doesn’t require you to be a doormat or fall back into a toxic routine.

To me, forgiveness is about two things: letting go and learning. It’s about accepting the past, moving on, and learning to turn any pain you’ve experienced into purpose for the future.

After all, it’s our seasons of suffering that best prepare us for the seasons to come. It’s our seasons of suffering that best shape our testimony, the story we’ll one day share with others to encourage them and offer them hope through their struggles.

I can’t tell anyone how to apply forgiveness to their life, but I can share a few thoughts that help me. I’ve learned, in my ripe old age of 43, that I can forgive someone who doesn’t ask to be forgiven. I can practice forgiveness daily by not getting angry at the young man who steals

my parking place, the cashier who is rude or the person who makes a cutting remark.

Instead of jumping into defense mode, I can let it go. I can forgive the offender and ask God how I might be able to show them love instead.

Every individual who crosses our path has something to teach us. And through forgiveness, we open up our heart to lessons that build character, compassion and faith. It’s not the events in our lives that define us, but who we become as a result. And if we allow the past to change us for the better, we can’t regret it. We can see even bad experiences for what they are - seasons of life that prepare us for the next season, where hope is plentiful and God’s faithfulness in helping us overcome challenges becomes more evident than ever.

*Kari Kubiszyn Kampakis is a Mountain Brook mom of four girls, columnist, and blogger for The Huffington Post. Her first book, “10 Ultimate Truths Girls Should Know,” is now available on Amazon and everywhere books are sold. Join her Facebook community at “Kari Kampakis, Writer,” visit her blog at karikampakis.com or contact her at kari@karikampakis.com.*





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