

LYSA TERKEURST

#1 *New York Times* Bestselling Author of *Uninvited*

FORGIVING
WHAT
YOU
CAN'T
FORGET

DISCOVER HOW TO MOVE ON, MAKE PEACE
WITH PAINFUL MEMORIES, AND CREATE A LIFE
THAT'S BEAUTIFUL AGAIN



WHAT READERS ARE SAYING ABOUT *FORGIVING WHAT YOU CAN'T FORGET*

“I’m really grateful for Lysa TerKeurst’s courage to walk with us and teach us not just from her own experiences but from her vast theological and therapeutic research on what forgiveness is, what it isn’t, and how to realistically live this out. This resource is invaluable, and I pray it brings healing to your life like it has mine.”

—CRAIG GROESCHEL, Pastor, Life.Church;
New York Times bestselling author

“Forgiveness lived out can be one of the hardest things we do in life and Lysa has written a breathtakingly beautiful guide for us to maneuver the most painful parts of our pasts. She has walked this hard road herself and what God has done in and through her is nothing short of a miracle!”

—JENNIE ALLEN, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Get Out of Your Head*; founder and visionary of IF:Gathering

“*Forgiving What You Can’t Forget* is quite possibly the most important book on forgiveness I’ve ever read. An ignored part of my heart was healed with every page and freedom was found through fighting for forgiveness.”

—BIANCA JUAREZ OLTHOFF, speaker, Bible teacher,
and bestselling author of *How to Have Your Life Not Suck*

“An unbelievable collision of the messy but miraculous. Watching Lysa and Art lean into this freedom and open their hands and hearts to God as He

continues to write a miracle throughout their story is one of our highest privileges. If you're ready to move on with freedom and create a life that's beautiful again, read this!"

—LOUIE AND SHELLEY GIGLIO, Pastor, Passion
City Church; cofounders of the Passion Movement

"Lysa reminds readers it's not *what* we deal with but *how* we deal with circumstances that produces a redemptive message of hope for others—a truth poignantly reiterated in Lysa's life and the pages of this book."

—TRUDY CATHY WHITE, Chick-fil-A
Ambassador and author of *A Quiet Strength*

"Lysa's book helped me revisit and restore places my heart was withholding forgiveness. This story will be a healing balm for all who want emotional freedom. I couldn't put it down!"

—REBEKAH LYONS, bestselling author of
Rhythms of Renewal and *You Are Free*

"Lysa has been my friend for two decades. I trust her and so should you. I often tell her that she is a healer of broken hearts. Let her guide and teach how to forgive so you can live again."

—DR. DERWIN L. GRAY, Lead Pastor,
Transformation Church; author of *The Good Life:
What Jesus Teaches About Finding True Happiness*

"If you've ever tried to forgive someone and just couldn't get there, this book is for you. I wish I would have had this book my whole adult life. It's one I'll read again and again."

—TRACY W.

“Forgiving What You Can’t Forget will become the reader’s go-to handbook on forgiveness and the process of healing.”

—STEPHANIE A.

“There are so many nuggets of truth and perspective tucked into the pages of this book that make it nearly impossible to put down.”

—KIMBERLI F.

“As someone who caused the hurt in my own marriage, it was incredibly helpful to see the forgiveness struggle from the other side. Lysa helps you find the way, whether that is forgiving yourself or forgiving others.”

—LINDA G.

“Lysa’s words met me during my own season of significant struggles with loss, grief, and a life full of the unexpected. She helped me see that I could be beautiful again too. I’m so incredibly thankful.”

—STARR H.

“These are the words you desperately need and will beg the question, Why have you held on to this pain for so long?”

—MICHELLE R.

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It's Not Supposed to Be This Way

It's Not Supposed to Be This Way DVD and Study Guide

Embraced (devotional)

Uninvited

Uninvited DVD and Study Guide

The Best Yes

The Best Yes DVD and Study Guide

Unglued

Unglued DVD and Participant's Guide

Becoming More Than a Good Bible Study Girl

Becoming More Than a Good Bible Study

Girl DVD and Participant's Guide

Made to Crave

Made to Crave DVD and Participant's Guide

What Happens When Women Say Yes to God

CHILDREN'S

It Will Be Okay

Win or Lose, I Love You!

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Dedicated in loving memory to
Brian Hampton and his beautiful family . . .

Karen Hampton, Ben Hampton,
and Caroline Hampton Cole.

Brian's fingerprints are all over
everything I've written in the past ten years
and this book is certainly no exception.
I heard his gentle wisdom, gracious challenge,
and brilliant creativity as I typed these words.

I miss him so much. He smiled the
biggest and brightest when
he talked of each of you.

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INTRODUCTION

I Still Cry Over What Happened

DO YOU EVER FIND yourself defining life by before and after the deep hurt? The horrific season. The conversation that stunned you. The shocking day of discovery. The stunning call about the accident. The divorce. The suicide. The wrongful death so unfathomable you still can't believe they are gone. The malpractice. The breakup. The day your friend walked away. The hateful conversation. The remark that seems to now be branded on your soul. The taking of something that should have been yours. The brutality unleashed on the one you love. The email you weren't supposed to see. The manipulation. The violation. The false accusation. The theft. The fire. The firing. The day everything changed.

That marked moment in time.

Like your own personal BC and AD, which usually mean Before Christ and *Anno Domini*. This dating was intended to indicate a turning point in history—the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ. When we have personal marked moments in our own history it can feel like Before Crisis and After Devastation.

It's a line in time. One that's so sharply drawn across your reality, it not only divides your life, it splits open your memory bank and defiles it. Pictures of the past are some of our most priceless treasures, until they become painful reminders of what no longer is. And when your phone randomly sends those memory movies of what happened on this same day four years ago, it stops you from breathing.

Life before. Life now. Is it even possible to move on from something like this? Is it even possible to create a life that's beautiful again?

Some part of what you loved about your life exploded in that moment and marked you with this unwanted reference point of before and after. Grief is devastating no matter how it comes. But when there's a person or people whose choices struck the match igniting the grief? It's only natural to clench your jaw when you think of what happened.

And maybe it seems like you think of what happened all the time. Or at least so much of the time you wonder if you'll ever, ever stop having that deep-aching, off-kilter feeling. That throbbing heartbreak bubbling with an equal mix of anxiety, unanswered questions, and suspicion that really no one in the world is truly safe anymore.

People are all around you at work, in the coffee shop, at your kid's school, and even at church just trying to live their lives, completely unaware that at any moment there could be a triggered memory so painful you'll feel as though the world has no more oxygen to breathe. But you are the only one affected. You're gasping, sweating, and being asked to please get on with it or get out of everyone's way.

All you can do is stare at the pictures that just popped up, taken just before everything changed, desperate to go back to that moment and warn your former self to redirect . . . change course . . . avoid . . . escape . . . turn . . . and maybe, maybe this wouldn't have ever happened.

Then, surely, you wouldn't be here. In the mess of the aftershock and fallout. Grief and panic. Feeling as fragile as the tiniest twig but as stuck in this place as a hundred-year-old stump.

I understand all of that.

Like you, I wish I didn't have such an intimate understanding of those feelings. But I do. If you read my last book, *It's Not Supposed to Be This Way*, you know of the shattering discovery of my husband's affair and the long road of uncertainty I was still walking at the end of that book. The four years of hellish heartbreak that followed the discovery did eventually take an unexpected turn toward reconciliation. I'm grateful, but I have not been spared the slow and grueling work of finding my way again after experiencing something that forever marked my life.

I cried again today. It wasn't because something is wrong in my marriage. Restoration is a gift for which I'm so very thankful, but that's not what this book is about. It's about figuring out what to do when you can't forget what happened and *forgiveness* feels like a dirty word.

I'll raise my hand here. That's why I cried today. If you relate to this, then you know how awful it is to define one's life with the words *before* and *after*. And if no one else in this world has been kind enough to say this, I will. I'm so, so sorry for all that's happened to you.

Whether this was an event or a collection of hurt that built over time because someone wasn't who they were supposed to be, didn't do what they were supposed to do, or didn't protect you like they should have protected you, your heartbreak deserves a safe place to be processed. Whoever "they" are in your story, their actions hurt you, took from you, and set off a chain of events still greatly affecting you. And that was wrong.

This isn't a judgment against them. I don't know all the facts of what happened. And I'm not qualified to be their judge, but I can be a witness for your pain.

Your pain is real. And so is mine. So, if no one has acknowledged this with you, I will.

But, friend, can I whisper something I'm learning?

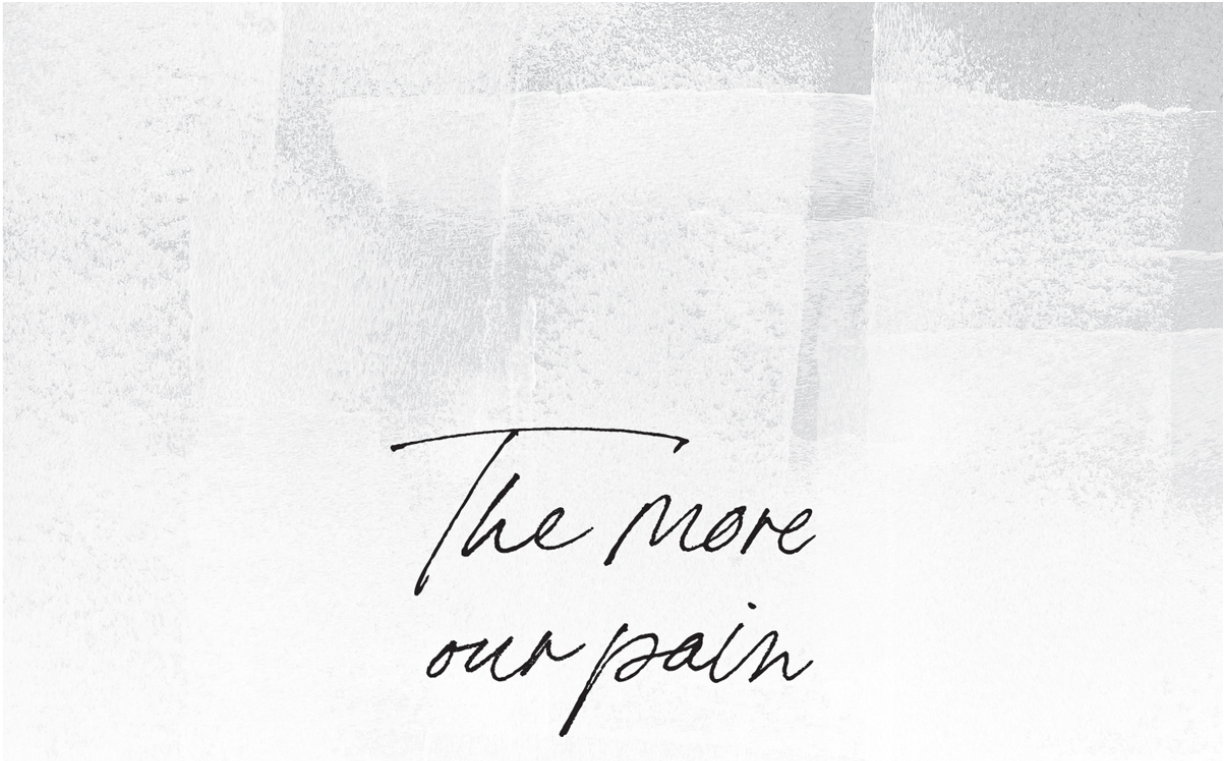
Staying here, blaming them, and forever defining your life by what they did will only increase the pain. Worse, it will keep projecting out onto others. The more our pain consumes us, the more it will control us. And sadly, it's those who least deserve to be hurt whom our unresolved pain will hurt the most.

That person or people—they've caused enough pain for you, for me, and for those around us. There's been enough damage done. They've taken enough. You don't have to hand over what was precious and priceless to you and deem all the memories as hurtful. You get to decide how you'll move forward.

A few years ago when my marriage imploded, I didn't think I had a say-so in keeping memories that were precious to me. I thought my marriage was over; therefore, my life had to be edited both going forward and backward. I went through the entire house and removed all pictures of "us." I packed up some of my most favorite family mementos. I tried to untangle my life from anything that reminded me of what once was, because, well, because I didn't know what else to do. But completely sterilizing my life from the physical presence of reminders didn't remove the pain. You can't edit reality to try and force healing. You can't fake yourself into being okay with what happened. But you can decide that the one who hurt you doesn't get to decide what you do with your memories. Your life can be a graceful

combination of beautiful and painful. You don't have to put either definitive label on what once was. It can be both-and.

Maybe that's part of what's hard about moving on: the letting go. But what if it's possible to let go of what we must but still carry with us what is beautiful and meaningful and true to us? And maybe this less-severe version of moving on is what will ease us to a place of forgiveness. There's been enough trauma. So, because I don't want anything else ripped or stripped away, I need to decide what stays and what goes.



*The more
our pain*

CONSUMES

*us, the more
it will*

CONTROL

us.

This is what I need. This is what I want.

I want to look at my wedding album with joy again, even though an affair would be an eventual horrific reality for us. That day was still real and beautiful and completely worth treasuring.

I want to remember that vacation we took that we all loved without zeroing in on the fact that it's also when I didn't know what was going on. We were still making incredible memories full of laughter, sharing inside jokes, crazy competitive games, silly dances, and long dinner conversations. It was real and it was lovely. And I'm not willing to deny what I authentically experienced.

I want to look at that Christmas card we sent—with all of us dressed up and smiling—and not cringe, feeling like a fool or a fake. The family closeness we captured that day was real and so precious and completely true to me.

I want this for you too. However this translates within the context of your pain, those pictures, those memories, those times of togetherness . . . if they were a joy to you, they are yours to keep.

Other memories that are excruciatingly painful are yours to release.

And those that are a tangle of both are yours to sort out into piles of keep and toss. It is necessary for you not to let pain rewrite your memories. And it's absolutely necessary not to let pain ruin your future.