



Hi, I'm Elisa Preston. You're listening to episode 16 of Praise Through It.

This podcast is based on Philippians 4:8, which says “Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, whatever is excellent and praiseworthy -- think about these things.”

My hope for our short time together will always be to help you see an old burden in a new way, to see the praiseworthy side of your daily struggles. To see life in a way that brings hope, and in a way that shows the glimmer of light that inevitably shines, even in the daily grind. So, if that's something you're working on or you'd like to be a part of, listen in.

(acoustic guitar)

So I've been thinking about forgiveness and everything that goes with it for, I would say, since the beginning of summer. Honestly, the catalyst for thinking about this is a few ruffles with a few close friends, and the constant divisiveness permeating American politics and culture conversations. There's so much anger, so much vitriol. I also want there to be so much forgiveness in those spaces.

Forgiveness is a pretty old burden. You could say it goes back to the first humans on Earth. There are the stories of Cain and Abel. Jacob and Esau. Joseph and his brothers. Betrayal, hurt feelings, anger, disappointment, grief, and forgiveness. And there are so many thoughts that I'm going to try to order into a thoughtful, encouraging message for you.

Before I do offer these thoughts, though, I offer a disclaimer: if you are in a situation in which you are being repeatedly hurt - either physically or emotionally - boundaries are important and healthy. Forgiveness does not mean allowing a repeated, dangerous, toxic aggressor or abuser back into a relationship with you. When I talk about forgiveness today, it's a heart condition. And it is not meant to be misinterpreted as a pass or justification for a continued abusive relationship. There are resources in the show notes if that's your situation and you're not sure what to do.

So, let's talk about the heart position of forgiveness...

Forgiveness can be a pretty tough topic. Honestly, I was pretty hesitant to talk about it. It elicits anger if we're in a season where forgiveness doesn't feel like an option. It elicits peace like balm on a wound if we're in a season where we've recently extended or been extended forgiveness. There's not much in between. Even for the passive-aggressive among us, forgiveness usually is or isn't present.

When betrayal or hurt feelings happen, forgiveness now becomes part of your story. It's pretty much been a part of our story since the beginning of time, with the characters of the Bible I mentioned a moment ago. But when something happens to you, to your family, to someone you love, forgiveness now becomes part of your personal story, whether you want it to or not. And whether you extend it or not.

There is *plenty* of advice on how, why, and when to offer forgiveness. In the faith space, the *why* centers on the idea that we forgive because we were forgiven first, and that is a beautiful gift. The mercy of not getting what we deserve, and the grace for getting the good and beautiful that we don't deserve but get anyway. That is all tied up in the forgiveness of God.

The *how* is a little more subjective depending on the person, the pastor teaching it, the friend offering advice. But in the faith space it usually centers on prayer and bringing our requests to God, which is important and good and right. And, since we're human, even when we do that, we tend to come back around to the hurt at some point. We forget the forgiveness we've given and we hold onto the hurt, we hold onto the offense.

The answer to *when to offer forgiveness*, especially in the faith space, is usually *as quickly as possible*, because holding back forgiveness is like keeping yourself in a locked box but you're the one who holds the key. So to experience the freedom that comes along with forgiveness, we should offer it as quickly as possible. Right?

Well, maybe. But what if you feel like that's not really possible? What if you don't know how to do that? There is *so much* behind the act of forgiveness that doesn't *just* include the offense. It includes past hurts, past traumas that might have nothing to do with the person who hurt you this time. It involves your current life season, the standing of the relationship at the time of the offense, and more that I'm sure you can articulate better than me since you're the one thinking of the offense.

And then, what if you've been given the advice of *forgive and forget*? From a psychological standpoint, that's not really healthy. It's dismissive of the pain caused to you upon the offense,

and it might put you in danger in the future if that offense was exceedingly harmful. And that's not what I want for you, and I know that's not what you want for yourself. In the church we talk about love keeping no record of wrongs and how Jesus doesn't remember each one of our offenses when he considers being our savior, but we're not Jesus. I'm not the savior of the world. I am a fallible human who doesn't always know how to just forget something that hurt me.

What about the advice of *forgive but never forget*? Unfortunately, that's not too healthy, either. Holding on to the specific memories of the offenses done to you can cause literal, lasting damage to your brain and to your body from the inside out. It harms you more than anyone else, and it goes against the golden rule of treating others how we want to be treated. Kind of a lose-lose there.

So ... what now? What's the thing that brings us to a point of forgiveness? A heart position of forgiveness that is meaningful and lasting?

Honestly, the only thing I could think of over months of thinking about this, **is committing to it**. Deciding that once we decide to forgive, that's it. We have forgiven and nothing may be held for that offense from that day on.

Now when we consider our faith, that's the main tenet. Living as though we are forgiven, because we are. Nothing God does with us, for us, and through us is based on anything other than being a forgiven, beloved child of the Almighty. God doesn't give us opportunities or plant blessings or plant tragedies based on whether or not he has finally, once and for all, forgiven us. No. He has finally, once and for all, forgiven us. So our walk with Him can be a confident one.

Our walk with other humans, however, it's a different story. We're walking around this perfectly imperfect earth with other people who are doing the best they can with the human condition, too. And at some point, because we're all flawed people, we hurt one another. We get angry. We feel unforgiving. Then, time goes by and eventually, we come to a point after a betrayal or an offense where we're just too tired to keep being mad. So we either cut that person out because we don't want to deal with it, or we forgive (or we say we do) because we decide we'd rather spend our energy on other things, other relationships, or other aspects of the relationship most impacted. So we stop being mad and we move on. Then a few days, weeks, months, or years later, something pops up and all of a sudden we feel like we want to snatch that forgiveness back like a preschooler taking the toy she started to share. We are reminded of how hurt we were and we think, *Nope, not over that*. And we go back to withholding forgiveness for a season. Maybe we shut them out again. Maybe we're nasty again. We go back to making choices based on the fact that we're still hurt.

In this back-and-forth, truly the only thing I have experienced that moves me forward in forgiveness, that moves my heart to a position of forgiveness, is committing to it. Once I decide to forgive, I commit to it and make decisions regarding that situation and that relationship out of the fact that they are forgiven, despite that day's feelings that may run contrary. This sounds hard, and it can be. It sounds counterintuitive, and it can be. It also has retrained my brain and my heart out of that hurt. That does not mean I've discounted how they hurt me. It does not mean that I've forgotten all about how they've hurt me and I might not make different choices in the future. When someone hurts us, it feels so unfair that they just get our affection back. Flashes of how they've hurt us can be assaulting, and the feelings of not wanting to forgive can be so strong that committing to forgiveness can feel wrong. But let's remember that feelings aren't facts. So just because it feels wrong doesn't mean it is wrong.

So what does it mean to make decisions out of the fact that the offender is forgiven? Here are my thoughts.

That offense pops back into my brain and gets my body all hot with anger or hurt, I make the decision again: I forgive him. I make no snide comments. I send no snide texts. I don't complain about him to a friend. I actually do the opposite: I find something to compliment him on and I say it out loud. I acknowledge to myself and maybe to one trusted friend: yes, that hurt then and it's hurting now. I say a breath prayer asking for a softened heart so I may keep my commitment. Then I do the next right thing in my day, moving forward out of forgiveness.

That hurt comes back around and my heart turns cold thinking about it, I make the decision again: I forgive her. I make no snide comments. I send no unnecessary, passive-aggressive or overtly aggressive texts. I don't troll her social media feeds. In fact, the opposite: I find a common ground and I acknowledge that. I acknowledge to myself and to a trusted friend: yes, that hurt then and it's hurting now. I say a breath prayer asking God to help me keep my commitment. Then I do the next right thing in my day, moving forward out of forgiveness.

The betrayal bites again, leaving my heart feeling cold as steel and like I am never going to heal. I make the decision again: I forgive. I acknowledge the hurt. I am compassionate with myself. I say a breath prayer: God, soften my heart. And I move forward to the next right thing in my day.

Withholding forgiveness doesn't always *feel* like a choice. Sometimes it feels like the only right, rational thing to do. But let me let you in on one of my main life tenets: *feelings are real but they're not reliable*. I said something like that a few minutes ago: feelings aren't facts. We can't treat our feelings like facts. Forgiveness doesn't always feel like a choice, but at some point in your journey it will be a choice. And for that forgiveness to have a lasting impact on you, your relationships, and your faith, you'll commit to it. I'm talking, like Lucy would commit to all of her antics on every episode of *I Love Lucy*. Like Tom Brady has committed to the NFL. Like the

Grateful Dead committed to tie-dye. Like the Cookie Monster and I commit to chocolate chip cookies. There comes a point where the forgiveness you extend to another human, or to a group of them, will be a choice that you commit to, one you will remain fiercely loyal to if you want any real chance at healing the hurt and putting your heart in a true position of forgiveness.

The truth about forgiveness is that it isn't easy for most of us. The truth about forgiveness is that it can feel real unfair, undeserved, and impossible.

If you'll let me, I'd like to offer some of Philippians 4:8 for the next time you find yourself in a situation where you might not want to forgive.

What's true about committing to forgiveness is once the commitment is made to extend it once and for all, everything becomes clear as you make decisions from the steady place of decided and done.

What's right about committing to forgiveness is it's like preempting your eventual need for forgiveness. You will need it in the future, so extending it is kind of one-for-one.

What's noble about committing to forgiveness is it is an acknowledgement of the human condition, one we all experience and one we all could stand some help in, for sure.

What's pure about the commitment to forgiveness is it is an extension of the grace shown to us in our darkest moments by a heavenly Father who has seen all of our ugly and calls us beautiful anyway.

What's lovely about the commitment to forgiveness is it fosters deeply authentic, restorative relationships.

What's excellent about the commitment to forgiveness is it sets a great example to our next generation for creating and cultivating an empathetic and understanding world.

What's praiseworthy about committing to forgiveness is that when we trust our hearts and souls to the author and finisher of our faith, we can be confident in praising him for the good works he starts and finishes with each and every one of us.

Please hear me: I know forgiveness is not an easy experience. And we all deal with it in all sorts of ways. What I know is this: forgiveness is *hard*. And -- forgiveness is *possible*. It can be a feeling, but more than that, the lasting and meaningful kind of forgiveness that actually heals hurts - that's a decision. A commitment. One we usually make more than once. But if we stick to

it, follow through on that commitment and make our choices based on the decision of forgiven, well, that changes everything.

(soft acoustic guitar)

I am so grateful to you for spending some time with me today. There are literally millions of voices to choose from on your podcast app, and you chose here! Thank you so much. If you're feeling generous or if you've got a moment, I'd be so grateful if you would share this podcast with a friend or leave a rating or review - those things help podcasters with the algorithms and gets this podcast in front of people who could really benefit from this message.

Also - we're about a month into the Friday Crew & it's been so fun! Framed around the Enneagram, a personality assessment tool, I give communication and personality tips that are quick, helpful & entertaining. We've talked about what to do when you're not having the right conversation with someone and how to make the Stressed Out You a better version of yourself. If that sounds good to you, head to elisapreston.com/enneagram to get those. That's elisapreston.com/enneagram – E N N E A G R A M. Thank you again for spending some time with me today. I'll see you next time for another episode of Praise Through It.