

the
PROVERBS 31
MINISTRIES
podcast

Biblical truth for any girl in any season.

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- Meredith: Well, hello, friends. Welcome back to the Proverbs 31 Ministries Podcast, where we share biblical Truth for any girl in any season. I'm your host, Meredith Brock, and I am here with my cohost, Kaley Olson.
- Kaley: Hi, Meredith! Happy new year, right?
- Meredith: [Crosstalk] to be in a new year.
- Kaley: I know everybody collectively takes a deep breath, just inhale and exhale. Before we get started with our episode content today, I would love for us to just take a few minutes and tell our listeners about what they can get connected to, with what's going on at Proverbs 31. So Meredith, do you want to start?
- Meredith: Absolutely. Well, starting January 19th, our first online Bible Study of the year kicks off, and it is Lysa TerKeurst's new book, *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*. Our ministry has seen an overwhelming response to this book and we believe it's a message our world desperately needs today. We want you to be a part of this study with us. So, to sign up for free, just go to proverbs31.org/study.
- Kaley: Yes. And also if you are a writer or maybe you feel passionate about writing, we've got news for you. Our writer's training platform called COMPEL opens for registration a few times a year, and right now, we are taking new members. So if one of your new year's goals is to become a better writer, or maybe you wanted to start that blog, or maybe you have a book idea, whatever your idea is, we know that your heart is to share the message that God's given you. And so now is the perfect time to get started. You can learn more at compeltraining.com.
- Meredith: Well, friends, it's time we introduce our teaching for today. And I am pumped to tell you that we were able to get the audio from the first chapter of Lysa's new book, *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*.
- We're so excited to be able to let you guys hear Lysa read that first chapter. And yes, she actually reads it herself. Not many authors can do that.
- Kaley: Yeah.

Meredith: No. I mean, seriously, whenever you're listening to an audiobook, sometimes it's like a random person, woman reading it.

Kaley: Yeah.

Meredith: But how much more personal is it that we get to listen to Lysa TerKeurst herself reading the book?

Kaley: And I'm here to tell you why she did it. And that's because the content of this book is just so personal and she couldn't stand the idea of someone else reading these personal things from her heart. So it really is a neat experience to hear her read the book.

Meredith: Yeah, absolutely. And you guys, we have a secret, and we're going to tell you about it. We actually have the second chapter for you to listen to. And it's available for our friends who subscribe to our free monthly Podcast Insider email. So if you're listening and you aren't currently subscribed, you're going to want to get access to that second chapter of the audiobook. And all you need to do is become an insider by visiting proverbs31.org/listen and sign up. And then at the end of the month, currently it's January, you'll get Chapter Two in the newsletter.

Kaley: That is awesome.

Meredith: I know! I'm pumped about that.

Kaley: Well, I think they've heard enough from me and you, haven't they? It's time to listen to Lysa in Chapter One of *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*.

Lysa: Chapter One. Forgiveness, the double-edged word. In the early days and months of my marriage devastation, I remember wishing I could be put to sleep like when you have surgery. Why is it they only call an anesthesiologist when you are surgically cut open? When you were being ripped open emotionally, it's no less painful. The shock and heartbreak and relationship implosion impacted every level of my life. Nothing was left untouched or undamaged. And I felt the harsh realities every single day. Each morning, I woke up to something else devastating. My kids were struggling. My health was failing. My finances were a mess. I was getting letters from attorneys I never dreamed we'd need. And each night, the only way I could sleep was to lie to myself that tomorrow would be better. Days turned into months, months turned into years, and slowly I turned into someone I didn't recognize. My strong but normally carefree spirit became a confusing mix of anxiety, panic attacks, and soul-blinding pain so intense I thought I'd never feel healthy or regain a sense of normalcy again.

And because I'd been through so much, that was so hard to process, a darkness started to cloud my outlook that used to be so optimistic. Relationships were reduced to attempts at managing what I feared about them rather than enjoying what I loved about them. Laughter felt fake. Fun felt careless. And people's imperfections were like neon lights, screaming that they were just another high-risk opportunity for me to get hurt again. Daily issues all seemed like worst-case scenarios. Small aggravations, like

emotional chaos and losses, big and small, were like terminal assaults. A heaviness settled in. I couldn't explain or pinpoint exactly. I'm not sure how to properly describe it except to say on different days, it crept up with varying personas that seemed to hold me together and rip me apart simultaneously. Cynicism dressed like a security guard, making me believe that if I hoped for less, it would protect me and prevent more pain.

In reality, though, it was a thief in disguise out to steal every bit of closeness between me and those I love, and even worse, authentic intimacy between me and God. Bitterness masqueraded like a high court judge making me believe I must protect the evidence against all those who hurt me so I could state and restate my airtight case and hear "guilty" proclaimed over them. In reality, though, it was a punishing sentence of isolation out the star of my soul of life-giving relationships. Resentment cloaked itself in a banner marked with the word "vindication," making me believe that the only way to get free of my pain was to make sure those who caused it hurt as badly as I did. In reality, though, it was a trap in disguise with dagger teeth, digging into me, deeper and deeper, keeping me tortured and, even worse, unable to move forward.

Delay snuck in like a theater attendant, offering popcorn and a comfy chair made of my sorrow and sadness, making me believe it was just fine to stay there playing old movies of what happened over and over. And that by doing so, I'd one day understand why it all happened. In reality, though, I was in a torture chamber with each replay only ratcheting up the pain but never providing the answers I kept thinking would come. And lastly, trust issues disguised themselves as private investigators on stealth missions, making me believe they would help me catch everyone out to hurt me and prove no one was truly honest. In reality, trust issues were toxic gas that, instead of keeping away the few who shouldn't be trusted, choked the life out of everyone who got close to me. These were the soldiers of unforgiveness waging war against me. The soldiers of unforgiveness waging war right now against every hurting person.

I am a soul who likes the concept of forgiveness until I am a hurting soul who doesn't. So it would seem strange that I am the one to pen the words of this book. But if this were easy for me, if I didn't struggle with forgiveness, I'm not sure it would be written with the angst a message like this deserves. Left to my own deep, deep woundedness, forgiveness can seem offensive, impossible. And one of the quickest ways to compound the unfairness of being wronged, I cry for fairness. I want blessings for those who follow the rules of life and love. I want correction for those who break them. Is that too much to ask? And it's that exact spot where I like to park ... focus on everyone else's wrongs, and rally those who agree with me to join in and further help me justify staying right there.

But that's like the time in college I stayed in the parking lot of a beautiful vacation spot just to make a point. A small offense happened with my friends on the drive up. When we got to our destination, they all piled out of the car, skipped through the entry and spent hours playing fun games on the beach, jumping in the refreshingly cool waves, eating a picnic lunch and making incredible memories together. All the while, I walked around the parking lot with vigilante strides in the sweltering heat, letting my anger intensify with every passing hour. I relished the idea of teaching my friends a lesson by staging this solo protest. But in the end, I was the only one affected by it. I'm the only

one who missed out. I'm the only one who stayed hungry. I'm the only one who's wrong actions were talked about that day.

And then I'm the only one who rode home in silence, knowing no one had been punished by my choices but me. The soldiers of unforgiveness whooped and hollered at their victory that day. And I was just another lonely soul crying herself to sleep, feeling embarrassed and defeated. The only memory I made that day was a sour one. That was a silly day with a pretty insignificant offense that kept me all bent out of shape. Please know, I want to acknowledge and absolutely recognize that much of the pain you and I have been through is way more serious and complicated and devastating than that day at the beach. But that parking lot is such a good visual of what holding onto offenses does to us and where the cruel soldiers of unforgiveness will always lead us to isolation, to the emotional darkness of broken relationships, to spiritual darkness with heaped on shame and to a darkened outlook where we are unable to see the beauty that awaits just beyond the parking lot.

What if I'd been able to release the offense and move forward that day at the beach? What if I could do that now? The ability to see beautiful again is what I want for you and for me. Forgiveness is the weapon. Our choices moving forward are the battlefield. Moving on is the journey. Being released from that heavy feeling is the reward. Regaining the possibility of trust and closeness is the sweet victory. And walking competently with the Lord from hurt to healing is the freedom that awaits. That's what this book is. A journey where you'll discover new ways, healthy and helpful ways to process your pain. Now let me assure you what it isn't. It is not a message that diminishes what you've been through or makes light of the anguish you've cried a million tears over. It is not a message that justifies abuse or abandonment or fails that are all wrong, no matter how it's flipped or framed by others.

It is not a message that refuses to acknowledge how powerful feelings are and how powerless you can feel when you get flooded by pain, triggered by memories, ignored by those who were supposed to love you or brushed aside by those who should have cared for you. This isn't a message that demands your excuse, the cruelest and most horrific crimes committed against you or those you love nor will it not in the direction of forgiveness, demanding all relationships work out with all people. Sometimes that's neither possible nor safe. In fact, we will do the work of untangling the erroneously co-mingled ideas of forgiveness and reconciliation. And this message definitely isn't something that will be preached at you with pointed fingers and accusatory tones. I can't pick those messages up. So I definitely won't be laying a message like that down. But while it will offer truckloads of grace, it is fueled with God's truth.

After all, grace gives us the assurance that it's safe enough to soften our fearful hearts, but it is the truth that will set us free. See John 8:32, grace and truth are kept together throughout Scripture. See John 1:14 and verse 17. If I only offered you grace, I would be shortchanging you on what it truly is to heal. While the truth is sometimes hard to hear, God gives it to us because He knows what our hearts and souls really need. It is His truth that sets us free. Forgiveness is possible, but it won't always feel possible. Forgiveness often feels like one of the most maddening instructions from the Lord. It's a double-

edged word, isn't it? It's hard to give. It's amazing to get. But when we receive it freely from the Lord and refuse to give it, something heavy starts to form in our souls.

It's the weight of forgiveness that wasn't allowed to pass through. And for me, that's mainly because I've misunderstood something so incredibly profound about forgiveness. Forgiveness isn't something hard. We have the option to do or not do. Forgiveness is something hard-won that we have the opportunity to participate in. Our part in forgiveness isn't one of desperation where we have to muscle through with gritted teeth and clenched fists. It isn't fighting through the irritation and wrestling down the indignation. It isn't sobbing through the resistance of all of our justifications to stay angry and hurt and horrified by all they did. This is what I once thought.

But when I wrongly think forgiveness rises and falls on all my efforts, mustered up grit, conjured maturity, bossed around resistance, and gentle feelings that feel real one moment and fake the next. I'll never be able to authentically give the kind of forgiveness Jesus has given me. My ability to forgive others rises and falls instead on this, leaning into what Jesus has already done, which allows His grace for me to flow freely through me, see the visions for seven. Forgiveness isn't an act of my determination. Forgiveness is only made possible by my cooperation.

Cooperation is what I've been missing. God knew we couldn't do it on our own. He knew that full well, right from the very moment the crunch of the forbidden fruit became sins first sounds. And then came [inaudible] of the enemy's accusations and the pounding footsteps of a terrified and woman. Adam and Eve ran to the darkness as blame and shame reverberated with echoes we still hear coming out of our mouths today. Then they hid. As soon as sin was their choice, the cover of darkness became their preference. And please be patient as I speak these next words. It's not just when I do something wrong that I find myself running and hiding in the darkness.

It's also when I do the very opposite of what I should in reaction to someone who sins against me, wrongs me, hurts me, or even just inconveniences me. My first inclination, most of the time isn't to bless them, or to be patient with them, or to be all things Romans 12, and give them a Happy Meal and a chocolate milkshake. Nope. My first inclination is to do the very thing I'm so critical of them doing. I let my justifications for retaliation draw me in. And I make sure I hurt them the way they hurt me. And when sin is my choice, the cover of darkness is my preference. But make no mistake. It isn't just what covers me. It's also what hovers over me with that maddening heaviness. Human hearts are so very prone to want to cover things up. We all have that place we run to where it is dark rather than risk what may come out in the light.

We want freedom, but are resistant to simply doing what God says to do. God knew all of this. So He made a way not dependent on our strength, a forgiving way, a way to grab onto Jesus's outstretched arms, bloody from crucifixion and dripping with redemption. He covers and forgives what we've only been able to hide. He forgives what we could never be good enough to make right and makes a way for us to simply cooperate with his work of forgiveness for us to receive and for us to give. I believe with all my heart forgiveness received and given is the very thing that splits this world open with the most

stunning revelation of the reality of Jesus more than almost anything else. But please never confuse redemption with reunion.

Reunion or reconciliation requires two people who are willing to do the hard work to come back together. Redemption is just between you and God. God can redeem your life even if damaged human relationships don't come back together. And you and I can forgive, even if the relationship never gets restored. It's so incredibly freeing to forgive and not have to wait on other people who may or may not ever want to or be willing to talk all of this through. Forgiveness isn't always about doing something for a human relationship, but rather about being obedient to what God has instructed us to do. Those who cooperate most fully with forgiveness are those who dance most freely in the beauty of redemption. And what exactly is this beautiful redemption? It is you accepting the exchange God is offering. What you give up, the right to demand that the one who hurt you pay you back or be made to suffer for what they've done.

God will handle this. And even if you never see how God handles it, you know He will. What you get, the freedom to move on. The scenery for your life should not be the pit of pain that person dragged you down into. There's so much more to see and discover and experience. Let go of calling your way through the muddy pit, hoping there's some reward buried there. There's not. Take God's hand. And as the words of forgiveness are released from your lips, it's like scattering seeds of beautiful flowers. The mud of the pit becomes fertile soil with potential. And before long, you'll be dancing through all that has blossomed and bloomed around you. For a while, you may still have tears that come and go, that's okay. Freedom from unforgiveness doesn't mean instant healing for all the emotions involved, but it does mean those emotions will turn into eventual compassion rather than bitterness.

And you'll see those who cooperate most fully with forgiveness really are those who dance most freely in the beauty of redemption. I'll just let that statement sit right there without requiring anything from you. I certainly don't mean that you should quickly get over all you've been through and move on from here. Deep emotions come to us in a rush, but don't leave at the same pace. It takes time. That is exactly what I wish to give you as we move slowly through this message. Before we walked through the steps of forgiveness, we're first going to process our coping mechanisms and the reasons we resist forgiveness. And even more importantly, we are going to make the decision that we will survive all of this by taking away the power from the ones who hurt us. Our healing can't rise or fall on their efforts, especially if they can't or won't change.

Yes, this will take time, but it can happen. And pressing on toward forgiveness will require other important components as well. It takes understanding. That is the reason I'm sharing both the brutal and the beautiful realities of my own deep pain. It takes insight. That is what I'll give you. Based on my study of God's Word, my own admissions of resistance and my imperfect progress. It takes divine intervention. That is exactly what God will provide you personally and profoundly, not through my words, but His, woven throughout this book. And lastly, it will take openness. That's the invitation. I'm not requiring this from you, but rather offering you a place in this discussion for your own revelations from God to gently and beautifully emerge. And the best part is we can do this together.

Meredith: Well, friends, we are so grateful for this book for the message that Lysa has shared, even in just Chapter One. I know that right now, wherever you are, we know that no one is exempt from walking through the process of forgiveness and that everybody's having to navigate this in their own personal way. And so maybe you're in the car right now and you just listened to this, and your heart is tender. Maybe you're surprised that you made it this far because listening to this chapter was triggering and you're so resistant to forgiveness because of how badly you've been hurt. There's a lot of places that people can be right now. And so wherever you are, we just want you to know that we see you. We know that this is hard and we want healing for you. So one of the best things that you can do is study this book with a community of women surrounding you on the journey.

And you can do that through Proverbs 31 Online Bible Studies. Our team there, Kendra and Melissa, and so many other volunteers—like countless people—care deeply about each participant. We're expecting a huge mass of women to just join us for this study. And I can't wait to see what God does through everybody who joins and the forgiveness that He just unleashes in the community.

I know our world so desperately needs that right now. And so if this is you and you want more, but you know that you need community and you need accountability, all you need to do to join the study for free is visit proverbs31.org/study.

Kaley: Yes. Please don't miss out on that if you're ready for the forgiveness journal. And please don't forget if you want access to the audio version of Chapter Two of Lysa's book, sign up for our Podcast Insider email list. It'll be included in the January 2021 newsletter. So sign up for free today at proverbs31.org/listen. Well, thank you all so much for joining us today friends. At Proverbs 31, we want to help you know the truth and live the truth because when you do, it really does change [inaudible].

[Singing]