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3 Models of Forgiveness We Can All Follow

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I didn't want to forgive my assailant. I believed forgiveness meant that I was letting him win, so instead I bottled up my feelings and held onto them. He deserved all the anger I was funneling toward him.

But the truth was, my bitterness was sitting inside my chest like poison, eating away at a little of my joy every day. I thought staying firm in unforgiveness would strengthen me, but it made me oversensitive and angrier. I felt God calling me to take control of my life again and move toward His purpose for me, but I didn't know where to start.

With some prayer, I stumbled upon the stories of a few individuals who extended their forgiveness in the most surprising ways.

Pope St. John Paul II

When I was hurt by my assailant, it was hard for me to look toward the future with positivity and hope. After all, what they'd done to me was hurting me emotionally every day. But Pope Saint John Paul II's story showed me how to move forward with hope.

On May 13, 1981, a Turkish nationalist named Mehmet Ah Agca shot Pope John Paul II twice, which left him in critical condition. But after the shooting in St. Peter's Square, Pope John Paul II asked the population to pray for Agca, for he had forgiven him. In fact, the pope visited Agca in prison, and the media reported their conversation was lighthearted and included some laughs from the would-be assassin. The pope asked for Agca's pardon, and Agca converted to Catholicism.

I wanted to carry my emotional scars the same way that Pope John Paul II carried his bullet scars. I saw how John Paul II continued his term as pope, and I wanted to move forward in the same way, focusing on my career in writing. Forgiveness provided me with an outlet to be free from my pain.

St. Maria Goretti

I often wondered why it mattered whether I forgave my assailant – it wouldn't change the past. But my mindset shifted when I learned about St. Maria Goretti.

Maria was an eleven-year-old living on her late father's farm in Italy when a worker, Alessandro, attacked her in her bedroom. When she resisted his advances, he stabbed her fourteen times and left her to die. At the hospital, Maria told the doctors she wanted Alessandro in Heaven with her before passing away from her injuries.

When I heard the story of Maria, I felt a stirring in my heart to forgive my assailant, too, but what really astounded me was what happened after Maria forgave. After seeing a vision from Maria, Alessandro sought the will of God and forgave himself, which ultimately led Maria's mother to forgive Alessandro.

While Maria lost her life because of that attack, the impact of her actions lived on. I hope that sharing my story of forgiveness will influence other people's lives too.

Louis Zamperini

Sometimes, our forgiveness might not impact those who hurt us directly. That was the case for [Louis Zamperini](#), an Olympic runner who was drafted during World War II and imprisoned in a POW camp. His tormentor, named the Bird, beat him incessantly and forced him to perform physical labor.

After his rescue, Zamperini returned to the

After his rescue, Zamperini returned to the prison camp a year later and learned the Bird had died; his tormenting was over. In response to that news, Zamperini didn't experience hatred or relief; rather, he let go of his bitterness, which had been holding him captive. He found forgiveness by putting the weight on God and believing he was worthy of God's love.

I never got to face my assailant after getting hurt, so it was important for me to let go of my bitterness on my own. I placed my emotions on God and gave Him permission to judge my assailant. Like Zamperini, I eventually felt worthy of God's love and found myself moving forward.

These three models did not come from prestigious backgrounds but instead shared humble beginnings. They did not go to fancy schools or have access to the finest resources. They trained their eyes on God and asked for the grace to forgive.

As Pope Saint John Paul II said, "Asking and granting forgiveness is something profoundly worthy of every one of us."



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