



The Receiver



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But be doers of the word, and not hearers only.... James 1:22

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I love winter in the Rockies. The mountains, valleys, and plains are full of breathtaking views and diverse world-class recreational opportunities. The winter holidays also bring together family and friends. But what I love most about this time of year is seeing freshly fallen snow gently blanket the world around us in whiteness. For a time, all is quiet, peaceful, and simple. It covers unraked leaves, mud and outdoor projects left undone. Here in the West, this season especially, the snow represents the answered prayers of thousands of people who rely on mountain snowpack for water for their livelihood throughout the year.

Long considered a symbol of forgiveness, a blanket of freshly fallen snow refers to a teaching by the prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." Because ultimately, forgiveness is a gift from God - and the forgiveness we extend to others is a reflection of the forgiveness God so generously showers upon us.

Life is a study in forgiveness. No one gets through life without needing to forgive, and no one escapes the need to be forgiven. Perhaps the central test of character, forgiveness brings out the best in us. It leads us beyond our own pain and suffering and helps us feel God's love. Ironically, we help ourselves in the most profound way when we give the gift of forgiveness to others.

Charlotte Bronte's literary classic *Jane Eyre* addresses the theme of forgiveness so well. Young Jane, orphaned and sent to live with a spiteful aunt, endures years of neglect and cruelty as a child. When Jane is old enough, her aunt sends her away to a substandard boarding school, where she is again mistreated. But Jane learns a vital lesson from Helen, a dear friend there.

Helen explains to Jane one of life's great secrets, "Life appears to me too short to be spent in nursing animosity, or registering wrongs." Helen teaches Jane to forgive - to forget wrongs, to love enemies, and to "bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you . . . [and] despitefully use you."

Jane's life is different ever after. It did not necessarily become easier, Jane still had to endure injustices, hardships, and betrayals. But she was better prepared for all these things, because she had learned not to hold on to grudges and ill feelings. She freed her soul from anger, bitterness, and revenge. In fact, Jane even returned to her malicious aunt and attended to her during her dying days. Ultimately, Jane found true joy - even true love, because she learned to forgive.

And so can we. It may be the hardest work we will ever do, but is also the most rewarding. Resolve now to let go of an old grudge. Decide in advance to forgive any future offense that may come. Determine never to let a mistake get in the way of a meaningful relationship. As the 18th-century British poet Alexander Pope wrote, "To err is human, to forgive, divine."

—Ch, Capt Camille Barlow, RMR Deputy Chaplain
Contact for citations