

## Moving Beyond Anger and Resentment



Christopher News Notes

**WE'VE ALL BEEN THERE.** Someone treats us dismissively or is outright rude. Or maybe we've been hurt by people we trusted, and it still makes us angry. Anger can be a powerful emotion that obscures the light in our lives. And holding onto resentment leads us down into a spiral of negativity and spiritual dangers. Thankfully, Jesus offers the antidote.

Letting go of anger is one of the most difficult things a Christian is called to do. What tougher Gospel verses are there than, “Turn the other cheek” (Matthew 5:39) or “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44)? Yet we know from Christ’s example and teachings that not letting go of anger only amplifies malice and cruelty in a world already too full of both.

If forgiving someone “seventy times seven” sounds like a tall order, that’s because it is. But the alternative is far worse, for ourselves and those around us. Learning to let go of anger and resentment is a key stepping stone to a more balanced, peaceful, and Christ-filled life.

## The Disease of Resentment

*“Resentment is like taking poison and waiting for the other guy to die.”*  
—Malachy McCourt

In his book *Healing the Diseases of the Heart*, Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, president of the Italian Episcopal Conference, notes that resentment is a disease that infects our sense of peace and stability. It can start simply, and with small things, and soon grow to take over our hearts, leading us to judge, dismiss, and hold grudges.

In an article on the website *Aleteia*, Cardinal Zuppi says, “This is also why we must forgive without reservation and without making it conditional on the offender’s behavior or compensation. And forgiving does not imply seeking justice first...It pays to forgive! Only forgiveness frees us from the evil we have suffered: this is the only possible remedy for defeating resentment.”

## A Seat of Anger

Sometimes, we don’t notice how much our anger is affecting us, so it falls to our friends and family to point out how destructive we are being. Author Lindsey Hammond wrote an article in *Guideposts* about the time a friend challenged her to put down her anger—or, if she couldn’t do that, to carry it around in a radically different way.

Lindsey had grown up in difficult circumstances, around people who hurt her badly. She carried deep resentment towards them and tried to drown it with drugs and alcohol. After getting sober and engaging in counseling, her habits became healthier, but she still felt justified in her anger. One day, Lindsey’s friend Sue saw that her anger was suffocating her. So, Sue suggested to Lindsey the following idea: “I want you to find a chair, a big folding chair, to carry around with you. It will help you see what a burden your seat of anger has become.”

“Are you crazy?” Lindsey exclaimed. “I’m a professional, Sue. I’m not going to do something that bizarre!”

Sue smiled and responded, “Go home and think about it, Lindsey. How badly do you want to change?”

Lindsey decided to give it a shot. She found a folding chair at Goodwill, wrote “ANGER” on it, and carried it with her everywhere she went. She got a lot of odd looks, but then something unexpected happened. People began opening up to her, talking about their issues, telling her she was brave for being so public about hers. The chair inspired conversation and openness.

One day, a pastor asked Lindsey to speak with middle school students about her experiment with the chair. He asked each of the students to write down what made them angry and put it in a basket on Lindsey’s chair. Something shifted inside of Lindsey when she saw all those children putting their hurts in the basket.

She recalled, “I looked at that seat of anger. My eyes prickled with tears. Maybe it was the peace in the sanctuary, maybe it was reaching the kids, who were at the age where I’d been so hurt. I knew one thing: It was time to let go of the chair—and the negative feelings that went with it. There in the church, I gave my anger and pain to God. Then I walked out the door and into my life, feeling lighter, freer, ready to embrace my art, my relationships, all the wonders waiting for me.”

The Mayo Clinic Staff offers these suggestions on moving toward forgiveness:

- Recognize the value of forgiveness and how it can improve your life.
- Identify what needs healing and who you want to forgive.
- Join a support group or see a counselor.
- Acknowledge your emotions about the harm done to you, recognize how those emotions affect your behavior, and work to release them.
- Choose to forgive the person who’s offended you.
- Release the control and power that the offending person and situation have had in your life.

## The Healing Power of Forgiveness

In their book *Choosing Forgiveness: Unleashing the Power of God’s Grace*, Father Thomas Berg and clinical psychologist Dr. Timothy Lock diagnose and offer solutions to the inability to forgive. Father Berg says, “When we forgive, we are able to ‘let go’ of that ruminating and stewing, and the person who offended us. This ‘letting go’ allows us to relax, and we can direct our resources and strength to other areas of our life.”

The authors go into detail about how forgiveness is a decision that takes time, and is often deeply challenging. It is active, deliberate, and can be difficult. Dr. Lock notes, “[Forgiveness] means canceling a debt, giving up something that we really want from the offender, namely, our own affirmation and validation. That kind of decision often takes time, it takes prayer, and you have to build up to it.”

Dr. Lock and Father Berg highlight that the process of forgiveness is asking for God’s grace—and extending that grace to others who hurt us. It’s a desire not to be bound by past hurts and to be free

to live and love, at peace with all. Part of it involves recognizing the hurts that we have caused and learning to forgive ourselves. Forgiveness is truly a circle of healing. And what it offers is freedom from the anger and resentment we carry as a defense.

“We have seen people from all types of life experience benefit from forgiving,” Dr. Lock writes. “We have seen people who have experienced tremendous trauma yet live a profoundly forgiving life; we’ve also seen others who have experienced relatively little trauma live an unforgiving life. I think when we are honest, we can all identify places in our hearts where we need to grow in forgiveness.”

## Finding Peace Through God’s Grace

Growing up in Los Angeles, gang life surrounded César John Paul Galan. His friends, siblings, and everyone around him were involved in one way or another. Anger and retribution were the code they lived by. Then, one day in 2001, everything changed. A shootout with a rival gang left his brother dead and César clinging to life. He would survive his injuries, but end up paralyzed from the waist down and permanently confined to a wheelchair.

In a story on *Aleteia*, César recalled that at the moment of the shooting, as he was lying on the sidewalk, he experienced a strange sense of peace. He said, “I heard a voice deep inside of me just saying, ‘Do not be afraid, I’ll be with you always.’”

While recovering at St. Francis Medical Center,



**“It’s better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.”**

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César found his way out of bitterness and despair with the help of Brother Richard Hirbe, minister general of the Friars of the Sick Poor and a St. Francis chaplain. He learned to forgive the man who put him in a wheelchair and killed his brother. And through God’s grace, he made peace with what happened to him.

In fact, César speaks of the incident as a catalyst to his faith and vocation. It was in the hospital chapel where he encountered Christ. “There’s somebody that created me that loves me beyond even my wildest imagination,” he said in a testimony. César realized that he could use his infirmity as a way to connect with others in similar situations. He studied, became a hospital chaplain, and in 2015, he joined the Friars of the Sick Poor (FSP) himself.

Brother César wanted to extend the same care and compassion to others that helped him let go of bitter resentment when his life had been upended. Through his work and his vocation, he saw that God was calling him to ministry beyond the hospital walls. He was accepted to study for the priesthood and was ordained in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles in 2023.

None of this would have been possible without that first step, when Brother Hirbe encouraged César to go down the path of forgiveness, for his own sake and that of the man who hurt him. That decision, and trusting that this was God’s plan for healing the hurt and anger in the world, continue to echo to this day. “I just pray that God always gives me a heart for service,” Father César said. “In my darkest days, I couldn’t imagine myself doing this. But here I am. And to those discerning a vocation, I encourage them to look forward, and pay attention to what the Lord is telling you.”

*“Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.”*

—Ephesians 4:31-32