

## Chapter 3

### Closing the Last Chapter: Part II— Leaving Difficult Things

In addition to all the “good” things in the last chapter are the “bad” things that came into your life. Even though we want to leave these things behind, sometimes we have difficulty doing it. We may want to forget about some, but events keep occurring to remind us of them. We may feel ashamed of others, and we keep reminding ourselves of those. To continue the transition process and really leave them behind us, we usually have to recall them, think about them, and place them in the perspective of our whole life story.

Paul and Barnabas talked not only about the good things that had happened but also about the difficult things. Luke also recorded some of these difficult things right along with the good things.

- While they were in Perga (in Pamphylia), John Mark left them to return to his passport country (Acts 13:13) before they moved on to Antioch (in Pisidia). Since they were shorthanded, Paul and Barnabas probably felt overworked and abandoned, and later they had some relationship problems about this. Paul had not yet left it behind.
- Still filled with the Holy Spirit, when they were deported from Antioch (in Pisidia), they shook off the dust from their feet in protest and went on to Iconium (Acts 13:50-52). Paul and Barnabas knew the pain of being rejected by the very people to whom they had come to minister.
- In Iconium they found out about a plot to harm them, so they fled to Lystra (Acts 14:5-6). Paul and Barnabas experienced danger, fear and evacuation.

- In Lystra Paul was stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead (Acts 14:19).

You may have been to your “Antiochs,” “Pergas,” “Iconiums,” and “Lystras.” Take time to look at your debrief form and look for those difficult times. Paul wrote in more detail about these times in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28. These are listed below for you to check off how many you have experienced yourself. Then on the blank lines at the end of Paul’s list, add additional ones you have experienced.

- ☐ Worked hard
- ☐ In prison
- ☐ Exposed to death
- ☐ Beaten
- ☐ Stoned
- ☐ Shipwrecked
- ☐ Adrift in the sea
- ☐ Constantly on the move
- ☐ In danger from rivers
- ☐ In danger from bandits
- ☐ In danger from his own countrymen
- ☐ In danger from the nationals
- ☐ In danger in the city
- ☐ In danger in the country
- ☐ In danger at sea
- ☐ In danger from false brothers
- ☐ Labored
- ☐ Toiled
- ☐ Went without sleep
- ☐ Hungry
- ☐ Thirsty

\_ Cold  
\_ Without clothes  
\_ “Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.”

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Sometimes it is difficult to close a chapter and leave such things behind emotionally, but it can be done. Paul had done this by the time he wrote Timothy. Paul wrote about his life, purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, and sufferings all in one sentence—good and bad alike. In fact he specifically mentioned the difficulties he endured “in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra” (2 Timothy 3:10-11). He finished by saying, “Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.”

Take time to go back a second time through Paul’s list as well as the items you have added. Check in the circles all those that still bother you. This is a good time to bring closure to them. If you do not do it now, these items may follow you into the next chapter of your life and become stumbling blocks there. Go back to the circles you have checked to consider some of the same questions you did about the good things in the last chapter.

• How did these difficult things lead to growth in your life?

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• How did God use the difficulties in your life

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• How did your fellow missionaries help you grow in those difficult times?

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• How do these difficult circumstances fit with the rest of your life story, with previous chapters in your life?

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• How do you see God using these difficult experiences as stepping stones into the next chapter of your life?

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Issues that are the most difficult to close are often those involving other people, people who were given advantages you thought you deserved, people who said things about your spouse, and especially people you saw as mistreating your children. Cross-

cultural transitions often bring these issues of “unfinished business” to a head as we see in the life of Jacob. Although listed as one of the “heroes of the faith” in Hebrews 11, Jacob did not know how to “leave well.” Coming from a dysfunctional family and producing a dysfunctional family himself, Jacob was more likely to sneak off without even saying goodbye than he was to seek forgiveness and reconciliation.

- He slipped out of his passport country under threat of death from his brother (Genesis 27:41-28:2).
- He attempted to slip out of his host country without resolving serious disagreements with his father-in-law and brothers-in-law (Genesis 31:1-21).
- He was in great fear and distress, praying that God would save him from his brother, as he reentered his passport country (Genesis 32:1-12).

Although filled with deceit like Jacob’s family, Laban’s family made attempts at reconciliation (following a warning by God himself).

- Laban followed Jacob for a week and finally caught up with him (Genesis 31:22-24).
- Laban was prepared to spend some time with Jacob (Genesis 31:25).
- Laban confronted Jacob about leaving secretly without even letting him say good-bye to his daughters and grandchildren (Genesis 31:26-30).
- After a long discussion about the issues dividing them (Genesis 31:31-43), Laban said, “Come now, let’s make a covenant, you and I, and let it serve as a witness between us” (Genesis 31:44).
- They committed the disagreement to God and made promises to each other asking God to hold them accountable for keeping those promises (Genesis 31:49-53).

- They ate together, stayed until the next day, and then each left for home (Genesis 31:54-32:2).

As he neared his passport country, Jacob took three more steps that are often helpful in reconciliation.

- He sent mediators to his brother (Genesis 32:3-6). This is often helpful, especially if there is great hostility.
- He again prayed to God (Genesis 32:9-12). This is always appropriate and necessary.
- He selected gifts from what he had and sent them on ahead (Genesis 32:13-20).

Reconciliation is always the goal. Jesus told us that if God reminds us of an offended friend while worshiping, we are to first go and be reconciled, then come back and worship (Matthew 5:23-24).

However, since reconciliation involves two people, it is not always possible if the other person refuses. Paul wrote, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18).

Who (if anyone) do you believe God wants you to see personally for reconciliation? This would be someone you can meet face to face.

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Who (if anyone) do you believe God wants you to call on the phone for reconciliation? You can call people anywhere in the country for three or four cents a minute ([www.bigzoo.com](http://www.bigzoo.com) and [www.suiteone.com](http://www.suiteone.com)), and many cell phones have free minutes every month.

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Who (if anyone) do you believe God wants you to write an e-mail for reconciliation? This can be done at no cost anywhere in the world.

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Who (if anyone) do you believe God wants you to write a letter for reconciliation? This can be done for less than a dollar anywhere in the world.

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Although reconciliation is not always possible, forgiveness is because it involves only one person—you. Not only is it possible, but it is also repeatedly commanded by God. Forgiveness can be granted even if the person who has wronged you does not request it. Granting forgiveness frees you to get on with your life, to go on to the next chapter. Consider others in Jacob's family.

- Esau, who at one time was considering killing Jacob (Genesis 27:41-42), could have nursed that grudge for 20 years. However without any request from Jacob, Esau had granted forgiveness to him as indicated by Esau's greeting in Genesis 33:4-9.

- He ran to meet Jacob.
- He embraced him.
- He threw his arms around his neck.
- He kissed him.
- He wept with him.
- He asked about his family

- He called him "brother."
- He refused the gifts, saying he had plenty.
- Joseph, who witnessed the reunion of his father with Uncle Esau (Genesis 33:1-2), learned the lesson of forgiveness well.

Although 10 of his brothers plotted to kill him and finally sold him as a slave, he did not hold it against them. Even though living near him in their host country of Egypt for more than 15 years, they had apparently never asked for forgiveness. Again, as they had 39 years earlier, they made up a story—this time about what Jacob had said (Genesis 50:15-17). Joseph's response shows us that he had granted forgiveness even without being asked.

- You wanted to harm me.
- God intended it for good.
- It accomplished the saving of many lives.
- Don't be afraid.
- I will provide for you and your children.
- He reassured them.
- He spoke kindly to them.

Forgiving is sometimes a very difficult, but necessary, thing to do. Consider some of the following facts about forgiveness.

- Forgiveness literally means "to give up."
- The dictionary defines it as "to give up all claim to exact punishment for an offence."
- Forgiveness is repeatedly commanded in Scripture.
- Once you have granted forgiveness, you can never bring that offence up again.
- In the Lord's Prayer we ask God to forgive us as we forgive others.
- Forgiveness does not mean forgetting, but that memory no longer

has control over us, and it does not bring the same pain.

- Forgiveness does not mean the offender becomes your friend (reconciliation), although that may happen.

Are there some people you need to forgive? Perhaps you have not given up all claim to exact punishment on some of the following people.

- Family Members
  - Father or mother?
  - Sister or brother?
  - Child of yours?
  - Aunt or uncle?
  - Stepparent
- Others in your agency
  - Fellow missionary?
  - Field director
  - Homeland administrator?
  - Board member?
- Nationals
  - Teacher?
  - Pastor?
  - Student?
  - Housekeeper?

Continue to work on considering how all these difficult things are fitting into your life story. Paul wrote about this in Romans 8:28. If you love God and are called according to his purpose, you know that God works in all things (even bad things) for good. When you have granted forgiveness so that you feel it in your heart like you

know it in your head, you are ready to go on to the next chapter—one in which God will take what Satan meant to be stumbling blocks and turn them into stepping stones.