
Letting go of my hate

by Diana Honaker

It was another visitation day. My two children, Billy and Tonya, were excited about seeing their dad, who was now my ex-husband. I was thankful that he loved and enjoyed them. I had no problem with their relationship. It was the presence of Vicki, "the other woman," that drove me to tears. As his car pulled away from the curb, a giant wave of hate swept over me.

I retreated quickly behind the front door as feelings of anger and rage filled every inch of me. I cried out, "Father, please make this stop!" My aching heart felt as though it would explode. All I wanted was relief from the heartache that engulfed me.

God had planted me into a caring group of Christians at our church. They listened patiently and ministered to my children and me. Their encouraging love taught me to trust Jesus. I knew that there was someone to pray with me morning or night. These Christians not only discussed the Word and prayed with me, they invited me and my children to their homes for times of laughter and fun. The acceptance that I felt helped me deal with my feelings of inadequacy.

Because of their love for me and for Jesus, I started to desire to be set free from the hate that burned inside me. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." As the desire grew in me to let go of the hate, I found out that I could not do it by myself.

Many times I asked God to free me from the hatred, but the root of bitterness had grown deep inside me. It took only a glance at the circumstances to trigger the rage within. One situation that occurred again and again involved my two-year-old son, Billy. After each visitation with his dad I would hear car doors slam, and then Billy would be screaming and crying. Before the kids even entered the house, I knew that the next two hours would push me to the limit.

Billy begged his daddy not to leave. Tonya did not want him to go either, but at the age of five she had learned not to show emotion. My ex-husband would try to coax Billy out of his emotional state, but when that didn't work, my ex-husband would leave. The children's sorrow was left in my lap. Billy would not let me hold him or talk to him; all I could do was wait for his tears to run dry.

I grew weary of my pastor's counsel. He kept saying the same thing. "Let go." It seemed so unfair. In desperation I prayed, "Lord, please show me how to let go, and how to forgive." If I had known what was ahead, I might not have asked. The lesson was hard, but the freedom that I received during the following year changed my life.

I was standing in the line waiting for my first unemployment check after an unexpected layoff. The kids were restless and hungry; I promised them a hamburger on the way home. Everything seemed so hard. The kids were a handful, but I didn't know what I would do without them. My thoughts were interrupted with, "Mommy, look! There's Vicki!"

Before I could stop them, they darted off to see her. "Oh Lord, how do I get away from her?" There she was at the front of the line, handing out unemployment checks. She hugged my children and gave them suckers.

"I can't handle this, Lord! Why is this happening?" I thought frantically. Then a familiar voice spoke quietly within me: "Do you want to be free from this? Forgive her."

For the next five months Vicki handed me my unemployment checks. She gave bountiful hugs and suckers to the kids, and I learned to respond in my heart, "OK, Lord, I forgive her." After a while Vicki and I had short conversations. Slowly I noticed that my chest was no longer tight from anger. I relaxed. When the children ran to get suckers from her, there was peace occupying the space that hatred had once filled.

When I was called back to work, I went with joy in my heart. Now I was happier than before, and some of the other employees wanted to know why. This gave me an opportunity to tell them about Jesus. Some of them came to know him as Savior.

Even on visitation days my peace remained. The despair was gone, and joy had taken its place. I knew that Jesus would never leave me or hurt me.

One Saturday, as I finished doing the dishes, the phone rang. "Hello," I answered. All I could hear on the other end was quiet sobbing. "Who is it?" I asked. At last a quiet voice replied. "It's Vicki. I just wanted to tell you that I'm sorry."

Again I could hear crying. My mind was searching for something to say. "Vicki, what is wrong?" I asked. "What has happened?" She said, "You have been so strong through everything. How have you done it?" Carefully I answered, "Vicki, I'm not strong. But there is someone who gives me strength. Jesus is the One who helps me. He can help you too."

"I'm not good enough for that," she said. "It's odd that you would mention Jesus. Last week I went to church with a friend. She tried to get me to go up front to accept Jesus as my Savior. I couldn't. I'm not good enough!"

"God loves you just the way you are," I responded. "Why don't you come over to my house? It will be easier for us to talk here."

After hanging up, I started to pray, "Lord, if I'm not ready to tell her about You, please don't let her come." I was afraid that I might still have some unforgiveness in my heart. All at once I started to feel inadequate. What if I said something wrong? I called my friend next door who prayed with me and offered to watch the kids.

"Lord, give me Your love for Vicki," I asked. I recalled Proverbs 24:17 "Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice."

The doorbell rang. When I opened the door, I saw only a hurting woman who needed Jesus. "The other woman" who had been a threat to me disappeared as I extended my hand to Vicki.

We sat on the couch and read God's wonderful plan of salvation. Then we knelt beside the couch and a miracle happened -- Jesus came into her life. When Vicki drove away, I sensed the Lord saying, "Forgiveness sets everyone free."

From then on, I was often blessed by Vicki's love for my children. But the greatest blessing has been the wonderful freedom from bitterness and hate that I found by letting go.