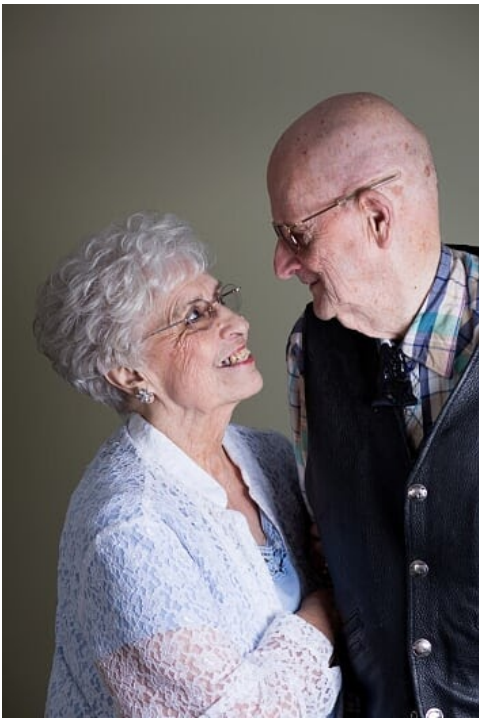


# OUR PATH TO HAPPINESS

*(Some names have been changed to protect the privacy of others)*

**By Rea Clodfelter Whicker**

*Christmas 2020*



A few years ago, as I was pondering what I could leave for my children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, etc., the thought came to me that if I could just leave them real happiness such as their father/grandfather and I have had, that would satisfy my desire! I prayed and pondered about how I could accomplish that. I know I cannot just hand happiness to each one of you! So the next question was ‘what is it that has helped bring about this degree of happiness.

As I looked back, carefully searching for the answer, I went step by step through my life. The end result was obvious.... I would love for them to grow in the understanding and value of real honesty, true love and **real forgiveness!**

I have found that forgiveness is the happiness place for those who choose it. But I believe the lessons in love and honesty are essential to reach that goal!

My journey forward in life (thus far) has consisted of lots of love, lots of joy, a fair amount of pain...all of which resulted in lots of learning! I can see clearly now that the pain was a necessary ingredient for any progress I have been blessed with or with any that I will yet be blessed with.

As a child, I was taught to be kind toward others, as my father and mother were often involved in compassionate service. For my parents, kindness was a heartfelt and natural thing. They were a great example of feeling and caring for others.

However, I also had examples which gave me a seemingly justified sense of anger concerning what “should” happen to a person when they commit an offensive or damaging act. After many years of this influence I, too, became prone to criticize those who hurt others, and pronounce what I thought was a logical and adequate “should-be” punishment against the offenders.

Many years later, I was married to my wonderful husband, Ben. Although he was often my teacher in diminishing my disgust with others at times, he had his own strong disdain for careless or uninformed drivers! We all felt a bit of humor as he yelled at truck drivers for not dimming their lights etc. Over the course of many more years, I



watched a great change happen with my beloved father's perception and actions....and also with my husband's tunnel vision towards those drivers!

One of the 'wake up' calls that brought about a rearranging of my way of thinking happened as Grandpa and I were entering the driveway to our local grocery store's parking lot, another vehicle was exiting the same driveway. She was well beyond her side on the exit half. She barely gave us room to enter. Grandpa mumbled something about 'what on earth' she thought she was doing!! As we passed her, driver's window to driver's window, we both saw WHO was committing this Great Offense! Grandpa's whole demeanor changed quickly to a smile, a wave, and a friendly "Hi, how are you doing?" Our sweet, close and wonderful neighbor was in the car! So sweet, so wonderful, that suddenly the way she had been driving was just FINE!

Another example of this new concept occurred as a huge semi truck approached us going South as we were going North on a busy highway. It was a dark, rainy night that made it much harder to see when the trucker failed to dim his lights. I held on as Grandpa (and my husband) changed directions quickly so that he could stop the trucker and advise him of the need to dim headlights when you meet someone coming from the other direction, especially in a dark, dark night! I objected and told him it was not necessary, but anger is usually blind, or hard of hearing, I guess! When he saw our car blinking our lights at him, the truck driver calmly pulled over to the side of the road. Very quickly there was a face in the man's passenger side window, which he had rolled down for convenience in conversing.

"Don't you know enough to dim your lights?" was the grumpy question presented to this truck-driver-stranger.

The driver's face softened and his voice was totally apologetic as he replied, "Oh did I not dim my lights? I'm so sorry!"

'A soft answer turneth away wrath!' (Proverbs 5:1) (An often repeated scripture of your Great/Great Grandmother, Beulah Blanche King Whicker!) Grandpa's wrath was gone! It not only was gone, but he replaced it with honest sheepiness!

So now a question formed in my mind. In Grandpa's mind, what was the reasoning behind his totally different initial reaction to each of those 'offenders'?

He knew ONLY one mistake about our dear friend, everything else he knew was ALL good! He also ONLY knew one mistake about the stranger who was driving that truck! everything else he knew...was ZILCH! How could we possibly know what was behind ANY of his actions or thoughts? How could we be aware of a possible tragedy or mishap in his life that was distracting his memory?

So it has become clear to me that when we know and love someone, and we have a little more information about them, overlooking mistakes is much easier!

And then, as I began to learn more about how deep real love truly IS, I understood more about what Christ and our Heavenly Father had done for us. Could it be that the Savior finds that he can forgive us **because He knows everything about us, and who we truly are? Just as we know our own children!**

For me, that was a pretty significant realization!  
But that was only the beginning of my lessons on love and forgiveness!

\*\*\*\*

While visiting our daughter and her children in Grapevine, Texas, her phone rang at 2 a.m., on October 30, 1996. It was her oldest brother, calling to give us the news about a younger brother, John, who had been murdered while working at a Motel 6 as a clerk.

I was too stunned to have nearly the reaction others expected....that came later. It seemed unreal, because right then, it was totally incomprehensible!

All we knew at the time about John's death was that four or five young boys got \$400 from the motel cash register to use (as we found out) for drugs, and John was shot. He died within a few minutes, leaving a young wife and two sweet young children, a boy 5 years of age and a little two year old girl.

I was still in shock but maintaining a stable and fairly calm outward appearance as I boarded the plane the next day to return home. But when the quiet time came...the time when there was nothing to do but sit in my window seat and wait for take off, I suddenly felt hysteria start to build. I didn't know what it was at the time, because I had never experienced those kinds of feelings, but I did know that I was about to fall apart. I felt desperate to remove myself before that happened.

I knew I must have help. I prayed for comfort and peace.

Immediately, I was warmed and comforted. It felt as if there was a warm blanket cuddling around me, gently squeezing me. My heart was filled with **total peace!** Somehow it was made known to me that John was all right, AND that his wife and his sweet little 2 year old girl and 5 year old son would be cared for by our Loving Father as well as their earthly mother. I wept with sadness, relief, and even joy in knowing WHO was in charge. It was a deep, beautiful and joyful healing feeling, deeper and more peaceful than I can possibly describe adequately! This was surely "the peace without understanding" we are promised (Philippians 4:4).

Our hearts were broken for the loss of our very sweet son. His absence was so obvious every day, and I often felt the stabbing pain of loss for each member of his family as well as my husband and I and all eight of our remaining children and many grandchildren, who were very close to him. But then I would remember the great and soothing gift of love and assurance I had received that night on the plane, and the understanding continued to grow. That experience has held me up during all the dozens of years that have followed. It was definitely a taste of His love for me. I have come to a much better understanding of God's love, and His Son's love.

## **OUR DAYS IN COURT**

I had not yet considered the pain of those who loved the group of boys who perpetrated this crime, until one day I was told as I entered court that the mother of one of them had passed away a few days before. That alone gave me a broader perspective. This mother **also** had a broken heart. I realized her loss was greater than ours, and may have even caused her death! For me, it was important that I recognize the anguish of everyone involved in this time of tragedy, because it was part of my learning to comprehend and recognize the real kind of love that I needed.

As the many court hearings continued for almost a decade any feelings of anger that I may have felt began their journey to oblivion when one of those court days brought the news that one of the boys, Jay, wanted to talk to us. After the hearing, we met in a courtroom with only his attorney, a guard and my husband and I present. We were all seated close together, within reaching distance.

At first, as Jay struggled with his emotions, there were no words. Then he began to sob. He gained his composure and told us sincerely that he was so, so sorry that he had a part in John's death.

Did he really mean it? I believe that he did.

But that has no bearing on what happened to my heart. Previously, whatever anger I had harbored was against an unknown enemy, a dark evil that I couldn't see or understand.

But now, I saw a young boy, much like one of my own beautiful sons. There was pain and confusion in his eyes, and almost surely in his life, I saw deep sorrow from many many incidents and hurt in his life. I hadn't planned on the tenderness the Lord was planting in my Mother's heart! But I knew without a doubt that this assurance *was from the Lord!*

I wanted to comfort him, but of course, we weren't supposed to touch so I refrained, but I felt unfinished, incomplete. (I should have known that the Lord would fix that for me!)

At a later date, the trial still continuing on and on, the clerk assistant made a mistake! They put Jay and our family in the same room as we waited our turn in the busy courtroom.

I smiled at Jay, and he smiled back. I slowly made my way to his side. I asked him what he was planning when this was all over. He seemed to have a little sparkle in his eyes as he announced that he and his girlfriend were expecting a baby boy and they were going to get married. I replied, "That's good, Jay" and I reached up to give him the hug that had been waiting in the depth of my heart. He returned the hug with gratitude.

Without any premeditation on the subject, I asked him if he was going to take his baby boy to church or teach him righteous principles.

He looked a little shocked, then said "Yeah, probably."

I looked him in the eye and assured him that if he didn't give his baby that kind of teaching and background, he and his son would be right back in a courtroom like this somewhere in 18 years. He simply replied, "Yeah," and that was the end of the conversation. I knew it had been inspired, and I was so grateful to have that opportunity. I prayed that he would do some praying himself, and remember our conversation. I believe he will have the opportunity to witness the change that comes into the hearts of those who are blessed to learn that Love is the answer, the ONLY answer, because God IS Love.....the REAL kind of love. (I was given this information spiritually years before, in answer to a prayer about how to handle a little daughter's small but important problem! It was one that could have affected her future

Whatever Jay does with his life, *mine* has been changed. I believe I was privileged to see him and the other boys as their Maker sees them. I believe that each of those involved in this tragedy are loved wholeheartedly by our Father. Since then I continue to see everyone in a much more benevolent light. I want to see their hearts over and above their actions, even when their actions need to result in consequences.

Having a desire for living a Christian way of living is worthy of our complete attention! For it can, if we dedicate our lives to it, lead to the depth of understanding and love that is much more than the world's comprehension, and, I believe, to a constantly enlarging grasp of missionaries happiness.

Later, my husband and I were called to be Addiction Recovery Program missionaries at our County Jail in the men's section. That was another period of time spent in growth, and understanding that these men in this jail were loved deeply. We both loved them all, and shared in whatever pain or joy they were feeling. (I kept wanting to take some of them home with me!)

These experiences have all added together to make love and forgiveness an easy part of my life! ! I still hurt at times, but I do not hurt *against* anyone. I do not wish anyone anything except that they find the source of peace and real love that is available to us all through the Atonement of our Savior.

Learning to recognize and feel God's full love for us as I look at people everywhere has become a deep desire in my soul. I see my challenges as lessons in love.

**One word of caution:**

True forgiveness must be freely given, with pure love for that person.

Forgiveness is letting go of bitterness. I realized this blessing had come to me, that I truly loved those whom I forgave. But forgiveness does not involve putting that person or keeping him/her in the position to hurt you or someone else again. It does not entail sparing them from the consequences of their actions. Forgiveness is freely given. Trust must be earned.

There is a great absence of growth in a life without forgiveness. I yearn for forgiveness and grace for my own life, thus my only course is to give that gift to others. It is not a burden that I need to bear, but rather *it is a gift available to ME. It provides joy and comfort and light and freedom.*

Having a desire for living a Christian way of living is worthy of our complete attention! For it can, if we dedicate our hearts to it, lead to the depth of understanding and love that is much greater than the world's comprehension, and, I believe, also lead to a constantly enlarging grasp of happiness.

My greatest wish for your life is deep love and the happiness that I would like to hand to you on a platter.....BUT, it is so big, it just wouldn't fit on a platter!

I love each one of you so very much. I might be obvious in showing that I am not happy with a person's actions, but never will my love diminish one bit. I've often thought that if we could have our descendants all desire and obtain an understanding of pure love. We would have a wonderfully changed world! It's the happiest and most constructive productive way to live!

I want you to know that I have a deep and unshakeable testimony of our Savior. There is no doubt. He has been proven to me many times!

I pray for your eternal happiness! I want you near me for the whole length of eternity, whatever that might be!

Love,

Rea C. Whicker  
Your Mother,  
Grandmother,  
Great Grandmother

*(This letter is also to all who may come later. I'll be watching and rejoicing in your every progress as you walk your own path! May God bless you all!)*