

Love Them, Release the Outcome

*For parents, family, and friends we love but cannot change — loving them, grieving what isn't,
and releasing them to God*

All Scripture is ESV.

Think of any relationship as you read this — a parent, a family member, a friend. You do not need to name them.

The Hope That Keeps Hurting

Have you ever walked into a visit or picked up the phone thinking, "Maybe this time will be different"?

Maybe this time they'll listen. Maybe this time they'll say they're proud of you. Maybe this time they'll apologize, or be soft, or be sober, or be safe, or be there the way you needed them to be.

And then it isn't different. And you leave crushed — not just by what happened, but by how much you had hoped it wouldn't.

That pain is not a sign you don't love them. It's not a sign you're a bad person, son, daughter, or friend. A lot of times, it's grief.

Part 1 — Grieve and Accept: Naming What Is

A living grief

Most people think grief is only for when someone dies. But there is another kind of grief: grieving someone who is still alive, but not who you need them to be.

You can grieve:

- The apology that may never come
- The childhood, or the closeness, you didn't get to have
- The parent, family member, or friend you can call when life falls apart — and know they'll show up safe and steady
- The holidays, or the relationship, you picture in your head that never happen that way in real life

Naming that grief matters. If we don't name it, it comes out sideways — as anger, as people-pleasing, as going back over and over hoping for a different ending, or as shame that says, "If I were better, or tried harder, they'd change."

That last one is a lie we have to put down. Another person's refusal to change is not proof of your worth.

What acceptance really means

Acceptance does not mean:

- What they did or do is okay
- You have to like it
- You have given up praying for them
- You will never feel sad about it again

Acceptance does mean:

- I stop arguing with reality in my own heart
- I admit I am powerless to change another person's heart
- I make my choices based on who they consistently show me they are, not who I wish they were

In recovery we learn this over and over: we can love someone deeply and still not be able to fix, manage, or save them. Acceptance is where our peace starts to come back — not because the situation got better, but because we stopped spending all our strength on a job that isn't ours.

Psalm 27:10 (ESV)

"For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in."

David knew what it was to feel let down by the very people who were supposed to be closest. His hope didn't end there. God takes us in. God is not limited by what other people could or couldn't give us.

Psalm 68:5 (ESV)

"Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation."

Whatever gap is left in us from other people, God does not shame us for feeling it. He steps into the role of Father Himself.

Part 2 — Honor With Boundaries: What Honor Is and Is Not

The command, and the promise

Scripture speaks directly about honoring parents — and the same posture of respect, truth, and boundaries shapes how we love family and friends, too.

Exodus 20:12 (ESV)

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you."

Ephesians 6:2–3 (ESV)

"Honor your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise), 'that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.'"

God takes honor seriously — and He attached a promise to it. But we get ourselves in trouble when we let other people, or our own guilt, define honor in ways God never did.

Honor IS

- Speaking about them, and to them, with respect — even when I disagree
- Refusing to slander them, gossip about them, or recruit other people to my side against them
- Telling the truth kindly, instead of exploding or going silent
- Praying for them, for real
- Caring for them within the limits God has actually given me — my time, my health, my recovery, my own household
- Remembering they are made in the image of God, even when their choices hurt me

Honor is NOT

- Obeying, as an adult, in a way that asks me to sin or go against God
- Pretending hurt didn't happen, or calling wrong things right
- Unlimited access to my home, my time, my money, or my peace
- No boundaries — staying on the phone while I'm being cussed out, or staying in a room where I'm being torn down, to "prove" I'm a good son, daughter, family member, or friend
- Trying to earn their love, approval, or blessing by over-giving until I'm empty
- Trust without change — forgiveness and honor can be given, but trust is rebuilt over time when behavior changes

Honor is about my posture before God. It is not a promise that if I honor them well enough, they will finally become who I need. I honor because God asked me to — not as a bargaining chip to make them change.

A picture from Scripture: David and Saul

In 1 Samuel 24, David had every human reason to give up on Saul. Saul kept pursuing him, kept breaking his word, kept slipping back into the same destructive pattern. David refused to harm him or dishonor him — he would not raise his hand against him.

But notice what David also did: he kept a safe distance. He honored from a boundary. He did not go back and move into Saul's house and hope this time would be different.

That is a biblical picture for some of us: respectful words, a clean heart, and a wise distance when closeness isn't safe or healthy.

Romans 12:18 (ESV)

"If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."

So far as it depends on you. You are responsible for your side — your tone, your honesty, your

boundaries, your forgiveness. You are not responsible for whether they receive it, soften, or change.

Part 3 — Release Them to God: Their Change Was Never Your Job

The job we have to resign from

Many of us, without ever saying it out loud, took a job years ago:

Fixer. Rescuer. Peacemaker at any cost. The good one who holds the family together. The person who will finally say it right enough that they'll hear it.

That job will wear you out and steal your recovery. Because heart-change is Holy Spirit work.

You can:

- Plant a seed with a kind word
- Tell the truth in love
- Pray faithfully
- Live changed in front of them — sometimes the loudest testimony is a changed life, not another argument

You cannot:

- Convict them
- Soften a hard heart
- Make them want help
- Make them choose healing

When we resign from that job, we are not being cold. We are putting them back in God's hands, where they belonged all along.

Joseph's trust

Joseph's own family betrayed him deeply, and years later, after God had done a long work, Joseph could say:

Genesis 50:20 (ESV)

"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."

Joseph didn't deny the evil. He didn't pretend it was fine. He trusted that God was the One writing the bigger story — so he didn't have to carry revenge, and he didn't have to carry fixing them either.

Lay It Down

Matthew 11:28 (ESV)

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

"Lord, I release my expectation that _____ will _____."

Write it down, fold it, and place it in the little box. What is placed in the box stays private — no one else will read it.

Laying it down once doesn't mean the feeling never comes back. It means we know where to take it when it does — back to God, not back into another cycle of hoping, crashing, and blaming ourselves.

Romans 12:18 (ESV)

"If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."

Do your side well. Release theirs to God. And let God hold the grief, the hope, and the story — all at the same time.