



The Sound of Rain

Supporting the work of Emily Carson

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Freedom from Forgiveness

Transcribed from a sitting with Emily Carson, Monday, June 9, 2008

Find it within yourself to forgive what never really harmed you. Find the past in everything you have suffered and notice that you are not damaged, you are not hurt in any way, and the pain you suffer is the pain of your own expectations, not the pain of a real wound. Notice that when you say “broken” you mean a feeling and not a fact. Broken is the way we describe ourselves but it is inaccurate. Look at yourself, at every piece of you you can find, and see if there is any break, see if you have been split or fractured, see if you have been put down in any way that is real. You will find that, “I am broken” means “I feel broken,” and “I’ve been hurt” means “I feel hurt.” We do not suffer any damage truly ever; the body can be damaged, but that is inevitable anyway, and pride can be damaged but that is only blessing. Illusions are subject to crumbling, anything that takes shape will be annihilated. But are you damaged? Are you really hurt? Your body has already died and yet you are intact again. Your heart has already suffered its aches and losses, and yet it is one heart, whole and spacious, even if there is pain there. And your mind has never been broken; it carries its memories seamlessly through time, it holds its opinions, it dissolves and reforms its illusions, it feels disrupted, disoriented and uncertain, but there is no harm in that, there is no damage. And so, what have you come to believe needs to be forgiven? Do you believe, still, that you must forgive yourself, even though your mistakes have come to nothing, prevent nothing, damaged no one? Do you believe, still, that you must forgive your transgressors, even though you are whole, unscathed, even though they have given you nothing but a dose of reality you didn’t know you needed, and though they have taken nothing but some of your illusions? What is the point in forgiveness when there is no sin and there is no harm? Dissolve the need for forgiveness instead of trying to forgive. Cultivate understanding and not forgiveness; cultivate correct perception. Right now you can notice your own undamaged state; right now the fact

of your wholeness presents itself to you, and though it is more subtle than your pain and more cryptic than your grievances, because it is true and real you can still find it. If you need some reassurance, seek it here, seek it in the fact that you have damaged no one and no one has damaged you. Ultimately, that fact will speak for itself. Until it does, you must cultivate your awareness of it and seek that truth even in the midst of your pain and your discomfort. Freedom from forgiveness is much better than forgiveness itself; there is nothing to repent and no one who has hurt you. Live knowing that and you may still feel broken but you will know that you are not, and you may still feel hurt but you will know that you are whole. Try this instead. You can always say you're sorry; it does not change the fact that no one has been hurt by you. And you can always grieve your losses; it cannot change the fact that no one has damaged you. There is no victim, not in any real sense, and so, nothing to forgive, and no one to forgive. Try this instead.

Questions and Answers

Q: That was an interesting opening talk. Most of what I've been feeling is really heartbroken and also a feeling that I can't be trusted because I hurt people, and I've been feeling really responsible for E.'s death but also just feeling like I've been responsible for other people's deaths and...I'm having a hard time with that, and also that I have an idea that death is bad—...it causes a lot of suffering in me—and I'd like to know if you have anything to share about that....

Why do you think that E.'s death was bad?

Because he was really young and just a lot of people...miss him being physically present.

And so young people shouldn't die though it's okay for old people, and people with friends shouldn't die but it's okay for people without them? Does that make sense to you?

I think more of how it goes in my head is, "I don't want to be responsible for anyone's death." I don't want it to be me that is involved with it or causing it on any level....

Are you okay with being involved with helping people stay alive?

Most of the time.

And so living has some value or virtue in this view that dying doesn't have; would you say that's true?

Yeah, and...most people are coming to me to help them live more comfortably or live longer—that's also part of the expectation.

It's fine that you do what you can to help people live longer or more comfortably, or even just with less pain. But that is not because living is in any way superior to dying; it is not healthier, it is not more aligned spiritually, it has no inherent value that dying does not have. Privileging staying alive over dying is really a misunderstanding of the whole process we are in, and keeping people alive at all costs is actually quite detrimental to them. And I do not just mean sick people—people with terminal illness or severe disability—I mean that a person who is ready to die, whether or not he knows that, should not be prevented from doing so. Luckily for you, you can't prevent death; it isn't within your power. Your friend who died experienced an event that no one should be sad about. It is reasonable to be sad because you miss him, but it is not reasonable to be sad simply because he died. He hasn't lost anything at all except a body which is easily replaceable and an idea he may have had about his own invincibility, which he is much better off not having. And you haven't lost anything except a friend and an idea that you had that you should be able to control these things. You didn't cause him to die; it is as simple as that. His death was simply not in the realm of your power. There are two things you must keep in mind: The first is that virtually everything is outside your control; you can try and do your best to attain the ends that you set out to attain, but you're not really in charge, and so mostly you just have to take what comes. And secondly, you need very badly to remember that when people die there isn't anything wrong with that, really nothing at all. They don't go through a trauma, or, if they go through some small event of pain, it pales in comparison to the agony that you put yourself through imagining that death is horrible and that you have caused it. You don't control these things, and secondly, when people die it is only transition and renewal. Death is the way things work; there is nothing more fundamental to our circumstances here. The ground of all being is this thing you call dying; how could it be something to be avoided? Try this on, despite the protestations of your mind, and see if you can let it sink into your heart. See if you can let it relieve you.

Q: ...The last time I was here I was concerned about not having a voice and...I've really been working with that and feeling what it feels like to have a voice...and I've had an opportunity to really be with that on a few occasions.... I guess I wasn't really giving it a name of forgiveness until you started to talk about that, and it's not forgiveness that I really need to have. If this had been two months ago, I probably would have approached the opportunities I've had to use my voice from a victim place, and now I'm feeling much more from a strength place. It feels entirely different, so my question really is, am I on the right track? Do you have anything to say about that?

What was the last thing that you expressed with your voice that feels like it's significant?

...Well the most recent is I had been feeling that there were some people who were slandering my name...and I had a great story to tell about that to a lot of people, and that was a victim voice, but as I got to really sitting with it, and feeling it, and working with that, then I didn't feel hurt by it anymore...so I felt like I was able to not have to tell the story so often.

And right now, what do you have to say about having been slandered?

Well I certainly didn't like the way that felt and...I'm actually taking some action to, at least from my perspective, put it where it needs to be; [I've] written a grievance letter and that has really helped....

That's really good. What you're noticing through this experience is that there is a difference between complaining that you've been wronged and saying what you believe to be true. And you've said it well, that one is the voice of a victim and the other is a throat opened by strength. You need to say what you want to say, even if it sounds a way that you don't necessarily like, even if it ends up voicing an aspect of your personality that you don't wish you had. You need to let that be heard; you need to let it be exposed. You have found what it's like to just say what you mean; the only thing that would make you fall short of that full expression at this point is if you believe you will sound like someone that you don't like. Whatever is inside you, whatever she sounds like, is perfect and deserving of absolute exposure; there is no part of you that should ever be hidden, no part of you that can ever be wrong or unworthy or without value. Your principle task now is to use your voice, use it so you don't forget what it feels like to sound like yourself and say things the way that you mean them, from your strength and not from your protest, as someone accountable for her experience and not as a victim. Use your voice and it will uncover more and more of you all the time, and in the end you will know

yourself as you don't know yourself now, in all your aspects, in all your parts, and you will know, as I already do, that there is nothing wrong with any part of you, that none of it should be hidden and none of it ever should have been hidden. You will know who you are through your expression of yourself. Use your voice.

Q: I've been working lately on slowing down, and also the place where...habitually, my behavior has been to do things to redeem myself. I've been really watching that and slowing down enough to be able to feel more and also not acting out that behavior as much [so as] to be able to feel more, and this morning in group come to kind of see it a bit differently, that what I also do is that I kind of wait till things...pile up, and then I go do a piece of work to...relieve the pressure or relieve the pain, or feel better, rather than just live life...connected to myself, with me in the driver seat. As part of not doing the redeeming...I'm first speaking up for what I want, doing what I want, what I need, and feeling just whatever happens after that, so I like that.... Really, when C. said it, it just sunk in,...[that] it's not about a piece of work, it's about living your life, feeling connected to yourself all day long. So I've just been sitting with that today and I thought I would ask you [if] you could talk to me about that.

This method you have of relieving the pressure when it gets to be too much will never work. You can go through endless cycles of the same process and never really make any progress. It misses the whole point. You are doing this work in order to be connected to yourself in an ongoing way and in order to live your life differently, so why not simply be connected to yourself and live your life differently rather than imagining that that will come about magically through some feeling cycle that you complete to its perfection? What I talk to you about only works if you want to be a different kind of person than the person you've always been. When you decide that you are tired of the way you know yourself to be and the way you've always known yourself to be, then you begin to make the kinds of changes that really make a difference. The acute pain that you try to relieve by doing your work will never get bad enough to motivate you to make wholesale changes in your life. You have to be tired not of that acute discomfort but of the chronic sense you have that you are not free to be yourself or really even free to live your life while you behave in the same manner that you've grown accustomed to. You have to want this new kind of living, not as some future reward, but every day, in the present, as something that you can and will have right now if you allow yourself to be with yourself as a regular part of your life. Ask yourself this, L.; ask yourself if you want a radically different life right now, a radically changed experience of yourself today, in your life right now. When you can answer "yes" to that question you will stay connected to yourself, but if you cannot, there is little to motivate the

change that you need. Try this, even right now, for the rest of this sitting. See if you can find your honest answer to that question.

Q: I'm starting to try and use guidance to help me from the lying that's so ingrained in me, and it's a slow process, and I wanted to know if you have anything you can offer me more than you've already told me about that. And I also get to say that I feel like I'd like you to talk to me about having the courage to just be who I am, and I think that's part of the problem I'm having.

That is all of the problem you are having. Do you know why you don't want to just be yourself?

I have a very great fear of being rejected, and it seems to just permeate everything I do.

You will be rejected, R. If you are yourself you will be rejected, and if you pretend to be someone else you will be rejected. Can you try to really let in what I am saying? Tell me what your response is.

I feel it in my belly—it feels like...“There's nowhere to hide”—that seems to be what I do, I hide—but at the same time, when I let that in it just feels like, “Of course; there is no problem.” So, in this moment I don't feel that as a problem, but I know that's not going to stay with me.

You mean, right now, you feel there is no problem if you are rejected?

I feel like just bringing this up, I am open to being rejected—in my way of looking at things. I am being rejected because I have this way of looking at the world, so once I own that then I'm not held down by it, but...that's not how I live my life; I make this ghost into a powerful monster that holds me down.

Then you have to let rejection be the scary monster that it becomes for you—but you have to know, at the same time, that your lying can't prevent it. This is where you go astray in your mind. You actually believe that your dishonesty protects you. You believe that you can say the right thing and be the right way and so prevent rejection. You may not believe this as a logical construct but you believe it wholeheartedly nonetheless, and that is why you lie. I cannot persuade you that rejection is not terrifying or agonizing; you will have to find out for yourself exactly what that feels like. What I can try to persuade you of is the absolute uselessness of your defense. Nothing you do prevents this seemingly horrible outcome; you have no control at all over whether or not people will reject you, you

only have control over your own honesty. When you find yourself tempted to lie, even in small ways, even just by omission or only energetically, remind yourself that it won't work, it simply won't work to protect you from anything that you fear. And ask your guidance, in that moment, to confirm this; ask your guidance whether anything you try to do in your lying is actually protecting you from anything you fear. If this worked as a defense, I would have a much more difficult time trying to convince you to stop it, but, blessedly, it doesn't work, not at all, not in any situation, not even in the tiniest measure. Try to absorb this. Rejection may be terrifying, but you have no defense against it. Honesty can't bring you closer to it, and dishonesty can't keep you from it. Try to absorb what I'm saying.

Q: I have a teenage daughter who is strong-willed and likes to do what she wants to do, and I find it challenging to remain non-reactive in...the face of some of the stuff she does, and hence I'm not very useful to her in that state, and what I've been working with is sort of letting go of my attachment to her as well as honoring the fact that...she's not in my hands, basically—and letting go on that level as well—but I would love some guidance on how to be clear.

She won't do what you say. There is essentially no way at this point to make that happen, and so you have really only one option. You are in the position of feeling your losses with her almost all the time. The first thing you lose over and over again is your control. You are helpless in the face of her will; your will is simply no match. And secondly, you are in some ways losing your daughter. She's not the daughter you've always had anymore. She becomes, every day, more and more her own person, an individual forever separate from her parents and from her childhood. She is becoming grown, and so you are losing a child. There are other, smaller losses—you may have to deal with rejection, for example, and being disrespected—but the two primary ones are this loss of control and the loss of your child. You are not pleased about either of these things. The first sends you into helplessness and uncertainty. You are not strong in this place, and you are not listened to. Losing your child, too, is disorienting and disruptive. You are used to anchoring yourself in your family in a way that makes no sense anymore, in a way that isn't even real. The anchor has never really been there but now even the illusion of it is slipping, and so you are tossed about, unsure of your bearings and uncertain how to proceed. And there is no right answer to this, no easy way to transition from who you have been towards who you will be after all this has passed. More than any other time in your life, you need right now to find some anchor in yourself, to find something to hold to in you that doesn't change and slip away the way your family does, and the way your sense of control is always bound to. There is some chance right now that you will do this, that you will find something in yourself to hold onto, even if it

seems only to be some mysterious sense of strength recently found and only slightly understood. Hold to yourself—it is the only way to make it through this period with your sanity and some clarity intact. You are positioned to be able to do this. Take advantage of your own willingness, and stay your course.

Q: The question I would have is, when I was thirty I rejected the evangelical Christianity that I was brought up on, and it was a very traumatic period in my life, and I've been unable to open up to any sort of spirituality since then, and so I'm just wondering what I can do to make myself just a little more open and vulnerable to spirituality.

What attracted you to that church in the first place?

It was what I was raised in.

Did you ever feel personally attracted to it, just for yourself?

No, which is eventually what led me to abandon it, I never felt like I had any sort of spiritual connection,...I never felt like God was there, and so for essentially my entire life I blamed myself, I thought, "What am I doing wrong?" or "What am I doing that I'm not supposed to be?" or "What am I not doing that I am supposed to be?"

I would say to you that essentially God was not there, if we can even speak about places God is not, and so you finally came to realize something which was always true. How do you feel when I tell you that?

That makes perfect sense, but now I'm unable to or unwilling to entertain the thought of any spirituality; I'm afraid to.

But what I am saying to you is you have never entertained any spirituality, and you've never been in the presence of anything I would call truly spiritual—at least not in this lifetime—and so for you, now, what you must try to understand is that God and spirituality are completely unknown territory. When you imagine that you are turned off of religion altogether, you are comparing apples and oranges. You could rightly say that you are turned off of dogma and group-think and philosophies that have no inherent logic, but never having been exposed to God or to spiritual experience, how can you say that

you are aversive to those? God doesn't live in a church. He doesn't live in a person. He isn't a practitioner of a philosophy. He doesn't have some people in his group while other people never will be. God isn't an entity or a construct of any sort. He isn't a "he"; we just say that because we need a pronoun. And spiritual feeling will never resemble antagonism or fervor or sanctimoniousness. There is no judgment in God; the lack of judgment is perhaps God's only defining characteristic. If something in you is curious about God and spirituality then all you need to do is attend to the impulses in your own curiosity. If you genuinely have no curiosity about God then please do not even give Him a second thought. There is no virtue in seeking spirituality, in looking for God; there is no inherent value in that. It is valuable to seek what you feel drawn to, whatever that is. And if that is not God then you should be done with Him and put that behind you, and stop considering it a need or a virtue to be a spiritual person. Your upbringing filled you with misunderstandings; the most I can say right now is that God was never there except in that God is everywhere, even in places where people are ignorant and suffering is perpetuated. And whatever you have in your heart and in the heart of your own longing is exactly and only what you need. You are not lacking anything that religion can give you because you're not lacking anything at all. It is that fact that many people call God. I would just say, follow your curiosity, attend to your own longing, and if God shows up unbidden and unannounced then so be it. That is the way we should be introduced to Him anyway.

Q: ...I've been reading the Guidance Intensive opening talk and feeling that I really would like to deepen my guidance-driven life...[to] try to become more tuned in to listening to guidance on a deeper level, and I guess I was just wondering if there was something you might have to say about that.

There is a leap of faith that must be made every time you ask your guidance a question. It will require, for you, stepping out of your daily routine and the way you are used to functioning, and stepping into a space that is unhurried and uncertain. It requires a shift in gears; even the simplest question requires this shift. You get into a very busy mode of thinking and planning and doing; you are figuring things out, you're getting things done. But incorporating guidance into your life requires a constant shift in your attention; it requires that you abort the mode that you're in and put yourself in a space that is receptive. It is not the time or energy commitment that you don't want to make. You have trouble incorporating your guidance because you don't like to switch gears, you don't like to take yourself out of your busyness—even though it will only last a couple of minutes—and risk what you think will be a loss of momentum, a decreased efficiency, by allowing yourself to be slower, by allowing yourself to be uncertain, and by just stopping what you are doing. Day in and day out, this is your main problem.

You know that your mind can be ghastly at times, but you still trust it to run your life in the nuts-and-bolts way that you always have trusted it. You rely on your mind for your basic functioning and do not yet know that that still, receptive space can be efficient or productive. You recognize that it may be wise but you don't believe that it will be efficient. What I am telling you is, it is much better than the way you operate; it is more efficient, more productive, and ultimately more creative and a far better problem-solver than your mind can ever be. You have to make a regular practice of switching gears, engaging your guidance, and asking a question—and you have to ask about all kinds of things, from small details to your most significant misunderstandings. Your guidance becomes more and more a part of your life because you make yourself use it; there's really no other way. Make it a practice to stop and receive, even though your momentum feels thwarted, even though you don't trust this new way of doing things. If you practice, you'll realize the value in it, but it's the only way for you to truly understand that. Try it for one week, S. If it doesn't work, throw it out and go back to your old way. I am confident it will be an improvement. I am confident your guidance knows better than your mind about anything you might ask of it.