

# Learning the Ropes of Forgiveness

By Mary Hilgendorf

*I lift up my eyes to the hills — where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord* (Psalm 121:1–2).

I did it. I was guilty. I was condemned by a jury of one — me.

I punched Rodney and gave him a black eye! Ridden with guilt and shame, I fled to my “prayer rock” down in the “holler,” looked to the hills, and began to pray for forgiveness.

At the time, I was a short, red-headed, freckle-faced, sixth grader in Chester, Illinois. Rodney was a seventh grader, considered by some to be the school bully. During afternoon recess, Rodney pushed me off the merry-go-round, and so I popped up — with all of my 4' 9" stature — and reached up and punched him in the eye with all the power that I could muster.

Did the teachers know? I still don't know today. Nothing happened that afternoon at school. However, after school I fled to my favorite “prayer rock” in a small hollow a few blocks from my house

and shared my guilt and shame with the Lord. My teachers had taught me well, because I knew the Bible passage, *I lift up my eyes to the hills — where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord*

I knew that God forgave me, but what about Rodney?

The next morning, I waited for Rodney to arrive at school. His eye was ugly! I fearfully and humbly asked him to forgive me. He mumbled, “That's okay.” What beautiful words! God had chosen the most unlikely person to pronounce such powerful words. It wasn't all the lessons about forgiveness taught to me by my parents, teachers, and pastors that made me fully understand the power of forgiveness. God had chosen Rodney to teach me a most powerful lesson about grace and mercy.

I looked to the hills of the “holler” and sought God's help. He didn't let me down. It is through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection that simple words like “That's okay” can have such an eternal life-changing impact.

God had chosen Rodney, the least likely — a school bully — to teach me the ropes of what God's forgiveness was all about. Our God reigns!

*Dr. Mary Hilgendorf serves as Professor of Education and Ambassador to the Women's Leadership Institute (WLI) at Concordia University Wisconsin. Mary gives presentations throughout the country to encourage and to equip women for Christian leadership.*

