
HUGH LAWSON ROBINSON

SPIRITUAL BULKING

*Growing Stronger Through
the Obedience Christ Purchased*



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Hugh Lawson Robinson

ADVANCE READER SAMPLER

Introduction and Chapter 1

Advance excerpt. The final text may differ.

Full book coming early 2027

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Introduction

The idea for Spiritual Bulking arrived unexpectedly in 2022. It was an ordinary school morning. I had just walked into the staff room with my bag still hanging from one shoulder. Before I had even settled in, I overheard someone say, "Hugh looks different."

The statement seemed to be begging for an answer, and it got one immediately.

"He's bulking," a male colleague replied from the back of the room.

My mind owned the word instantly and held it close to my heart. Something happened to me the moment I heard, "He's bulking." The word fitted somewhere inside me, and from that moment something inside me ran with it. I immediately made the decision, or perhaps Someone had already made it for me. Right there I said to myself, I am going to write a book and call it Spiritual Bulking.

These meditations and messages were not written while I stood on some divine summit or basked in the glow of spiritual perfection. They were written on various battlefields, where folly, mistakes, and deep mess-ups met mercy; where grace made forgiveness real; where reformation occurred through pain and reconciliation found its work whenever I draw near to the heart of God.

These pages were born in the eye of the storm, in the height of battles where life and death converge. They were written in the place where calamity and God's favour found agreement and produced repentance, turnaround, and new birth.

Not from a stress-free rocking chair...

*not beside a warm fireplace...
but from a soul wobbling under the weight of struggle
and almost wrecked by my own fragile spirituality.*

*I wrote in mixed seasons —
one day singing, praying, and even fasting,
and the next day grieving, grinding down, falling flat,
looking up and begging for another serving of grace.*

*I wrote while playing too close to the riverbank with my salvation,
knowing I needed rescue.*

Looking back, I still find the moment a little odd, me, bulking. It is amusing that I decided to write a book because I have never considered myself a great reader. But something inside me had already embraced the title, and I could suddenly see countless ways in which a person could bulk spiritually.

I knew immediately what it meant. What can I do to become spiritually strong? And by extension, what can we all do to grow into robust, resilient believers? So I began to list thoughts, actions, habits, and behaviours necessary for spiritual strength. I began with myself, because my own bulking was not as pronounced as I needed it to be.

This bulking did not arise from a great revelation or flawless devotion. It came at the right time, when I was trying my best, but the growth was only coming in trickles. I was open to a more constant flow, steadier growth, and I challenged myself to bulk spiritually to match the physical version. So I prayed, sat with my thoughts, and wrote from deep within me, no holding back, at least for the most part. I flushed it all out in ink.

I expressed spiritual bulking in the language of my understanding and my experience. For me, spiritual bulking bears the hallmark of God's

intervention. Spiritual bulking hands our conscience victory over its compromising nature and reveals the death and shame embedded in danger. It stresses Christ and the gospel in obedience. It escorts us to the feet of Jesus where we are transformed. It is the packaging of God's virtues, stored in the muscles of our souls, shaping us into people who are resilient, temptation-resistant, and challenge-durable.

My life has never been short of turbulence, the kind that carries heavy clouds of darkness. Sometimes the darkness is within, sometimes nearby, sometimes both. That darkness often tempts me toward compromise and carelessness. I have also tasted the restoring light that obedience brings. Through every battle, God has allocated enough grace and mercy to pull me out of the sinister grasp of the enemy. He has lifted me, held me, and returned me to safety over and over again.

This book is a testimony, an invitation into deeper, more meaningful spiritual maturity; a call to spiritual bulking through prayer, uncompromising obedience, self-denial, thanksgiving, and learning to forgive both others and ourselves.

This book is not for the near-perfect. It is for those of us who still wrestle with the darkness pressing too close. For sincere souls who long to consistently experience overcoming power. For those who have allowed their feet to slip off the narrow path and now want to return. For those who refuse to slow down, weak or strong, but still clutch tightly to the hope of salvation. For those longing for one final breakthrough where the Holy Spirit seals them for eternity.

If these pages are prayerfully and meditatively read, the Spirit will speak in a language we can all understand. He will convict, comfort, lighten burdens, and prepare us for a life where the memory and taste of sin will no longer exist.

A PRAYER FOR THE READER

My prayer is simple.

*May these chapters revive our faith,
reinforce our commitment,
and re-establish and strengthen our walk with God.*

*May the Word work wonders for us.
May our lives reflect the beauty of His grace.
May we experience the restoring, healing touch of God as we read.*

And may you come to discover, as I have, these blessings:

Grace has a bounce, it rebuilds what sin declared destroyed.

Mercy sustains what shame left for the grave.

Christ bulks us even in our crushing.

This is my humble prayer as you step into these pages.

SPIRITUAL BULKING — REFLECTION

In the Introduction the author lived through various battlefields where folly and mercy met. Before stepping deeper into the chapters, think about how things are with you now.

1. If you are kneeling now and confessing before God, where would you tell Him you are, at the riverbank, some other brink, or on a sure foundation?

2. The author says this book is not for the near-perfect but for those who refuse to slow down, weak or strong, while still holding on to hope. Have you sometimes had experiences fitting that description? What does your holding on feel like?
3. Before you engage with the first chapter, name one blessing you hope this book will bring you. Make a note of it and check it against your experience as you journey through the chapters.

Chapter 1

Forgiveness

OPENING REFLECTION - WHAT FORGIVENESS TAUGHT ME

Sometimes the thought of forgiveness feels almost repulsive. The feeling invites itself in without warning. Not because I do not want to forgive, most times I want to, and I do. I want to break through the wall and free myself. But it is not always that easy. Sometimes I feel like the enemy of forgiveness. The word is easy to pronounce; living it is a journey. Still, for the most part, I want to do what is right.

Some branches of forgiveness weakened me before they began to make me stronger. It was a strange experience. I learned that relief does not always arrive when forgiveness begins. Sometimes it takes months. Sometimes it takes years. Forgiveness first asked me to accept what happened, even if that meant lowering my head for a while before finally letting go. Acceptance feels like growth wrapped in fading hurt. As the pain subsides, I begin to feel lighter. Then comes growth. Then comes strength. It seems the deeper the forgiveness, the quicker the lightness, the quicker the growth, and the stronger the strength.

Some hurts feel almost unreasonable to forgive, they invite you in, feed you, give to you, and then betray you, even while holding the spoon in your mouth.

No wonder refusing to forgive can feel strangely comfortable. It can place us on a deceptive high, where unforgiveness feels like being crowned, as though remorse has suddenly turned into gain.

When a wound feels like it is mocking you for being naïve, forgiveness can feel like a second wound, or even madness. It can feel as though forgiving deepens the pain instead of quieting it.

Sometimes the emotion that comes before forgiveness wants to be rude before forgiveness is allowed to be kind. It often happens out of sight, with no witness but our own hearts.

Regret sometimes comes quickly after. But so does a brief relief, as though something that was choking finally got released, even if only onto ourselves. And somehow, after the rudeness and the regret and the relief, forgiveness begins to feel more justified, easier to accept.

Sometimes forgiveness feels like a request that adds to the burden; it harasses instead of heals. Forgiveness is not flesh of our flesh and bone of our bones. Its grace often works alone.

Some betrayals deepen the wound because they share the same bloodline, the same household of faith, grazing in the same pasture, carrying the same gaze. They reveal how far-reaching forgiveness must be, even when grace abounds.

Perhaps the hardest forgiveness I have wrestled with was forgiving myself. Some mistakes appear so obvious in hindsight that even common sense seems to accuse me of being foolish. The wound alternates between healing and reopening whenever memory returns. Shame comes back, not as fresh as before, but still strong enough to be heard. Regret revisits, sometimes armed with self-defence. Yet even there, God's grace reminds me of its sufficiency, not to excuse my failures, but to free me from the grip of memory.

It was in those battles that I began to understand spiritual bulking. God was not only asking me to forgive, He was humbling me, pruning me, and strengthening me through forgiveness.

SPIRITUAL BULKING A DEFINITION

Spiritual strengthening through the obedience Christ purchased. It agrees with right. It builds on the foundation laid by Jesus' sacrifice, through danger, calamity, shame, and every circumstance that tries to kill our strength.

*It is obedience with wings —
swift obedience, immediately siding with what is right.*

*It is intense obedience —
every part of our being absorbing the pressure
and responding in unison.*

*It is untiring obedience —
every moment presenting a different scenario,
while the obedience remains the same.*

The circumstances fluctuate in heat and name.

The obedience does not change.

The temptations vary their cry and their pull.

The obedience does not change.

Spiritual bulking is not measured by how loudly we pray, how often we sing, or how visible our kindness appears, but by the constancy of our obedience when hardship questions our faith.

It is growing while being shaken by trouble.

It is learning obedience through failure.

It is refusing to return to the place where our shame began.

It is remaining in worship while everything around us bows to compromise.

It is forgiving, even when it feels dangerous.

This is how spiritual muscles grow.

This is how Christian character forms.

This is how Christ lives in us.

Every surrender is a story to make us stronger.

Every act of obedience sinks our commitment deeper.

Every victory over self makes our daily dying easier.

Every return to Jesus bulks us.

Every act of forgiveness makes the next easier.

This is spiritual bulking.

Forgiveness, Where the Bulking Began

Forgiveness was where I first began to understand what spiritual bulking felt like. It introduced me to both its cost and its blessing.

The cost was measured in time and energy, dwelling on the hurt, rehearsing the offence, and repeatedly confronting the accused.

The blessing was found in the peace that eventually silenced mourning, the understanding that slowly drained bitterness from the tongue, and the returning joy that came with restored smiles, kind words, and the possibility of reconciliation.

Looking back, forgiveness gave me more than revenge ever promised. Resentment, even when armed, could not produce what grace quietly delivered.

SECTION 1 — THE APPOINTED TIME FOR FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness demands we carry the weight of the cross.

Resisting forgiveness is resisting God.

Without forgiveness, we are tormented, tossed and torn.

With forgiveness, our peace holds.

*In a world where offences are inevitable, forgiveness proves Christ lives
in us.*

When I don't forgive, it follows me, even into prayer.

Unforgiveness echoes in my memory and clashes with my prayer.

It is not only about releasing others from the debt of their wrongdoings, it is about freeing ourselves from the prison of unforgiveness. Unforgiveness shackles us to a past of pain. It chains us to the offender and to the offence. It invites us to become hostages, enslaved by anger and robbed of peace.

And still, God does not deal with us as our unforgiveness deserves.

"It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:22-23)

Unforgiveness has followed and listened to me pray before. It felt like it was holding me back. I had to stop and include it in my prayer, asking God to help me to let go and forgive. Then I carried on praying.

Forgiveness is a decision we must keep making. It does not erase what happened, it releases us from carrying it. It does not pretend there was no wound, it refuses to let the wound make us bitter, vindictive, or withdrawn.

SECTION 2 — FORGIVENESS ON DISPLAY

Sometimes, when I break my mother's heart through my repeated mischief and still hear her calling me, I know it is love, and my heart is moved by remorse at the sound of her voice. She calls me to come and eat. She knows I am hungry. When she calls my name, there is no sound of the memory of my crime in her call; there is no hardness in her voice. It is clean.

A voice sending out assurance, forgiveness, and love. She has dropped the load of my shame and is feeding me now.

Her anger does not touch the meal. Her calling me is the sound of forgiveness on display.

To hear my name means, "You are forgiven."

That voice brought a rebel to the table, to her heart. The moment felt fathomless, love caring while the heart was still wounded.

Forgiveness feeds the fallen. It uses names.

*Forgiveness is not an emotional performance,
not a sentimental impulse,
not a staged pretence of understanding adorned with artificial affection.
Forgiveness is the natural response of a heart under divine influence —
the reflex of a soul visited and awakened by God.*

Forgiveness is not the disappearance of pain, it is the refusal to convert pain into permission for revenge or retaliation.

Forgiveness means the consequences of the truth are stingless.
Forgiveness does not consider circumstances, it lets go and heals. Something within lightens, and I stand before God without fear of my past. It releases the love of God to testify through us.

*Retaliation is our natural bite, but the cross extracts its teeth.
Retaliation may be normal, but it is never necessary.*

*We forgive from the measure of forgiveness we have received.
To forgive is to take the stripes, and still love the hands that gave them.*

It demands that the hurt still present, the sting, the disappointment, the wound, be taken as pruning and carried to God in prayer.

And what remains when the tears have fallen, and the wounds have lost their sting?

*A love that intercedes for enemies,
an understanding that rebukes retaliation,
a compassion that still pours when scorned,
and a freedom that surprises even the forgiver.*

This is spiritual bulking, God's love working through us.

SECTION 3 — THE PLANTAIN PARABLE

Sometimes I buy plantains that look perfectly ripe, golden skin, dark specks, and the promise of sweetness at a glance. But when I peel them, they are hard, pale, stiff, stone-like beneath their attractive surface.

I have met people like that.

Outwardly, we are framed in our posture of piety, to ministry, to profession, to public duty. Our speech is polished. Our reverence is humble. Our service is admirable.

We look sweet, convincing, consistent, commendable.

But inwardly, something remains untouched. Hard. Unmoved. Unresponsive. We perform religion attractively, but beneath the surface rests a heart still stiff with unforgiveness, unable to release old offences, unable to let bygones truly be bygones, unable to silence the quiet judge seated inside the soul.

Hardness is making our conclusions law.

Counterfeit forgiveness smiles and says, "I forgive," while bitterness, hurt, and hidden hate settle comfortably in the protected recesses of the heart. Our appearance promises sweetness, yet our spirits remain unseasoned, lacking compassion, tenderness, and the courage to let the past stop dictating our decisions, our treatment of others, and the posture of our hearts.

Flaws live even in our perfection.

And hard is not foreign to me either. I have had seasons where I looked sweet but withdrew, leaving those who cared standing in the cold. I am no perfect ripe plantain. God is still softening the places in me that resist His gentle pruning. I need the Spirit to hover over my hardness, melt it, and make it tender again.

There are no patches of hard dirt in surrender, just an open field for a downpour.

The plantain looks ripe, but it has not ripened.

The believer looks sanctified but has not surrendered.

*Forgiveness softens the soul the way time softens the plantain —
Until what is tough becomes tender,*

And what is bitter becomes sweet.

This is the slow miracle of spiritual bulking.

SECTION 4 — THE NOSEDIVE

Some people's heads go into an automatic nosedive the moment they see you coming. If you catch a quick glimpse of their face before it drops, it quietly reads: "Disgraced." "Unwelcome." "Unworthy of acknowledgement."

They pull every plug to avoid a simple greeting, a passing smile, or even the most basic pleasantries. And when they do greet, it sometimes feels rehearsed, a Christian salutation wearing a strained grin.

I recognise that grin, I have worn it.

Yet this I know, God stands ready to return us to beauty. We are often attired for beauty and duty, elegant in appearance, polished in presentation. We sing, preach, pray, teach, lead, and fully participate in worship. Yet inwardly, we can be hemmed in by pride and resistance to forgive.

We may appear outwardly impressive, yet remain inwardly unmoved by grace. Externally active, but internally lacking in love. Religious in performance, but cold to reconciliation.

Cold-shouldering from those with titles does not wound, it disappoints.

Even when you know you have nothing to prove, their behaviour still lands somewhere in the soul.

Some days it feels like a small prick. Other days, like a quiet jab.

It stirs unspoken questions: "Really? Even if I had deliberately crossed a boundary, and it became public, where is 'love thy neighbour as thyself'? Why judgment instead of a gentle nod, a simple greeting, or a warm embrace?"

It is a sadness I understand. A sting I have felt. A reality that exposes how deeply unforgiveness can stay buried in a heart not fully surrendered to grace.

We may appear loving to the world, while inwardly resisting grace. Zealous in action, yet still lacking love. A heart half-surrendered to the healing and forgiving power of God cannot greet without guilt, cannot smile without strain, and cannot love without pretence.

The hurt is the sting. The lack of compassion is the sting. Feeling like an outcast in the house where we worship together is the sting. It felt like being cut by their faces, faces that would welcome my absence.

Hypocrisy practices courtesy. It knows how to mimic caring.

But I never allowed the sting to sing. I smiled in my heart and told God: I am not holding on to this. I will not let it stop me from enjoying the fellowship. I will not return what I received as bitter.

*This, too, is a lesson in forgiveness: to forgive even those whose faces
become the wound.*

SECTION 5 — THE RESPECTED ONE

I grew up in a community that was both beautiful and dangerous, beautiful because neighbours protected each other, dangerous because young men often died before their promise could bloom.

Poverty, limited education, and few open doors pushed many into careless and irresponsible choices. I was one of them, expelled from school, drifting without direction, and clinging to the hope that luck might one day remember my name. Some called me a terrorist. One woman even called me a bad-word merchant, and she was right.

I cursed almost with every other word and smoked like I invented smoking, jumping fences, climbing trees, helping myself to fruit without asking, and spending long hours playing dominoes.

I was not a Christian then. My mother was, but her faith had not yet crossed the threshold of my heart.

We don't always have to have a baptismal certificate, share scriptures heard and anthems resound to be touched by the intercessory prayers of those who kneel on our behalf. Our distance from God might be true, but some unheard prayers have our names on them.

One evening, in my usual foolishness, I borrowed a gold ring from a chap called Wiggs, and decided not to return it. I did not realise how close I was to stepping toward death.

In our community, a man known as The Respected One ruled with a strange, paradoxical authority. To the world, he was feared. But to us, he was protector, provider, and judge, a complicated blend of justice and danger.

When Wiggs reported me, The Respected One summoned me twice. Both times, I did not go. Not out of defiance, but disbelief. When the first

messenger came, I did not believe he was sent by The Respected One. When the second arrived, the seriousness settled within me. I believed. By then, fear had already taken residence in my body. I went into my pocket, retrieved the ring and gave it to him. He took it and left.

I stood watching the stretch of road leading to The Respected One's office, every heartbeat driving dread deeper into my soul. Behind me, my friends were playing dominoes, slamming tiles in triumph. Something inside me banged much louder than the dominoes.

Then I saw him.

Tall.

Broad-shouldered.

*Walking with his signature stride —
chest forward, slight lean to the left, his right little finger pointed like a
blade.*

He was alone.

My mind shouted, Run.

My body refused.

He walked past me, then looked back.

Our eyes locked.

No anger.

No hatred.

No vengeance.

*Just a calm, silent finality, as if grace itself had already walked ahead of
him and settled the matter before he arrived.*

And then he carried on walking.

In that moment, something settled in me, something that humbled me to the core: If a man the world labelled as hardened, cold, unreachable, often lacking in compassion, could forgive me, what excuse do I have not to forgive those who never learned how to love?

That encounter became my first personal sermon on forgiveness.

The Respected One may not have worn religion, but that day he wore mercy.

He may not have known doctrine, but he practised principle.

He may not have prayed, but he demonstrated grace.

The Spirit of God flourishes in any heart open to fairness, understanding, and compassion. Forgiveness insists that we treat others the way we hope to be treated. It peels away pride, the kind that does not know how to forgive. Refusing to forgive keeps us buried in slow spiritual decay. Forgiving liberates both the wounded and the offender.

That unexpected mercy planted something new in me, a spirit that now craves opportunities to forgive.

Gratitude sprang up where guilt once lived.

And without knowing it, that day became the first rep in a lifelong training in forgiveness.

*Forgiveness found me in an unexpected place —
and it lifted me before I ever learned how to lift anyone else.*

SECTION 6 — THE SCHOOL THAT SAID NO

One particular experience anchored this lesson deep in my soul. Many years ago, I applied to an institution that offered a second chance, a programme designed for late starters, dropouts, and those without a living faith, people whose lives needed the Lord.

My brother was already attending, and he encouraged me to come and apply while on campus. Others from my church had been accepted. It felt like the opportunity I never remembered praying for, but God made it happen. After a life with such a bumpy ride, this looked smooth, like the beginning of something new. I was leaving for better.

I packed my suitcase.

I said goodbye to my community.

I waved as I left, believing I was not coming back.

For fifteen days I lived in the dormitory. Every morning I woke up believing I belonged there. Then the news came. My brother informed me I had failed the mathematics entrance examination. I was told I could not remain.

Everything inside me knelt, not to pray, but to protest.

The joy that once danced now hung like damp clothes on a line. My expectations descended quickly from excited anticipation into silent dejection. Then the accusations began knocking at the door of my mind.

Maybe my mathematics simply was not good enough.

Maybe my conversion was still too new.

Maybe my reputation arrived before I did.

*Maybe they thought I represented a present risk,
considering how supposedly dangerous I was perceived to be before my
conversion.*

Every explanation stabbed. The decision left me missing from myself. It bent my emotions out of shape. It shook every last drop of my confidence. It felt like a school saying "no," and a God quietly saying, "not here."

Or maybe that is what I wanted to hear.

Both experiences, the mercy of The Respected One and the sting of that school's no, taught me the same quieter, harder lesson: to filter my thoughts before they matured into accusations.

I realise that I cannot accuse someone of wrongdoing without first asking God whether what I see is truly injustice or simply a scene from His providential script that my maturity has not yet caught up to.

Convictions can be loud, persuasive, and emotionally convincing.

*But convictions can also become advocates for our biases —
loyal to our hurt while denying truth its platform to speak.*

Some actions may appear unjust, discriminatory, or intentionally harmful. But appearance is not evidence. What we see may only be a speck, a pixel from the picture God is painting for our expansion. Providence is coded to finite minds. What transpires behind the scenes in Heaven does not always make its way to the balcony or the doorstep of our understanding.

So when we jump to conclusions, even when those conclusions feel justified, we may be accusing someone of an intent they never had and motives that never entered their minds. This is why forgiveness must stand ready: perched, not passive; eager, not reluctant; willing, not withdrawn.

Accusation diminishes our spiritual life.

Forgiveness crowns it with dignity and honour.

When we frown and fold our arms, pride speaks in exalted language.

When we clasp our hands, prayer speaks in a language of power.

There are moments when the pieces of our lives seem misplaced or unable to fit. But in God's arrangement, nothing is out of place, only out of our understanding. When confusion rises and emotions flare, that is when faith and trust must step forward.

Faith says, "Believe even if you do not understand."

Trust says, "Wait, God will reveal His providence."

There were times I had to restrain myself because I recognised the dangerous slope my heart was stepping onto.

*Jumping to conclusions is easy —
refraining is maturity.*

And maturity widens our thinking, softens our assumptions, and accommodates perspectives beyond our own.

Yet beneath the brokenness, one thing remained unshaken: a rugged beam of resolve. I reminded myself that all things work together for good. I

forced myself to believe it. And if that Scripture is true, then perhaps God removed me from that place for reasons hidden behind the curtains of His providence, reasons with my name written on them.

*Maybe it was not rejection —
but redirection in disguise.*

So instead of harbouring bitterness, I chose the harder road:

*I forgave them.
I surrendered my assumptions.
I trusted that God was scripting something I was not yet wise enough to
read.*

And over time, I discovered something beautiful: bitterness never found a resting place in my bones or rooted itself in my heart, because forgiveness drained the poison before it could settle.

I packed my suitcase and returned to the community. There was disappointment all around.

But I moved on.

I grew.

I learned.

I forgave.

*Never jump to conclusions when God's providence has not yet finished
speaking.*

SECTION 7 — THE WEIGHT OF SELF-FORGIVENESS

My divorce was a disaster that could have been postponed. Wisdom is not always in a hurry; sometimes it sits and thinks.

But during that period, my emotional and mental health were pleading for rescue. Our marriage sometimes felt like a merger floating on convenience; our values had given each other unwritten permission to misbehave and never intervene. Patience had carried the load for too long, or so I thought, and exhaustion became its defence for leaving.

When our strength is running out of grip, impulse may invite judgement. But our hold can be sustained by grace.

One evening, after yet another round of disrespect, the heat forced my heart open. I left while still seated. I snapped, but there was no sound, no movement, it felt like I was unplugged and released. A swelling that sat for years disappeared at the sound of a whisper.

Months later, I received an overseas employment opportunity; it lifted my hands in the air, a half-lit walkway towards something that seemed capable of accelerating the change I needed. We discussed relocating with the boys. In my mind, they would go with me, return to see their mother during the holidays, and she initially agreed, or at least that is how I remember it.

But when the time came, she would not allow the boys to go with me. Instead, she asked, "What about me?" Those three words should have reset my thinking. They should have forced me into a pause. Looking back, I believe things might eventually have worked out if I had delayed. But feeling won the match, impulse moved forward with a victory chant, and I pressed ahead.

We separated.

She moved with the boys to a different part of the country.

I drew two lines across the face of the contract and chose to stay, but in a different area, believing I could still father them from a distance, provide stability, and remain meaningfully present in their lives.

But distance can be dishonest and unreliable.

And my sons paid the price.

My youngest drifted into chaos, gangs, smoking, and alarming brushes with the law. My older son finished high school, but far below what his potential pointed to. For years, regret lived in my stomach like hardened, undigested guilt.

I justified the divorce by telling myself that protecting my frame of mind was wisdom, that I deserved peace.

But peace that injures the innocent is not peace. It is disquiet. It is vice.

I needed the peace.

Maybe it was an impatient peace, wanting to arrive at its destination too quickly, without thinking carefully about the cost to the innocent left behind to bear it. The brief happiness the divorce gave me was real... but shallow compared with the immeasurable emotional and psychological hit the boys absorbed.

We must seek reconciliation with the innocent when our peace unintentionally hurts them.

If I could speak to my younger self, I would whisper Isaiah's wisdom:

"But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." (Isaiah 40:31)

And I would tell him: "Wait a little longer, not forever, just long enough to hold my ground a little longer while the boys found their footing, their futures, their adulthood."

*The divorce gave me reasons to smile —
but far more reasons to sigh.*

It felt like triumph that had been denied its freedom.

It was asking questions about its health, and finally received the answer it had waited for.

The plea of my soul found an ear.

I was able to own my strides again, overcoming stumbles.

Grace found me ruined. Grace became a map and then a country, and finally the Dubai promise. Grace flew me to change.

Grace removes, grace guards me, and grace encloses me.

I can extract beauty even from regret. Remorse can become a catalyst for spiritual bulking when it is surrendered, not hidden, in the hands of Jesus.

I have forgiven myself for handing over my sons to uncertainty too early. My prayers repeated my sorrow and I left the guilt at the base of the cross.

SECTION 8 — THE WEIGHT OF FORGIVENESS AND THE GYM METAPHOR

*Spiritual bulking begins when superficial performance ends
and pretence refuses to role-play any longer.*

*It begins when we become truly authentic —
when Christianity stops posturing and starts living.*

*Bulking begins when we stop prioritising appearance
and start strengthening the muscles of Christian authenticity.*

*In God's gym, there are no mirrors, only altars:
Altars where tears of remorse file their complaints,
Altars where repentance is offered and forgiveness is sought,
Altars where pride buries its head and prays for power to end the
performance.*

God's forgiveness is never a power play; it is a partnership with our repentance, a sacred exchange where our surrender meets His mercy.

*Every time we step back from revenge
and fall forward into forgiveness,
we grow.*

*Every unforced act of forgiveness is a rep in the gym of grace:
Each rep trains the will to let love carry hurt without seeking revenge.
Each rep shapes us into the likeness of Jesus.*

Forgiveness is not weakness —

it is the warm-up routine for spiritual bulking.

Sometimes forgiveness comes in my prayer. I am praying, and when I get to the person's name, sometimes it feels hard to call when I ask God to intervene with forgiveness in my heart. Then after a while I can say the name with confidence because I have forgiven.

The name is the measure.

When it comes easily, when it arrives without the weight it once carried, the muscle has grown. The rep has been completed. The bulking has happened.

Every person we forgive who does not deserve it is a rep in God's gym. Every time we release a debt that was genuinely owed, we add to our spiritual capacity. Every time we choose the altar over the argument, we grow. Not immediately. Not without cost. But the growth is real and it is lasting and it is the kind that cannot be achieved any other way.

For Christ's sake, we forgive. Not because the offender merits it. But because Christ, who merited nothing of what was done to Him, forgave anyway. And because we are, in ways we do not always understand, still being shaped by that example into something that looks more and more like Him.

*"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."
(Ephesians 4:32)*

We forgive... and we begin to grow.

*Let us release our enemies from the captivity of our hatred,
and let forgiveness declare us resurrected, bulking, and free.*

SPIRITUAL BULKING — REFLECTION

Chapter 1 — Forgiveness

Forgiveness is where spiritual bulking begins. It is also where most of us stop with our list of objections. These questions use searchlights, but the sincerity in their answers draws us closer to God.

1. Is there a name you find difficult to call in prayer without the memory of hurt seated on it? If so, how do you think forgiveness can help you to defeat the foe in the hurt?
 2. The author describes a moment when his mother called him to eat after he had broken her heart, no hardness in her voice, the anger not touching the meal. Have you ever experienced a similar type of kindness? How does it affect your perception of the person? How does it affect your attitude towards forgiveness?
 3. Identify someone you need to forgive. Bring that name to its knees. Call their name with the confidence of compassion. Then pray and call their name again with the power of forgiveness.
-

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord,

Help us to forgive and be comfortable with it.

*Give us the strength to pray for any name
without the weight of hurt on our tongues.*

*Give us victory over the sight of our wounds
and the accusations they sometimes make.*

Soften our hearts through the power of Your Holy Spirit.

*We thank You for the relief sometimes experienced
when our forgiveness is complete.*

*We thank You for forgiving us
for not always wanting to forgive,
not always happy to forgive,
not always being quick to forgive.*

*We pray for the power to be released
from every besetting sin,
from every captivity.*

For Christ's sake,

Amen.

Thank you for reading.

Spiritual Bulking will be on Amazon in print and Kindle in early 2027.

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YOUR RESPONSE MATTERS

1. Which line stayed with you?
2. What did this chapter stir in you?
3. May your response be shared, with your name, on the website?

Please reply to spiritualbulkingministry@gmail.com