



# **FORGIVENESS**

You cannot afford to withhold forgiveness. Nothing will destroy your life more surely, for there is a great hidden grief in the denial of forgiveness. Your **heart** is so heavy from what you have not forgiven that you bear the offenses of another as if they were

**YOUR OWN**  
(Glenda Green)

### **Class format**

Each class is 90 minutes long. We cover some “heavy” information that will open up issues that we all face. Sharing is very much encouraged, but to hear and learn from everyone, the facilitator may need to ask you to finish your thought. To follow the spirit of this:

### **Class guidelines**

#### **We have confidentiality**

To build trust. Refrain from gossip inside and outside the group.  
Gossip is discussion of or about others when they are not present.

#### **We respect others boundaries**

Spiritual, Emotional and Physical

Ask what others are comfortable with before assuming they are ok with you entering their personal space, for example hugs.

#### **We give and receive support and encouragement**

We comfort each other as we have been comforted by God. Supporting others is not to give advice or try to rescue. If we are struggling with a problem, we can usually find at least one other person who has worked through a similar struggle. This person may often be the one best equipped to minister to those striving to overcome similar problems without giving advice.

#### **We focus on feelings when sharing**

Refrain from explaining situations when sharing. Do your best to clearly identify and share your feelings. Focus more on your feelings than the details. Feelings do not require analysis; they require proper response and can be resolved. The feelings point to the core issue. As we progress together, appropriate labels for feelings develop (joy, fear, peace, sadness, depression, anger, love, resentment, guilt, loneliness and fulfillment)

#### **We believe the Holy Spirit is in charge**

The leader is simply facilitating the group. Pray for guidance and direction, and ask the Holy Spirit to be present in each one of us.

#### **We limit our own talking and allow others to share**

Allow everyone an equal opportunity to share. Talk about your own experience, strength and hope without giving a detailed account. Take turns talking and do not interrupt each other.

- Share for no longer than 2-3 minutes.

# Forgiveness Discussion Session 1

## *Forgiveness Definition*

### **Why is forgiveness important?**

Forgiveness is good for your body, your relationships, and your place in the world. That's reason enough to convince virtually anyone to do the work of letting go of anger and working on forgiveness.

#### **Your Body**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lower blood pressure</li><li>• Lower heart rate</li><li>• Better sleep</li><li>• Stress relief</li><li>• Less fatigue</li><li>• Less sickness</li></ul>	
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#### **Your Relationships**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• With God</li><li>• With spouse</li><li>• With children</li><li>• With co-workers</li><li>• With boss</li></ul>	
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#### **Your Place in the World**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Attitude toward people in general</li><li>• Overall happiness with where you are at in life</li></ul>	
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## **What is forgiveness?**

Our culture has defined forgiveness to mean something that it really isn't. This incorrect definition makes forgiveness seem like something that is just not practical or wise to do. In this class, we will redefine forgiveness in a way that is much closer to the truth and see that forgiveness is not just practically possible but that it's a very wise and healthy way to live. We recognize that we don't have it all figured out yet and that, together, with God's help, we will get closer and closer to the truth.

## **What do you think forgiveness is?**

Take some time to write down or discuss with the class what you believe forgiveness is. Don't worry about being right or not. I can guarantee that everyone in the room has had an incorrect idea of what forgiveness is. I know I have and I'm sure I still do!

## **What do you think forgiveness is not?**

Sometimes to define something that's been already defined poorly, it's best to discuss what it is not. As we discuss what forgiveness is not, write them below:

## **What forgiveness is**

### **Some Possible answers:**

- A moral virtue
- Unconditional
- Strength
- Continual
- Unilateral
- Undeserved
- A process
- A remedy for bitterness and resentment

## **What forgiveness is not**

### **Some Possible Answers:**

- Revenge
- Conditional
- Forgetting
- Excusing/condoning/saying its OK
- Reconciliation
- A legal pardon
- Manipulation
- Weakness
- One time decision
- Easy

### **Our definition of forgiveness**

As we discuss what forgiveness is, jot down our definition.

**What did you get out of this session? (1 minute each)**

**Homework**

Start thinking about an offense that you would like to forgive. Forgiveness is a skill, and like any skill, it takes practice. When starting a new skill, it's wise to start small and build your way up. Think about offenses that are at a 4 or less on a pain scale of 1-10. Choosing a smaller offense will help us practice and as we practice, we will be able to forgive easier. Eventually we will get strong enough to tackle the larger offenses in our lives.

# Forgiveness Discussion Session 2

## *Forgiveness & Anger in Scripture*

### Review

#### Forgiveness is NOT

- Revenge
- Conditional
- Forgetting
- Reconciliation
- A legal pardon
- Manipulation
- Weakness
- Easy
- Excusing/condoning/saying its OK
- One time decision

#### Forgiveness IS

- A moral virtue
- Unconditional
- Strength
- Continual
- Unilateral
- Undeserved
- A process
- A remedy for bitterness and resentment

### Biblical Understanding of Forgiveness

- ❖ Forgiveness is required
- ❖ Forgiveness is unconditional
- ❖ Forgiveness is a remedy for bitterness and resentment
  - ❖ Forgiveness is a continual process
  - ❖ Forgiveness is undeserved
  - ❖ Forgiveness is a choice

### Forgiveness is required

#### Matthew 6:9-15

9 “This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
10 your kingdom come,  
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us today our daily bread.

12 **And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

13 And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.

14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But **if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.**

### **Mark 11:25-26**

“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, **forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.**”

## **Forgiveness is unconditional**

### **Romans 12:17-21**

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 **If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.** 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. 20 On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head\*.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

*\*Heaping burning coals is a reference to repentance. The hope is that repaying evil with good will open the other’s eyes to their sin, and seeing the wrong of their way, will turn from their sin towards God.*

### **Luke 23:33-34**

<sup>33</sup>When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. <sup>34</sup>But Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.

## **Forgiveness is a remedy for bitterness and resentment**

### **Ephesians 4:31-32**

**31 Get rid of all bitterness**, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. **32** Be kind and compassionate to one another, **forgiving each other**, just as in Christ God forgave you.

### **Colossians 3:12-14**

12 Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and **forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.** 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

## **Forgiveness is a continual process**

### **Matthew 18:21-22**

21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

22 Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but **seventy-seven times.**”



## Forgiveness is undeserved

### Romans 5:6-8

6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: **While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

## Forgiveness is a choice

Forgiveness is a choice we make. It is a decision of our will, motivated by obedience to God and his command to forgive. The Bible instructs us to forgive as the Lord forgave us:

### Colossians 3:13

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

## How is “Anger” related to forgiveness?

Typically, when someone hurts us, we respond with anger. That is definitely a normal and healthy response! But what we choose to do with the anger can hurt us worse than the initial offense if the anger is not dealt with quickly.

### What is anger?

Google definition: a strong feeling of annoyance, displeasure, or hostility.  
Reaction to a perceived injustice

### What is the cause of anger?

Anger is a symptom, but injustice is the cause

## Biblical Understanding of Anger

### Ephesians 4:31-32

31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.  
32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

*What is the appropriate way to respond when hurt? Is there a remedy for bitterness?*

*Paul seems to state in verse 32, that the remedy for negative emotions such as bitterness, rage, anger, etc... is to be compassionate and forgiving towards one another.*

## Why should anger be resolved quickly?

### Ephesians 4:26-27

26 “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

### Proverbs 15:1

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

## Truth is important when trying to understand anger?

### Ephesians 4:15, 25

15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

## Why is truth important when trying to understand anger?

### We must speak the truth in love

### Lewis Smedes definition of Truth

If we leave one of these out, it may be fact but not truth

1. The right truth –
2. To the right person - Is it good/right for this person?
3. At the right time
4. In the right way - Does it line up with the overall message?
5. For the right reason

### Why are each of these points important?

## How can Anger be destructive?

### Some destructive effects of anger:

Revenge, Denial, Displacement, Projection, Making rash decisions. (We will talk about these more in the next session.)

### What are some examples?

## How can anger be constructive?

### What are some examples?

**Some constructive effects of anger:**

Love and Anger = Passion

Helps to identify what's wrong

Push you to act and remedy the issue

**What did you get out of this session? (1 minute each)**

**Homework**

Start to think about how you can practically apply what you know about forgiveness to the offense you have chosen. We will be stepping through some practical steps but there are many paths to forgiveness. Start praying to be shown the path that is best for this particular offense.

Begin to pray that God would show you the best way to resolve your anger. As you think about the offense, practice constructive ways of handling your anger.

## **Mpho Tutu's Prayer**

"I want to be willing to forgive  
But I dare not ask for the will to forgive  
In case you give it to me  
And I am not yet ready  
I am not yet ready for my heart to soften  
I am not yet ready to be vulnerable again  
Not yet ready to see that there is humanity in my tormentor's eyes  
Or that the one who hurt me may also have cried  
I am at the prayer before the prayer of forgiveness  
I am not yet ready for the journey  
I am not yet interested in the path  
Grant me the will to want to forgive  
Grant it to me not yet but soon

Can I even form the words  
Forgive me?  
Dare I even look?  
Do I dare to see the hurt I have caused?  
I can glimpse all the shattered pieces of that fragile thing  
That soul trying to rise on the broken wings of hope  
But only out of the corner of my eye  
I am afraid of it  
And if I am afraid to see  
How can I not be afraid to say  
Forgive me?

Is there a place where we can meet?  
You and me  
The place in the middle  
The no man's land  
Where we straddle the lines  
Where you are right  
And I am right too  
Can we meet there?  
And both of us are wrong and wronged  
And look for the place where the path begins  
The path that ends when we forgive"

# Forgiveness Discussion Session 3

*Uncover the offense & decide to Forgive*

## Review of Anger

### **Biblical Understanding of Forgiveness**

- ❖ Forgiveness is required
- ❖ Forgiveness is unconditional
- ❖ Forgiveness is a remedy for bitterness and resentment
- ❖ Forgiveness is a continual process
- ❖ Forgiveness is undeserved
- ❖ Forgiveness is a choice

### **Ephesians 4:15, 25**

15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body

### **Speak truth in love - Smedes Truth Definition:**

- ❖ the right truth
- ❖ to the right person
- ❖ at the right time
- ❖ in the right way
- ❖ for the right reason

### **Steps to Forgiveness**

Now we know the what and why. Now to the hard part: the how.

There are general steps to forgiveness. These steps have been constructed from the work of Robert Enright, Everett Worthington, the Nehemiah Project, Dr Dan Green, Lewis Smedes and our own experiences. We hope that these practical steps will help guide you and the class along the path towards forgiveness.

## **Step 1: Face the truth**

In order to completely forgive, we have to recall and uncover the hurt done to us. It is impossible to forgive something that we deny ever happened or deny its painful effects on us.

Facing the truth and identifying the offense helps us focus on the offense and not the offender. Then we can forgive a hurtful act that a person committed. Practically, we must face the offense and experience the full pain of it.

### **Who hurt you?**

First, we must acknowledge the person who committed the hurtful act. It could be a family member, friend, coworker or stranger. It could also be a group of people.

### **What did they do?**

Think about what was done or not done. What was said or not said. Was it in person? Remember how love was withheld. Was it withheld through anger, yelling, or silence? Through an untrue accusation? Did you experience shame?

### **How did you respond?**

How did you respond? Anger? Yelling? Aggression? Did you walk away or confront the offender? Where tears shed or did you fall silent?

### **How has this affected you?**

Has this affected your health? Is it constantly on your mind? Is it causing you to feel depressed? Has it affected others? Has it forced you to make changes you didn't want to? Has this changed your view on people? Are people generally good or untrustworthy now?

## **Step 2 Decide to forgive**

### **Alternatives to forgiveness**

Before deciding to forgive, let's take some time to consider the other options. Then we can make a wise, informed choice.

#### **Revenge**

Definition: the action of inflicting hurt or harm on someone for an injury or wrong suffered at their hands. ---This is a very popular option in our culture...but is it the best one?

#### **Why seek revenge?**

- It's fast
- We feel in control
- We want the offender to suffer
- Reputation
- Gives us temporary power
- It's pleasurable
- It's a form of protection

Other reasons:

**What are some negative outcomes of revenge seeking?**

- Its dehumanizing
- We create a negative reputation
- Legal consequences
- It fills us with negative emotions
- It does not fix the injustice
- The offender may seek revenge in return
- Innocent bystanders can be hurt
- We will be filled with guilt and shame
- Unhealthy relationships - no intimacy
- It's a sin according to the bible

Other outcomes:

**Biblical understanding of revenge**

Basically, the Bible says “don’t do it!”

**Deuteronomy 32:35**

“It is mine to avenge; I will repay.

In due time their foot will slip;  
their day of disaster is near  
and their doom rushes upon them.”

**Romans 12:19**

Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.

**Hold a Grudge**

**Definition:** a persistent feeling of ill will or resentment resulting from a past insult or injury

This is another common alternative to forgiveness...but is it a good option? Does it truly resolve what has happened to us?

**Why hold a grudge?**

- Feelings of power and superiority
- We want to honor the memory of someone or something
- Protection
- It fosters feelings of entitlement
- It becomes our identity

**Other reasons:**

**What are some negative effects of holding a grudge?**

- It dehumanizes the offender
- Wastes time and energy
- Stunts spiritual growth
- Negative emotions like bitterness that have physical, mental and emotional health consequences

**Other effects:**

**Biblical understanding of holding a grudge**

**Lev 19:18**

Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

**Mark 11:25**

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. ”

(notes)



## Denial

Definition: the action of declaring something to be untrue

Many people deal with injustice by simply denying it ever happened or minimizing the effects of the offense. Is this a good alternative?

### Why do we deny what happened?

So we can avoid dealing with the injustice

**Other reasons:**

### What are some negative effects of denial?

- It fosters addiction
- Requires a lot of energy
- We hurt others
- Nothing gets resolved.
- We continually experience the consequences of the injustice.

Other reasons

### Biblical understanding of denial

#### Philippians 4:8

Finally, brothers and sisters, **whatever is true**, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

#### Colossians 3:9-10

**Do not lie** to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

#### Job 42:7

After the Lord had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, **“I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has.**

Read through the reasons why you may not want to forgive & the alternatives on the next page.  
Decide whether you want to forgive.

Reason not to	Alternative choice/truth
S/he hurt me so much; how can I ever expect to forgive that?	Matthew 18:21-35
I didn't deserve that treatment, and I do not believe that forgiveness is deserved in this situation.	Romans 5:7-8 <u>z</u> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. <u>g</u> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
S/he must be inherently evil, and despicable. No forgiveness will ever change that.	We are born into a sinful world and we have that bent, but God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ and His reconciliation redeems us. A relationship with God makes us righteous in His eyes and starts a renewal process. Relationships heal and transform. A relationship with God is the most healing and transformational relationship. There is hope.
S/he is vicious and cruel, and I always need to be on guard because of that; so why try to forgive what was done?	As above, there is hope in Christ.
It is a sign of weakness or softness to forgive. I must always keep my guard up so as never to be hurt again.	Forgiveness is <b>not weakness</b> , it is a position of strength. If we are angry and continue to think about what s/he did over and over again, we are continually wounded by them. If we choose to give the undeserved gift of forgiveness, we are released from the wounding and their hurtful actions no longer have power over us. We have the power of God to go against our own nature and to forgive!
There are some things I can never forgive.	We are commanded to forgive as we have been forgiven and if we cannot, the Holy Spirit grants us the strength to.
Only God can forgive, though at times I don't believe He can for what was done.	Forgiveness is not condoning the offense. Justice and forgiveness can happen at the same time.
All people who do wrong deserve the worst that life has to dish out.	Romans 5:7-8 <u>z</u> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. <u>g</u> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

We have

- Defined what forgiveness is
- Chosen a hurtful act to forgive
- Identified the wounds that the act has caused you
- Discussed alternatives to forgiveness

**What did you get out of this session? (1 minute each)**

**Homework**

We now have an idea of what forgiveness is and some alternatives to it. We've also uncovered some offenses that we can forgive. Take some time to really think this over. Next class we will discuss the decision to forgive. Do you want to be free of the hurt? Are you ready to do the work of forgiveness?

**Have you decided to forgive? Why or why not?**

(Write out your answer in the box below)

**Important note:**

- **At this point you are not actually doing the forgiving.**
- **You are just making the decision to forgive.**
- **There are steps to go through yet to take you to a place of forgiveness.**

I declare to myself that on \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_, I intend to try to use these group experiences and my work at home to try to forgive \_\_\_\_\_  
for \_\_\_\_\_

and I also want to be open to God's work in my life to become a more forgiving person.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness (Signature)

# Forgiveness Discussion Session 4

## Definition of Empathy

### Review Step 2: Decide to forgive

### Step 3 Empathize

Now that we've chosen to forgive, we can move into the "work" phase of forgiveness. Next is the most important and difficult step; empathy. It is very difficult to forgive without empathy. Empathy enables us to "re-humanize" the one who hurt us.

#### Definition of empathy

Empathy can be defined by the intersection of apathy and sympathy.

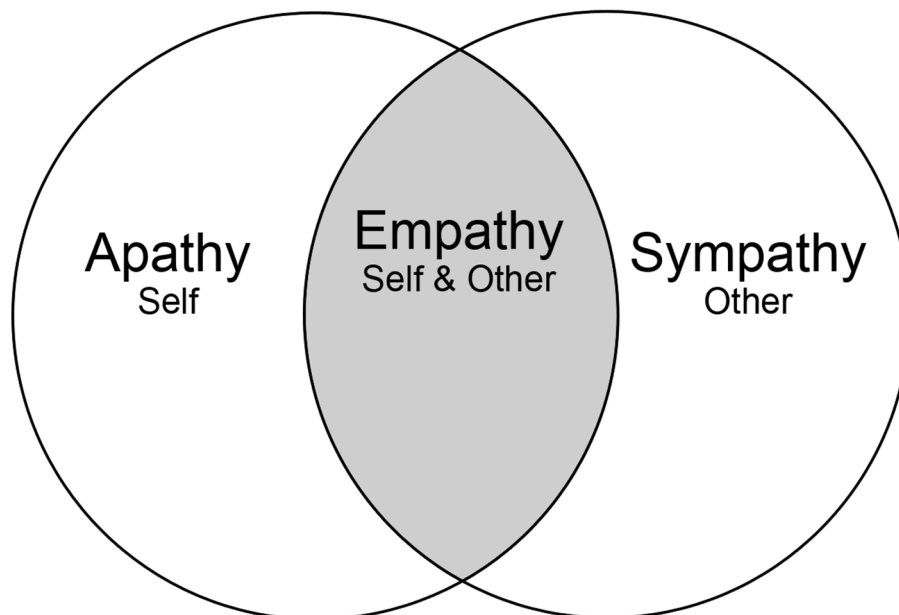
#### Apathy

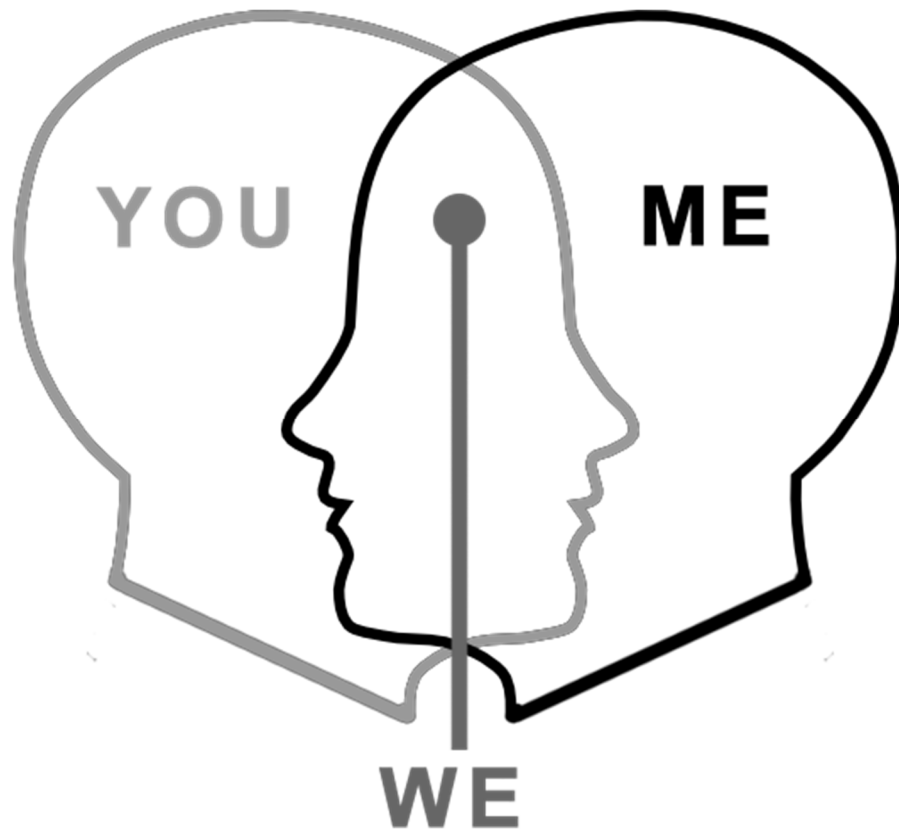
Someone who is self focused or numb to other people.

#### Sympathy

Someone that only reacts to another person and loses track of themselves.

Apathy	Empathy	Sympathy
What it is like to be me (or numb)	What it is like to be me & what it is like to be you	What it is like to be you
Self-focused	Aware of both my experience and learning about the other	Just react to the other and lose track of who I am. React to other's hurt/need without thinking about my own experience....Only ID with the other's pain but not my own...





### **Good definitions**

*“Experiencing emotions that match another person's emotions; discerning what another person is thinking or feeling; and making less distinct the differences between the self and the other.”*

*~<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empathy>*

*“Recognize my experience of what it is like to be me while I develop experience of what it is like to be the other person”*

*~Dr Dan Green*

*“We must learn to regard people less in the light of what they do or omit to do, and more in the light of what they suffer.”*

*~Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison*

### **Empathy is**

## Empathy in scripture

### John 11:33-35

33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, **he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.** 34 “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. 35 **Jesus wept.**

### Romans 12:9-16

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 **Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.** 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

### Hebrews 4:15

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.”

### Philippians 2:7

“rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”

## How do we empathize?

Practicing empathy restores the humanity of the one who hurt us. If we continue to objectify the person who offended us, it will be impossible to forgive because we don't forgive objects.

**The goal of empathy is to start restoring the humanity of the one who hurt us.**

What are some ways we can empathize?

“5 P’s” as ways we can empathize.

To try and understand why someone acts the way they do

#### 1. **Pressures:**

- When the person hurt you, what external pressures might he or she have been feeling?
- Was there anything going on in the person's life that was out of the ordinary?
- Was the person not feeling well?
- Did the person have a lot on his or her plate?
- Was the person struggling at work?
- Did the person have a high level of stress during that time?
- By journaling about pressures, you aren't excusing what the person did, and you aren't saying it was okay. But you are trying to understand the outside factors that might have contributed to what happened.

2. **Past:**

Did anything happen in this person's past that may have contributed to what the person did to hurt you?

What was this person's family like growing up?

Did the person have a loving family that modeled how to treat others well, or were there things that were missed in his or her growing-up years?

Did the person experience any traumatic events or struggles growing up that might have contributed to what the person did to hurt you?

3. **Personality:** Some people have natural tendencies toward certain ways of being that make it more likely to engage in certain behaviors. Think about the person who hurt you.

- Are there aspects of his or her personality that contributed to what the person did? Again, we aren't trying to make up an excuse for the person. We are just trying to understand the context around what happened.

4. **Provocation:**

- Did you do anything that contributed to the problem or what happened? We have to be careful with this one. In certain instances, such as when an individual is the victim of abuse, the abuse is not okay whatever the circumstances. However, in other situations, relationships often are characterized by a series of hurts from both parties.
- You may be focused on how you were hurt or offended against, but this 'P' encourages you to explore your role in what happened.

5. **Plans:**

- What do you think the other person was thinking when he or she hurt you? In general, most individuals don't wake up in the morning and say, "I think I will go and hurt someone terribly. I think I will ruin a relationship today."
- Can you think of any possible good intentions the other person may have had when he or she hurt you? What was the person trying to accomplish?

**Reflective listening**

If it's possible to have a safe conversation with the offender, you could use the "reflective listening" technique that centers around empathy

1. Pay full attention to the conversation
2. Genuinely empathize with the other's point of view. You are not agreeing with the speaker, just viewing things from his/her perspective. Encourage the person to speak freely, by being non judgmental and empathetic.
3. Mirror the mood of the other, reflecting the emotional state with words and nonverbal communication. This calls for you to quiet your mind and fully focus on the mood of the other person. The mood will be apparent not just in the words used but in the tone of voice, in the posture and other nonverbal cues. Look for congruence between words and mood.



4. Summarize what s/he said, using your own words.
5. Respond to the other's specific point, without digressing to other subjects.
6. Repeat the procedure for each subject, and switching the roles of speaker and listener, if necessary.

### **Offer Kindness**

- Pray
- Don't ridicule
- Forgive

### **Other ways of offering empathy:**

Again, the goal of empathy is not to condone the offense but to realize that the offender is like me. That s/he has hurt, been hurt and stood by as people hurt each other just like me. Like me, s/he doesn't deserve to be forgiven but is in need of forgiveness. Empathy is not judging, but taking on the other person's perspective, recognizing their feelings, communicating them back and feeling with them. It's a vulnerable choice. We must connect with a feeling or experience we've had that is similar to what they are going through, not judging, fixing or minimizing. The goal of empathy is to connect with the other person. When we connect, we see the other person is like us. They are no longer a monster or inferior. They become more human in our eyes.

### **What did you get out of this session? (1 minute each)**

### **Homework**

We have learned what forgiveness is, identified an offense, faced the pain of the offense and empathized with the offender. Think about how these all relate to one another and how you can "wrap" them together.

# Forgiveness Discussion Session 5

## Review

Here is a summary:

### Step #1 - Face the truth

#### ❖ Face the hurt

Identify

Who offended

What was the offense

How you responded

How it has hurt you

**WHY?! Impossible to forgive something we deny**

### Step #2 -Decide to forgive

#### **Alternatives:**

Why are Revenge, Holding a grudge, Denial poor alternatives to forgiveness?

- ❖ They hurt ourselves and others
- ❖ Negative health consequences
- ❖ It's only a short-term solution - nothing is fixed or resolved
- ❖ According to the Bible, its sinful

#### **Make the decision to forgive**

### Step #3 - Empathize

#### **Definition of Apathy**

Someone who is self focused or numb to other people.

#### **Definition of Sympathy**

Someone that only reacts to another person and loses track of themselves.

#### **Definition of Empathy**

Empathy can be defined by the intersection of apathy and sympathy.

#### **Review of Step 3: Empathize**

- It's difficult and vulnerable
- Most important step towards emotional forgiveness
- Empathy Re-humanizes the offender so we CAN forgive

## Step 4: Bearing the Pain

“Here is one of the paradoxes of forgiveness: As we bear the pain of injustices, and we surely do not deserve the injustices, then you are the one who is healed in an emotional way.

People become stronger as they bear up under the weight of the pain that life has brought their way. This standing up and consciously deciding not to transfer the pain to others has a positive effect on us. We realize we are strong and that we can play a part in preventing even more wounds from being transferred to our loved ones.

Bearing the pain is at the heart of forgiveness. It is a key to healing, both oneself and one’s relationships. So many people do not understand it.

Forgiveness does not ask you to bear more pain but to bear the pain you already have.”

~Robert Enright - The Forgiving Life

## Bearing the pain is healing Builds strength

### Biblical references to bearing pain

#### Psalm 37:1-6

- 1 Do not fret because of those who are evil  
or be envious of those who do wrong;
- 2 for like the grass they will soon wither,  
like green plants they will soon die away.
- 3 Trust in the Lord and do good;  
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.
- 4 Take delight in the Lord,  
and he will give you the desires of your heart.
- 5 Commit your way to the Lord;  
trust in him and he will do this:
- 6 He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn,  
your vindication like the noonday sun.

#### Romans 8:28

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

**Hebrews 12:1-3**

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

**What does it mean to bear the pain?**

Working through the pain  
Not displacing the pain  
Like a sponge

**What are some alternatives to bearing the pain?**

Revenge, Displacement, Denial, Hold a grudge, Bitterness, Resentment

**Why are they poor alternatives?**

**Other alternatives:**

**Why should we bear the pain?**

So we don't pass on the hurt to others  
If we don't work through the pain we are blocking our own healing

## **Step 5: Give Altruistically**

*Give the gift of forgiveness*

### **Definition of altruistic**

Unselfishly concerned for or devoted to the welfare of others

Once we empathize with an offender and see his/her need for forgiveness, we can give it to them as a gift. If forgiveness is given for selfish reasons, it may not last. Paradoxically, if forgiveness is given without expecting anything in return, the full benefit is applied to the giver. It is to be a gift given simply for the good of the other person.

However, if you cannot give altruistically, not to worry. Every step on the forgiveness path is very significant. Whether you give forgiveness altruistically or so you can be free of negative emotions, you will experience significant healing.

### **How do we give forgiveness away altruistically?**

#### **Empathize**

- Remember when we were guilty
- Remember how it felt when we were forgiven
- Give forgiveness because the offender needs it like we did

### **Experience the benefits of forgiveness**

When you think of the person and/or hurtful event, have those memories become less painful?

What benefits have you experienced through forgiveness?

- Healthier relationships.
- Greater spiritual and psychological well-being.
- Less anxiety, stress and hostility.
- Fruits of the Spirit
- Lower blood pressure.
- Fewer symptoms of depression.
- Stronger immune system.
- Better sleep.
- Improved heart health.
- Higher self-esteem.
- More altruistic tendencies.
- Forgiveness "muscle"

#### **Other benefits:**

## **Experiential Forgiveness Exercise**

(Based on Robert Enright's Phases of Forgiveness)

### **Uncovering phase**

Identify the work that needs to be done

### **Decision Phase**

Decide to commit to the forgiveness today, tomorrow and everyday. Eventually the decision becomes a part of who you are.

### **Work Phase**

Empathy is at the heart of the work phase.

### **Deepening Phase**

Bearing the pain and suffering instead of passing it on. I become a person who can love in my pain and love those that do not deserve it.

### **Giving Phase**

Giving the gift of forgiveness to the person whose act hurt you.

### **What did you get out of this session? (1 minute each)**

### **Homework**

- Think about how you will bear the pain of the injustice/offense you have chosen.
  
- Start giving the gift of forgiveness to the person whose act hurt you.

# Forgiveness Discussion Session 6

## Reconciliation – Discussion Session

### 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

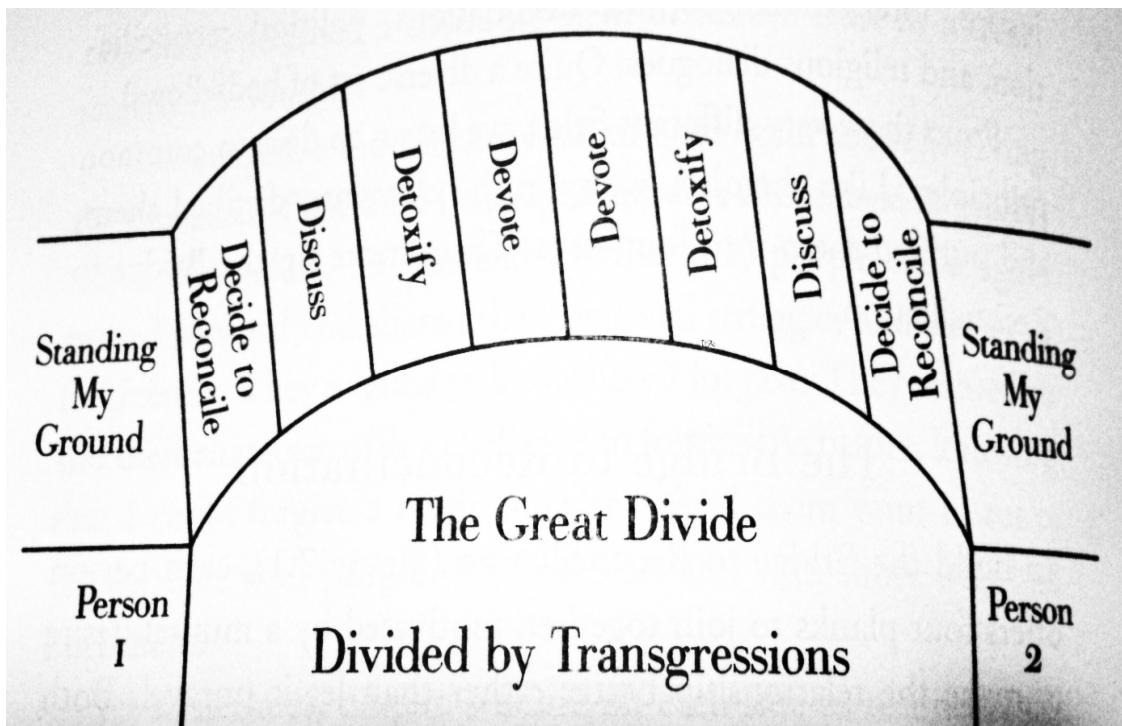
14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 18 **All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

### Does Forgiveness Lead to Reconciliation?

Maybe...or...Maybe Not. Reconciliation requires the equal involvement of all persons involved. True reconciliation requires that all involved are able to have a similar understanding of the offense and the boundaries of responsibility. All involved make the decision to build a new relationship with one another. The emotional pain involved has been resolved by each party and all relate in the present. Forgiveness may be realized by one or more persons;

Reconciliation requires all to be mutually and reciprocally involved.





# 4 Steps to Reconciliation

## 1. Decide to Reconcile

Why you might not want to

- “it’s finished”
- costs outweigh the benefits
- might lead us into compromising our integrity
- unsafe, there has been a repeated trust violation

Why you might want to

- you value the other person and the relationship
- you have a lot invested in the relationship
- you want a better relationship
- you want a positive outcome

### Barriers to deciding to reconcile if you’ve been hurt

Barriers	How to climb the barriers
I don’t want to give up the right to see the other person suffer	Do I <i>really</i> have a right to see him or her suffer? Will it lessen or worsen my own pain?
I don’t want to give up my right to punish the other person	Will I really feel better? Or will that lower me to their standard or below?
I feel morally superior and I don’t want to give that up	Is feeling morally superior helping restore the relationship? Can you relate better as people, that you both make mistakes? Do you really want to continue keeping score?
I feel vulnerable to being hurt or rejected again	Assess the likelihood. DO NOT put yourself in danger. But love doesn’t happen without risk.
I’m afraid I won’t be holding the other person accountable	Did holding the person accountable prevent the previous hurt? Forgiveness this time does not mean that repeated hurts have no consequences
I’m still in too much pain. I need time to heal	We all need time to heal, but we can’t let that stop us from ever trying to reconcile. Set a date that you think will be enough time, then think about it again.

## Barriers to deciding to reconcile if you've hurt someone

Barriers	How to climb the barriers
I don't want to admit that I am capable of doing such things	It's difficult to admit we're human. We all do things we aren't proud of or even very ashamed of. Admitting you're capable of harming others is the first step in harming others less often.
It's embarrassing to admit to the other person that I did something wrong	Can you admit to yourself that you are embarrassed at not facing up to your own acts? You'll be embarrassed either way. If you face up to your acts, though, at least you can look yourself in the mirror
I know I was justified in my acts	This may make you feel self-righteous, but it usually overlooks the truth that there are 2 sides to every story. Remember that we all make self-serving misconceptions
I can't say "I was wrong." It shows I'm weak.	If you're having a hard time saying you were wrong, then then saying you were wrong takes more courage and strength than keeping it to yourself.
What if the other person refuses to forgive me?	That will be difficult. But that reflects badly on the other person, not on you. You cannot control the other person's behavior. If you sincerely sought forgiveness, you did the right thing.
The other person might use my admission of guilt against me later	True. The other person might use it against you later. Usually, a sincere apology and an effort to make things right can head off many angry reprisals, but this is a risk you must judge knowing the other person.
The other person might try to extract some horrible payment for what I've done	While you will want to do whatever is reasonable to make things right, you need not accept being degraded as a person. If the other suggests an atonement that you simply cannot do, you can make a counteroffer.

### How to reconcile?

- Head on?
- Make your desire to reconcile known.
- Indirectly?
- Start moving towards reconciliation and see if the other is open to it.

### When to reconcile?

- Right away?
- When things have "cooled down"?

## 2. Discuss

Seek to understand before being understood.

Work towards building a similar story.

### Possible outcomes

- **Denial**  
No one admits wrong doing
- **Justification**  
The other may feel justified in their actions or even blame you for them.
- **Excuse**  
The other person could reduce the seriousness of the offense
- **Concession/Confession**  
The other could admit wrongdoing, show regret and apologize. They may even offer restitution or compensation for the offense. As may you.

## 3. Detoxify

- Both of you working towards changing the habits that have been discovered in the Discuss phase.
- Both of you assuming good intent; that the other is truly working towards building trust and values the relationship.
- Both of you should commit to overlook small offenses with an attitude of gratefulness that the other wants to repair the relationship.

## 4. Devote

- Devote to the repaired relationship.
- It may not be a close relationship, but work towards positive interactions.
- It takes 15 positive interactions for every one negative interaction to continue to rebuild trust.

### **Mpho Tutu's Prayer**

"I want to be willing to forgive  
But I dare not ask for the will to forgive  
In case you give it to me  
And I am not yet ready  
I am not yet ready for my heart to soften  
I am not yet ready to be vulnerable again  
Not yet ready to see that there is humanity in my tormentor's eyes  
Or that the one who hurt me may also have cried  
I am at the prayer before the prayer of forgiveness  
I am not yet ready for the journey  
I am not yet interested in the path  
Grant me the will to want to forgive  
Grant it to me not yet but soon

Can I even form the words  
Forgive me?  
Dare I even look?  
Do I dare to see the hurt I have caused?  
I can glimpse all the shattered pieces of that fragile thing  
That soul trying to rise on the broken wings of hope  
But only out of the corner of my eye  
I am afraid of it  
And if I am afraid to see  
How can I not be afraid to say  
Forgive me?

Is there a place where we can meet?  
You and me  
The place in the middle  
The no man's land  
Where we straddle the lines  
Where you are right  
And I am right too  
Can we meet there?  
And both of us are wrong and wronged  
And look for the place where the path begins  
The path that ends when we forgive"

# Accepting God's Forgiveness - Discussion Session 7

Everett Worthington, James J. Messina, Dan Green, Hope Street, God's Word

Jesus replied: “**Love the Lord your God** with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘**Love your neighbor as yourself.**’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” *Matthew 22:37-39*

## **The Problem – Why is accepting God's forgiveness necessary?**

### **Self-contempt/Self-hate**

- As we experience ruminations, we feel it
- Same as hating another
  - Remove our own humanity
  - We become an object
  - The object is harming me

### **In the absence of “accepting God's forgiveness”, you run the risk of:**

- Unresolved hurt, pain, and suffering from self-destructive behaviors.
- Unresolved guilt and remorse for self-inflicted offenses.
- Chronically seeking revenge and paybacks toward yourself.
- Being caught up in unresolved self-anger, self-hatred and self-blaming.
- Defensive and distant behavior with others.
- Pessimism, negativity, and non-growth-oriented behavior.
- Having a festering wound that never allows the revitalization of self-healing.
- Fear over making new mistakes or of having the old mistakes revealed.
- Being overwhelmed by fear of failure, fear of rejection, fear of non-approval, low self-esteem, and low self-worth.

### **Negative ruminations (to meditate on; ponder.)**

- Replaying over and over what I did
  - I Failed; I am humiliated; I am exposed; What do others think of me
- Takes us out of reality to a place where we are consumed by condemnations
- Judge on my shoulder that reminds me of the things I did, mocking me

### **Rev 12:10**

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say - :“Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.

- Condemnation comes from Satan and is meant to tear you down.
- Condemnation continually points out what a failure you are, and how badly you've messed up. Condemnation is showing you the problem, but avoiding the solution.

## **The Solution**

Condemnation tells you, "You are such a failure! Look at what you did!" while conviction tells you, "Come to me... and I will forgive you!" Conviction is known in the Bible as Godly sorrow. God's Word tells us that Godly sorrow is what leads us to repentance.

### **Romans 2:4**

Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

### **John 12:47**

If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.

### **Romans 8:1-2**

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin

## **What is accepting God's forgiveness?**

### **Belief**

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. - Romans 10:9-10

### **Repentance**

**Acts 3:19** - Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord

**Definition:** Repentance means a sincere turning away, in both the mind and heart, from self to God.

In a biblical context, repentance is recognizing that our sin is offensive to God. Repentance can be shallow, such as the remorse we feel because of fear of punishment (like Cain) or it can be deep, such as realizing how much our sins cost Jesus Christ and how his saving grace washes us clean (like the conversion of Paul).

(Notes)

## **Acceptance**

**Romans 4:4-5** - Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

- Accepting yourself as a human who has faults and makes mistakes.
- Letting go of self-anger for your past failures, errors, and mistakes.
- No longer needing penance, sorrow, and regret over a grievous, self-inflicted, personal offense.
- The act of self-love after you have admitted your failure, mistake, or misdeed.
- The spiritual self-healing of your heart by calming self-rejection, quieting the sense of failure, and lightening the burden of guilt.
- The act of letting go of the need to work so hard to make up for your past offenses.
- Realizing there is nothing we can do before God to make up for our past sins and mistakes.

**If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:8-9**

(Notes)

### **Next week:**

How do we live a life free of guilt and shame; a life of joy and confidence?

### **Homework:**

Study the "Lie" and the "Truth" in the chart below. How would you answer the lies listed?

What other lies do you tell yourself? – List them

What is the truth about your own lies?

What lies can keep us from choosing to accept God's forgiveness? What is the truth?

Lie	Truth
<p>No one deserved the treatment I dished out, and I do not believe that forgiveness is deserved in this situation</p>	<p>Nobody deserves forgiveness....it is a gift.</p>
<p>I hurt myself or others so much; how can I ever expect to be forgiven for that?</p>	<p><b><u>1 John 1:9</u></b> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.</p>
<p>I must be inherently evil, and I am despicable. No forgiveness will ever change that.</p>	<p>We are born into a sinful world and we have that bent, but God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ and His reconciliation redeems us. A relationship with God makes us righteous in His eyes and starts a renewal process. Relationships heal and transform. A relationship with God is the most healing and transformational relationship. There is hope.</p>
<p>It is a sign of weakness or softness to accept God's forgiveness. I must always keep my guard up so as never to repeat my wrongdoings.</p>	<p>Forgiveness is <b>not weakness</b>, it is a position of strength. If we are angry and continue to think about what we've done over and over again, we are continually wounded by ourselves. If we choose to accept the undeserved gift of forgiveness, we are released from the wounding and our hurtful actions no longer have power over us.</p>
<p>Only God can forgive me, though at times I don't believe He can for what I have done.</p>	<p>Very true, only God can forgive sins, but we have the choice to accept the forgiveness <b><u>1 John 1:9</u></b> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from <b>all unrighteousness</b>.</p>
<p>All people who do wrong deserve the worst that life has to dish out.</p>	<p>All have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God...God sends the rain on both the good and the bad...if God doesn't dish out the worst punishment to those that don't meet His righteousness, then we shouldn't either. However, we do face the consequences of our mistakes, hurtful actions and willing disobedience (sin).</p>



<p>I resent myself for hurting myself or others. It is better for me to be hidden behind my wall so I don't hurt anybody again.</p>	<p>Hiding behind a wall of shame will result in unresolved resentment and eventually self-hatred. These feelings will seep out from your wall and hurt those you care about. This “toxic seepage” will cause more harm to those around you than the original offense. Before hiding behind your wall, go to God, repent, ask for forgiveness, accept it and apply it to yourself. Allow God to change you and give you the power to stop harming yourself or others.</p>
<p>If I could treat myself or others that way, then I am undeserving of being forgiven, loved, or cared for.</p>	<p>We have all sinned and fallen short of God’s Glory. The truth is, none of us deserves forgiveness. It is a gift. God is the one who gave the gift of forgiveness to all of humanity (but not everyone reconciles with Him). The act of forgiveness makes the receiver worthy because the one giving it loves you.</p>
<p>What has happened in my life is God's seeking revenge for all the evil I have done in the past.</p>	<p>Sin has natural consequences. Sometimes the natural consequences of sin can seem like punishment, but it is not. Sometimes, God also disciplines us as a good father does his children.</p> <p><b><u>Hebrews 12:7-13</u></b></p> <p><sup>7</sup> Endure hardship as discipline; <b>God is treating you as his children.</b> For what children are not disciplined by their father? <sup>8</sup> If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. <sup>9</sup> Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! <sup>10</sup> They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. <sup>11</sup> No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it</p>
<p>(My Own Lie)</p>	<p>(Truth)</p>
<p>(My Own Lie)</p>	<p>(Truth)</p>

# Accepting God's Forgiveness – Discussion Session 8

## Accepting God's Forgiveness - Steps

### 1. Receive God's Forgiveness

Believe, Repent and Accept (As discussed last week, without these three we cannot receive God's forgiveness)

- a. God forgiving me is legitimate
- b. I am accepting something that is given to me
  - i. I am distributing what has been given to me by God to myself
  - ii. I am taking something real that has been given to me and applying it practically to myself so I will be released

### 2. Repair Relationships

Matthew 5:23,24 - So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

The extent of the apology for a sin should match the extent of the impact of the sin. In other words, we should seek forgiveness from whoever was directly involved in order to ensure healing.

### 3. Rethink Ruminations (to meditate on; ponder)

- a. Unrealistic expectations
- b. Take out the thoughts that keep it alive and present
- c. "don't give the devil a foothold"

### 4. REACH Emotional Acceptance of God's Forgiveness

- a. Recall the hurt (one incident at a time)
  - i. How much energy, creativity, problem-solving capability, and focus on growth is sapped from you whenever you recall this past hurt?
  - ii. What feelings come to mind as you recall this past hurt?
  - iii. How would you describe your role in this past event? In what ways were you the victim, perpetrator, enabler, martyr, bystander, instigator, target, scapegoat, distracter, peacemaker, people pleaser, or rescuer?
  - iv. Why do you feel strongly over what happened and how you treated yourself or others?
  - v. What did this event do to your self-esteem and self-worth?
  - vi. Who was responsible for your reaction to the incident?
  - vii. Who was responsible for your feelings about the incident?

- viii. Who was responsible for your inability to accept God's forgiveness?
- ix. How can you accept God's forgiveness?
- x. How can you put this incident behind you?
- xi. How can you avoid being so hurt when something like this happens again?

b. **Empathize with yourself**

- i. Must humanize yourself
- ii. 5 P's
  - 1. Pressures?
  - 2. Past?
  - 3. Personality?
  - 4. Provocations?
  - 5. Plans (expectations)?
- iii. You are a human being subject to making mistakes and errors
- iv. You are a good person
- v. You did the best you could knowing what you did at the time
- vi. You have compulsive and impulsive habitual ways of acting which you are working to change.
- vii. You do not need to be perfect in order for God accept you.

c. **Receive the Altruistic Gift of God's Forgiveness**

- i. Tell yourself "God forgave me". I am forgiven
- ii. You don't need to be so burdened by the pain and hurt you feel because of this.
- iii. You deserve understanding, compassion, and forgiveness.
- iv. You deserve to come out from behind the wall you have built around yourself as a result of this.

d. **Make a Commitment to accept God's forgiveness.**

e. **Hold onto God's forgiveness**

## 5. Rebuild Self-Acceptance – Because God Accepts You

Do not take on God's role

- a. Ask Yourself - Who am I really?
- b. You are a God's child. He loves you. Love yourself
- c. You may have slip-ups again but as long as you repent and keep on trying that's good enough for God.
- d. You no longer need to condemn yourself for this.
- e. You deserve a better life than you have been giving yourself.

## 6. Resolve to Live Virtuously

**Homework:** Take what I have learned and invest in love and acceptance of God's forgiveness.

(Notes)

### Our Forgiveness Definition

Forgiveness is a moral virtue. It is a habit and thought process that governs our actions. It requires effort and practice. It is a process, freely chosen by you, in which you willingly reduce resentment through some hard work and offer goodness of some kind toward the one who hurt you.

Forgiveness is **not excusing, tolerating or condoning** the hurt done to us. Forgiveness and justice can take place at the same time. It is possible to seek good for the offender and hold them accountable for their actions. Forgiveness is not the removal of consequences.

Forgiveness is **not reconciliation**. Forgiveness is a unilateral action; its one way. It does not require the offender's participation. Reconciliation requires all the people involved in the offense to start the process of trusting each other again. Forgiveness does not mean restoration of close relationships. It is possible to forgive someone for an offense and cease to have a relationship with the offender. Therefore, we can forgive people who are dangerous to be in a relationship with.

Forgiveness is **unconditional**. Since forgiveness is unilateral and does not require any action on the offender's part, we can be released from our painful bitterness, resentment and all-consuming thoughts by releasing the offender through our forgiveness. We do not need to wait for them to apologize.

Forgiveness is **not weakness**, it is a position of strength. If we are angry and continue to think about the offense over and over again, we are continually wounded by the offender and s/he has power over us. If we choose to give up the anger we're entitled to, releasing the offender from resentment and offer the offender the undeserved gift of forgiveness, we are released from the wounding and the offender no longer has power over us.

Forgiveness is **not forgetting**. As we give the undeserved gift of forgiveness to our offender, we start to remember the offense differently. The offense no longer wounds us. We never forget, but the memories no longer damage us.

Forgiveness is **not manipulation**. We do not release the other from our bitterness and resentment in order to have power over people. Forgiveness is a moral virtue, so we do it for the other person's good. If we give the gift of forgiveness solely for the good of the offender, we experience the most benefit. If we forgive so we can be released from negative emotions, that is a great start, but the forgiveness may not last.

Forgiveness can **take time**. It depends on how long the offense has been occurring and how long we have carried the bitterness, resentment and consuming thoughts of unforgiveness.

Forgiveness is a **continual process**. We live in a world where we are all offended, offenders and by standers. The only way to be healthy in this world is to let go of the anger we are entitled to and give the gift of forgiveness for each offense. Forgiveness is not a blanket remedy. It is more like a **precision instrument** that deals with each individual offense at a time.

### Summary of what Forgiveness is

- A moral virtue
- Unilateral
- Continual
- Unconditional
- Undeserved
- A remedy for bitterness and resentment
- Strength
- A process

**Suggestions for further study:**

“The Forgiving Life” - Robert D. Enright

“8 keys to Forgiveness” – Robert Enright

“Moving Forward: - Everett L. Worthington

“The Sunflower” - Simon Wiesenthal

“Forgiving and Reconciling: Bridges to Wholeness and Hope - Everett L. Worthington