

**Experiencing Forgiveness:
Six Practical Sessions for Becoming a More
Forgiving Christian**

Leader's Manual and Guide

**A 6-Hour Intervention to Promote Forgiveness
(which can be expanded to 12 or 18 hours)**

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Leader's Guide

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The Group Leader in Promoting Forgiveness: General Role

To promote forgiveness, you as group leader must understand four things. (1) People who want and need to forgive (and be forgiven); (2) your role—what it is not and what it is—as a group leader; (3) your own personal experience of applying the five steps and struggling with how to respond to transgressions, and (4) your own weaknesses, strengths, and resources.

1. Understand people who want and need to forgive.

People are unique, so generalization misses everyone's thoughts, motives and needs in some ways. Yet these generalizations touch many people in other ways.

People who seek to forgive have been wounded. Some might suffer from those wounds acutely; for others, the suffering is chronic. Some have been hurt deeply once; others are being wounded anew daily or hourly.

Wounds are part of life. Just like dying is part of life. Yet it is anxiety producing to dwell on those certainties so we often create an irrational belief that protects us against facing the negative. We hope that our irrational belief will give us hope. It seems, on the surface, that it should. But to the contrary it undermines hope.

The belief is this: I have a right to experience a life free of pain and suffering and filled with joy. We claim that "right" because (1) We try to live justly, righteously—treating others (most of the time) with respect, (2) We are especially strong, skilled, bright, or good, (3) We are Christians and God loves us and has a plan for our lives. There is a disconnection between these beliefs, which power our daily lives, and any rational analysis of our condition in life.

When we hold these beliefs and live as if they were true, we expect no pain, no suffering, no unfair treatment, and in general a just world, (However our "just world" usually overlooks any of our own hurtful behaviors.), our expectations are thus often violated. We look for someone to blame.

Some people blame themselves. Most blame the perpetrator. Some also blame behind-the-scene people: parents, teachers, former friends or enemies, or even God.

Perpetrators certainly play a role—though they are rarely as close to "evil incarnate" as they seem when they have transgressed. Instead, as a victim, we tend to remember selectively. It's not that we are wrong in our memory as much as that we don't attend to our past. (Our provocation, our response that poured fuel on the fire) or on the mitigating actions of the perpetrator, our hurts, life circumstances, and stimuli to act. God can always be blamed for not keeping us from all harm, yet in Scripture we are continually promised that we *will* experience suffering, tribulation, persecution betrayal, pain, rejection. We are told that he will use all things—good and bad—for his good if we are called according to his purpose. Job shows that we can love God in spite of not receiving his complete protection. We can have favor with God in our suffering. We can find God in our wounds. We can see later the impact of our suffering on building hope in others.

At root, though, our faulty ideas of a "just world" that provides nothing but joy to me as a result of my flawless life must be overthrown and replaced by a picture that I will be wounded (even Jesus was), but in those wounds God can act, if I can but see it, to bring about healing for others and good for myself and others.

2. Understand the role of the facilitator—what you are and are not.

Is not:

- Therapist
- Spiritual director
- Lecturer
- Person who walks people lock-step through a workbook

Is:

- Guide through material
- Facilitator of conversation

- Model of empathy

3. Understand your own personal experience of applying the five steps and struggling with how to respond to transgressions.

Before you begin to lead the group, try to work through the workbook. Ideally, this would involve participating in a group for group leaders at your church, or would involve going through meetings of two or more people with your pastor. By participating in the group, you can see what the experience is like, watch the way that a group leader leads the group and determine what you thought worked well and what did not work so well, and think through the issues and personal experiences you have had.

Importantly, you should identify the major transgressions you have struggled with. Regardless of how you forgave them or dealt with them, you should try to apply the five steps to each. That will let you see where the difficulties arise and will allow you to experience the Lord working through that structure.

One way to prepare, even if there is not a meeting of group leaders or the opportunity to meet with your pastor, is to read *Forgiving and Reconciling: Bridges to Wholeness and Hope* (Worthington, 2003, IVP). By reading the book, you'll find numerous examples of forgiveness and you'll be taken through a teaching on forgiving that uses the model that will be practiced in the group that you will lead.

You should work through the workbook. That will allow you to see what the people in the group will be doing.

4. Understand your own weaknesses, strengths, and resources as they relate to promoting forgiveness.

As you no doubt know, most of us act as if our experience at dealing with transgressions is the way others ought to react. We usually say that each person has a different experience. We usually can affirm intellectually that people forgive by different pathways. The problem comes about in allowing other people actually to "do" forgiveness differently than we do it.

If we struggle with conflict with our marriage partner, we often expect that others will struggle with theirs. (In fact, about a third of the happily married couples have almost zero disagreements, a third have some, and a third have a lot of disagreements.) If we have trouble forgiving our parents, we think that other people probably will have trouble forgiving theirs. If we had traumatic experiences growing up and only began to understand those later in adulthood, we expect that others who report no difficulties in growing up simply have not been able to face those yet. Assuming that others are going to have experiences that are similar to ours is common.

But people really do differ. If we experienced many wounds and often have been hurt, we must realize that many people experience few wounds and are seldom hurt. We must allow people to be different from each other and from us. Our job as a psychoeducational group leader is not to "probe" to uncover significant traumas. Rather, it is to accept people mostly at face value and let God work with them. They might really have few transgressions to deal with.

We each have different skills, experiences, and strengths at leading groups. I have led many groups, and have a recognition by now that I don't lead groups perfectly. For instance, sometimes, I talk too much. (It's one of the occupational hazards of being a university professor.) Sometimes I toss in too many personal anecdotes. (In these types of groups, I have found it best not to share any personal stories unless I'm asked personally to share. My focus is on promoting other people's experience, not helping them learn through my wisdom.) Sometimes, I have too much tolerance for disagreement. (I'm used to people disagreeing. When people disagree with ideas, in a university, we encourage free debate. But in these groups, people can get distracted if they disagree too much or if they get angry and begin to express their anger. While I don't try to stop differences of opinions, we have found that it's best to allow people to express their differences and affirm the people, but to move on with the group as soon as a smooth transition can be arranged.)

Take an inventory about your strengths and experiences, too. If you have experience leading Sunday School, you might be tempted to conduct the classes like you would a Sunday School class—perhaps with too much lecturing. If you have personal experiences with difficult transgressions—such as, say, a painful rejection by one of your children—and another person brings up a similar transgression, you might be tempted to put your counselor hat on or try to fix the problem. Again, be sensitive to your own experiences and the way they make

you think about the groups and the experiences of forgiving.

Some Specific Guidelines for Leading the 6-session Group

(They're not rules—more like guidelines.)

1. Have coffee and soft drinks available if you can. Snacks are always a plus. The group that breaks bread together usually shares together.
2. This is psychoeducation, not group *therapy*. Don't say the word "therapy."
3. Psychoeducation is based on providing "exercises" that allow people to experience forgiveness as they participate in the exercises. Thus, in contrast to the book-oriented group, these are experience-oriented groups. The present manual is designed to inform you of experiences you can use, as group facilitator, to structure people's experiences. The experiences have been ordered to lead the participants through experiencing forgiveness in the group. However, you can omit a few of them without damage to the flow through the group experience. You must judge carefully which experiences you wish to omit if you want to omit them.
4. The leader wants to connect with the group emotionally. Humor helps that. Also sit in the group. Try not to lecture. Talk about "us." Make the connection.
5. At the beginning, when people are introducing themselves, you might consider telling your own story of forgiving. (I actually don't usually do this, but different groups differ.) But be careful to keep the focus on the group members if you share.
6. As people share, the facilitator reflects empathically. There will be times when you whip around the group and get people in the group to contribute what their experiences were during a just-completed exercise. When you do, make a brief reflection of each person's contribution. Importantly, you want to help people know that their experience is important enough to summarize. Keep your summaries short and to the point.
7. As people share, look at them. Be attentive. Help people feel valued.
8. Try to avoid setting things up so people might give wrong answers. For instance, in defining forgiveness, there are two working definitions that we will use. Don't direct the group to come up with the two right answers without giving them any additional guidance. Rather, give the answers out with the list of definitions, and let them check and discuss against their ideas against the two definitions we'll use.
9. Patience and pace. Let people *experience* what you want them to experience. One of the biggest mistakes of the inexperienced group leader is to try to force the participants to have the experience of forgiving. Don't force the experiences. Don't feel that you have to hustle through all of the exercises. Instead, let people experience each exercise. If you need to delete one exercise, that's better than hurrying through to get all of them in. (I have denoted some exercises as "vital" and others as "optional." A few of the exercises are marked additionally as "extremely vital." Do not leave out those exercises. They are the most important exercises of all.)
10. Don't fight the resistance. *Affirm the difficulties people have forgiving*. Don't try to convince a person to forgive when the person is telling you how difficult it is and how much he or she is struggling. Do not get in the position of trying to convince anyone that an exercise works or the method works. Let forgiveness happen in the group; don't try to *make* it happen. If a person expresses difficulty experiencing something, instead of providing other suggestions about how the person could have the experience, merely reflect on the difficulty of forgiving. Forgiveness is indeed something hard to do.
11. Subjectively, these groups ought to feel very *personal*. They should not feel like a "program" that they are being "run through." Strive to be very personal. Let the members interact with each other. Don't be so driven by the material that you prevent people from experiencing forgiveness.
12. Try not to ask questions that make people feel wrong or shamed for "missing" the "right answers." You want people to cooperate with you. People should feel accepted and safe in participating in the group.
13. This program should be presented as "your" (as leader) program, not as "Worthington's" program. It will come across as more personal if you feel identified with the program and the experiences you are trying to facilitate.
14. Don't force it; don't rush; don't be agenda-driven; you don't have to *make* people forgive.
15. Let them experience forgiveness. Let them resist, and affirm how hard forgiveness is.
16. Give clear and thorough instructions. On each exercise, every person should have a task. Tell people clearly what you want them to do. Demonstrate if you must or if you think it will be helpful.
17. Most of the discussion happens in dyads; some happens in the group. Use flip chart or just a pad of paper. Use masking tape to tape sheets around the walls.

18. Crucial time will be after the early sessions. The first aspects of the five-step method deal with hurts. Encourage people to come back. Discuss the commitment to the entire process.
19. Even some of the middle sessions are not hugely healing. Encourage people to come back. Try saying: "I went through this and the power is in building up through all six sessions. Resolution comes at the end. That's where you'll see things happening."
20. Time is more important than doing all of the exercises. If you need or want to, you can omit some exercises. Some exercises are important (Definitions, Recall, Empty Chair, Certificate, Hand was, white bear, 12 Steps). Try to stay with the logical flow. Do not omit the exercises that are marked "Extremely Vital" unless you absolutely MUST.
21. Psychoeducational leadership styles are important, but differ (energy, enthusiasm). *Your style will work for you.* Don't feel like you have to lead a group like your pastor or the person who led the group in which you participated. Use your own style.
22. Lots of exercises pair people up, and then after they discuss with each other, bring their answers and stories back to the group. However, creativity is also involving. Having people draw or make paper sculptures or design symbols will involve people in a different way than does discussion.
23. Transitions between exercises need rehearsal. This is usually something leaders overlook, but moving seamlessly from exercise to exercise, with logical flow, is necessary for a good group.
24. Use post-its for reminders to guide you through each of the exercises. Read the leader's guide for the exercise. Make any note on a post it. Then, use the portion of the book that people will be working on. Attach your post-its to each exercise. That is a much better method than trying to flip back and forth between the participants' section and the leader's section of the book.
25. If someone isn't comfortable doing a particular exercise, then don't force the person to do it.
26. What if a crisis occurs (e.g., someone cries)? Treat it as normal. Have concern but do not panic. Ask if they need a break and ask how you can help. When people deal with past hurts, they sometimes get emotional. That is not a cause for worry.
27. What if a person wants to process "childhood sexual abuse" or some other extremely hurtful experience? Say "That's really important. I know you will benefit by the group. But, as we are learning these skills, you'll probably have more success if you pick a hurt that concerns you but isn't quite so difficult. Later, you can apply this to the abuse [or other very serious problem]."
28. Lead discussions by making sure each person gets "floor time" if the person wants to talk. Encourage each person to talk about the ideas and share their experiences with the group.
29. When off-the-subject questions are asked, simply suggest that you discuss them after the group or at a different time. If someone rambles frequently, privately ask the person to help draw out the more reticent group members. If you have a quiet member, ask, "_____, how would you answer this question?"
30. You don't have to be an experienced Bible teacher to lead one of these psychoeducational groups on forgiveness. First, they use structured exercises that lead people through experiences rather than serve as groups that are centered on the leader knowing how to answer specific questions arising from the group. Second, even if someone does have difficult questions, the beauty of a group is that lots of resources are available for answering questions. If you can't answer, fine. Ask others what they think. You don't want to set up a situation where you have to have all the answers. As leader of a psychoeducational group, you are more of a traffic director, keeping the experience moving along the marked out highways than you are a guide through a thick jungle.
31. Anytime the group has a break that extends to a new day (or new week) be sure to review at the beginning of the session what was done previously.
32. You'll almost certainly get a lot of fun and additional personal understanding out of convening the group. You might just make some life-long friends as well.
33. Have courage. Even if you are a bit concerned about your ability to lead the group, just do it. Use your concern as a stimulus to pray. These groups are most dependent on the members talking to each other—often in dyads—and then sharing their learning with the larger group. Little glitches in the leadership won't make much of a difference.

Overview of the Sessions

Session 1: Forgiving in Christian Context

Exercise	Name	Minimum Time	Maximum Time	Optional or Vital
Leader Introduction	Leader Introduction of the Forgiveness Group	5	5	Vital
1-1	Personal introductions of the group members	10	10	Vital
Pre-group Exercise	Pre-group Exercise Assessments Prior to Beginning the Group	10*	25-30	Vital (but might be done before the group begins)
1-2	Sing "Bind Us Together with Love"	5*	5	Optional
1-3	Scripture Art	15*	20	Optional (excellent for longer groups)
1-4	Sing "His Banner over Me Is Love"	5*	5	Optional
1-5	Experiencing the Scriptures	15	25	Vital
1-6	Two Truths and a Lie	20*	30	Optional
1-7	Discussion of the Three Scriptures	10	15	Extremely Vital
1-8	Discuss Whether Deciding to Forgive and Experiencing Emotional Forgiveness Are Always Closely Linked to Each Other	10*	10	Optional
1-9	Deciding to Try to Forgive	5	5	Vital
1-10	Discuss the implications of completing the following statement	5*	10	Optional
1-11	Sign the Declaration of Intent	5	5	Extremely Vital
1-12	What Did Your Get Out of This Session?	5	10	Vital

*Indicates optional and could be dropped for one-hour sessions

Session 2: What Is Forgiveness?

Exercise	Name	Minimum Time	Maximum Time	Optional or Vital
2-1	What did you get out of Previous Session?	5*	5	Optional
2-2	Why Forgive?	10*	10	Optional
2-3	Identifying the Benefits of Forgiving	10	10	Vital
2-4	Which Two of the Following Is Forgiveness?	20	30	Extremely Vital
2-5	Assessing the Hurts	10	15	Vital
2-6	Nurturing the Hurt: Small Group Discussion	10	20	Vital
2-7	Pain Doesn't Have the Last Word	5*	20	Optional (discussion can be good in longer groups)
2-8	What Did Your Get Out of This Session?	5	10	Vital

*Indicates optional and could be dropped for one-hour sessions

Session 3: How to Recall the Hurt (In Helpful Ways)

Exercise	Name	Minimum Time	Maximum Time	Optional or Vital
3-1	What Did You Get Out of the Previous Session?	5*	5	Optional
3-2	Decisional Forgiveness	5	5	Extremely Vital
3-3	Recall the Hurt through Imagination	10	10	Vital
3-4	Recall the Hurt through Discussing What You Just Imagined	5	15	Vital
3-5	Discussion of Events Objectively	10	10	Vital
3-6	Discerning God's Heart	10	15	Extremely Vital
3-7	Giving the Hurt Away	5	5	Vital
3-8	Reflecting on Recalling Hurts in Light of Understanding God's Heart	5*	5	Optional
3-9	We Do Things for Reasons	5	20	Extremely Vital
3-10	A Thought to Ponder Prior to Next Session	1	1	Vital

3-11	What Did Your Get Out of This Session?	5	10	Vital
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*Indicates optional and could be dropped for one-hour sessions

Session 4: Empathy with the One Who Hurt You: The Hard Part of Experiencing Emotional Forgiveness

Exercise	Name	Minimum Time	Maximum Time	Optional or Vital
4-1	What Did You Get Out of the Previous Session?	5*	5	Optional
4-2	We Do Things for Reasons	5	5	Vital
4-3	Rate Your Positive Feelings Toward the Offender (Paired with 4-13)	3*	3	Optional
4-4	Trying to Understand Why the Person Hurt You	10	10	Extremely Vital
4-5	The Five P's	15*	25	Vital
4-6	Write a Letter from the Offender's Viewpoint	10*	10*	Optional
4-7	A Different Kind of Letter	10*	10*	Optional
4-8	Empty Chair	20	35	Extremely Vital
4-9	Empathizing with the Heart of God	5	10	Extremely Vital
4-10	Sympathizing with the Offender	10*	10	Optional
4-11	Compassion for the Offender	5*	10	Optional
4-12	Reflection on the Passion of Jesus	5*	10	Optional
4-13	Rate Your Positive Feelings Toward the Offender (Paired with 4-13)	3*	3	Optional
4-14	Reflecting on Our Part	5*	10	Optional
4-15	When Did You Do Something Altruistic for Someone Else?	5	5	Vital
4-16	We Are All Capable of Evil	10	15	Extremely Vital
4-17	For Meditation at Home	0	0	Optional
4-18	What Did Your Get Out of This Session?	5	10	Vital

*Indicates optional and could be dropped for one-hour sessions

Session 5: Giving a Humble Gift of Forgiveness: Altruism and Commitment

Exercise	Name	Minimum Time	Maximum Time	Optional or Vital
5-1	What Did You Get Out of the Previous Session?	5*	5	Optional
5-2	When Did You Need Forgiving?	10	20	Vital
5-3	Dyad Partner Interviews You	5*	10	Optional
5-4	Getting in Touch with the Gratitude We Feel for Our Forgiveness	5	10	Extremely Vital
5-5	Reactions to Being Forgiven	5	5	Extremely Vital
5-6	Being Forgiven	10*	10	Optional (powerful in longer groups)
5-7	Expressing Gratitude for Having Been Forgiven	10*	10	Optional (powerful in longer groups)
5-8	The Gift of Forgiving	15*	15	Optional (powerful in longer groups)
5-9	A Crucial Question	5	5	Extremely Vital
5-10	Commit by Telling Others	5	5	Vital
5-11	Completing a Certificate of Emotional Forgiveness	5	5	Extremely Vital
5-12	What if Emotional Forgiveness Is Not Complete?	10*	10	Optional
5-13	Hand Washing	5	10	Extremely Vital
5-14	Barriers to Complete Emotional Forgiveness	5*	10	Optional
5-15	A Hypothetical Letter Expressing Forgiveness	10	15	Vital
5-16	More Forgiveness	5	5	Vital
5-17	Writing an Actual Letter	15	25	Extremely Vital
5-18	What Did Your Get Out of This Session?	5	10	Vital

*Indicates optional and could be dropped for one-hour sessions

Session 6: Holding on to Forgiveness and Becoming a More Forgiving Christian

Exercise	Name	Minimum Time	Maximum Time	Optional or Vital
6-1	What Did You Get Out of the Previous Session?	5*	5	Optional
6-2	Review of Major Concepts (5 minutes)	5	5	Extremely Vital
6-3	Smile	10*	10	Optional
6-4	Things That Might Make You Doubt Whether You Really Emotionally Forgave	5*	10	Optional
6-5	Seeing the Person Again	10*	10	Optional
6-6	Prayer for Your Offender	10	15	Vital
6-7	Hold on to Forgiveness When You Are in the Midst of a "Reminder" Experience	5	10	Vital
6-8	Facilitator Tells Important Example (5 minutes)	5	5	Extremely Vital
6-9	Control Rumination or Worry	5*	5	Vital
6-10	Summary of Ways to Hold On to Forgiveness	5*	5	Optional
6-11	Prayer of St. Francis	10*	10	Optional
6-12	Helping You Remember	20*	30	Optional
6-13	Dedicate Yourself to Being a More Forgiving Christian: 12 Steps	24	36	Extremely Vital
6-14	Learn the Lessons of a Pencil	5*	5	Optional
6-15	Mirror	5	5	Vital
6-16	What Did Your Get Out of This Session? (5 minutes/10 minutes)	5*	10	Vital
6-17	Processing the Whole Group Experience	10	30	Extremely Vital

*Indicates optional and could be dropped for one-hour sessions

Conducting the Sessions: Session 1

Introductions Welcome

Here is a sample text that you might use to introduce yourself and the group.

I would like to thank you all for coming, and welcome you to this group intervention to help you become a more forgiving Christian.

As you know, you have already identified some hurt in your life that you have tried to forgive and have had difficulty forgiving. That is the hurt you'll work with throughout the group. By focusing on that hurt, you practice a method of forgiving hurts. You can only learn to forgive using particular times in your life when you have been hurt—even if you believe you have already forgiven that hurt. By practicing the skills, you learn to forgive faster and more thoroughly. You can forgive a person for hurting you several times by applying the method to each of the most memorable hurts. Finally, you can forgive the person. Then, you might be able to forgive another person. And another. This is the way we become a more forgiving person.

In this method, we try to invite God the Father, the Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit to guide and change us to make us more forgiving people, and we seek to cooperate with the Triune God in that work.

We will meet in six two-hour meetings [use the distribution your set of meetings will occur in] over the next weeks [days]. Our normal meeting day will be _____.

Before we start, there are some ground rules that we need to agree upon.

- First, if you commit to the program, it is critical that you attend all sessions. Because we are learning a program in a brief period of time, missing any exercises or components will affect your ability to

succeed in becoming a more forgiving person. So, please let me know now if you see any potential problems attending any of the sessions.

- Also we are going to share about events in our lives where one person has been hurt by another. You might know some of the people who are talked about because the person attends the congregation or is familiar to you in other ways. We need to agree that these meetings are 100 percent confidential. That is, you must not use this information outside of the group. You must also agree not to share the information with anyone not in the group. This includes your spouse or other close friend, confidant or family member. Can you agree to this?

Exercise 1 **Introducing Ourselves**

Set up the first exercise. Begin by saying that it is important, just to get everyone into the flow of the group, to have an icebreaker. So, here is what you propose.

Introductions of members: Introduce the self to the group, tell your favorite dessert, hardest thing you have ever tried to forgive, what you hope to get out of the group.

Summary: At the end of the introductions, try to make some summary comments that summarize the nature of the transgressions (i.e. relationship betrayals, others who were hurt that you loved) the things people want to get out of the group (i.e., to be able to forgive at a deeper level, get over some of the pain of the transgression, be able to feel that I can be more self-sufficient).

Share your own hardest-to-forgive event (optional), which could help people identify with you.

Pre-group Exercise **Assessments Prior to Beginning the Group (25-30 minutes)**

Purpose of the assessments. People are going to work with one transgression throughout the group. It is important that the transgression be clearly in their minds. This assessment exercise is to help them remember the transgression clearly. Also, it will help them assess their changes when they get to the final week of the group experience.

Your choices about inclusion. Ideally, these assessments were completed prior to the beginning of the group. However, if these were not completed, time can be provided in the group at this point. (If your group sessions are 1 ½ or 2 hours, this is recommended.)

Alternatively, if your group sessions are only an hour long, the group members can complete the first three questions now (which describes a particular transgression that will be the focus of the group work; about 5-10 minutes) and then complete the remainder of the assessments at home prior to the next group meeting (20-25 minutes).

Exercise 1-2* **Sing *Bind Us Together with Love* (5 minutes)**

This exercise can be combined with Exercise 1-3 and 1-4 for three unified exercises.

Purpose. Begin with fun and activity.

Choice about inclusion. This activity (and 1-4 and 1-5) gets people involved and in a playful mood. This is a positive beginning, showing that not everything about this class will be serious.

The leader introduces “Bind Us Together with Love”. This is in 3/4 time (each phrase is 6 counts). To add an ice-breaker quality to this, the leader tells the members the words (which of course are extremely simple):

Bind us together, Lord
Bind us together, Lord
Bind us together with love.

Bind us together, Lord
Bind us together, Lord
Bind us together with love.

Then, the leader adds six hand motions. Members hold out their left hand to side, palm up. On count 1 (Bind), each person slaps palm of own right hand on person to right's upturned left. On count 2 (us), slap own right thigh. On count 3 (still "us"), slap own left thigh. On count 4 (to-gether-), raise right hand above own left hand; on counts 5 (--ther) and 6 (Lord), clap twice.

Exercise 1-3*

Scripture Art (15-20 minutes)

(This can be done immediately after 1-2 and before 1-4 for three related exercises.)

Each person takes a piece of typing paper. Draw a horizontal line half way down the paper. In the top half, draw a vertical line dividing the top half in a left and right half.

Leader reads Matt 6:14-15. Have members draw a picture or symbol of what the passage meant to them in upper left panel. After complete, leader has members explain what they drew.

Leader reads Phil 4:8-9, (section "love binds together"). Again members draw and explain in upper right panel. (Note: This connects the exercise with the ice-breaker).

Leader directs people to draw in the bottom half a picture, some illustration showing what they would like to see as their desired outcome of the group, knowing that forgiveness is possible and that God binds us together with love. Afterward, each member explains his or her drawing.

Exercise 1-4*

Sing "His Banner Over Me Is Love" (5 minutes)

The group can sing, "Jesus is the Vine and We Are the Branches/ His Banner over Me to Love."

Note: These three exercises combine ice-breaking and art with a unified theme.

Exercise 1-5*

"Two Truths and a Lie" (20 minutes)

Each person writes two truths about themselves and one lie. The person next to the person reads the three statements. The group must arrive at a consensus on which is the lie.

Great exercise for fun and for introducing each member, but it takes a long time.

Exercise 1-6

Experiencing the Scriptures (15 minutes/25 minutes)

Transition. You can affirm the importance of learning what Scripture says about forgiveness. Then say that because that is important, you will try to help people experience Scriptural teaching on forgiveness in several ways. The first way is based loosely on a method called *lectio divina*, which asks people to let Scripture speak to them. You will therefore read three passages of Scripture one at a time. You will read the first and ask each person to say one word that they would like to respond to the Scripture with. Then you will read the passage a second time. Each person can respond with a phrase that captures the person's feelings about the passage. Encourage people to experience the Scripture visually as you read it.

Repeat by reading each of the passages two times. This takes a while, but is a powerful way of experiencing the Scripture.

Exercise 1-7

Discussion of the Three Scriptures (10 minutes/15 minutes)

Transition. Say that *lectio divina* is one way to experience the Scriptures. Another is to try to discern the meaning of the Scriptures and what they teach. To do that, have people break into groups of 3 or 2 people and discuss the meaning of these three verses. Each group should try to answer the three questions posed in the Manual.

Drawing out discussion. Ask for some of the conclusions of each group. They might observe things like the following:

- Forgiveness is hard.
- We need to forgive, if we want God to forgive us.
- Forgiveness involves making a decision and standing by it. *That*, God requires. But forgiveness also is experiencing freedom. *That*, God desires.
- Divine forgiveness is different from interpersonal forgiveness in that God knows people's motives and their hearts but people don't.

Reinforce the points that people make and validate the group on their discussions.

Exercise 1-8*

Discuss Whether Deciding to Forgive and Experiencing Emotional Forgiveness Are Always Closely Linked to Each Other (10 minutes)

Set up for the exercise. Ask people to read the passage in their manual. The passage makes a distinction between making a decision to forgive those who harm us and experiencing emotional forgiveness. Ask people to see whether they can see the differences from the Scriptures they just reacted to and discussed. If they have a difficult time seeing the distinction, you can direct their attention to Appendix A, in which the verses on forgiveness are arrayed under the two types of forgiveness.

Things to reinforce in the discussion. Importantly, if someone brings it out, reinforce the idea that emotional forgiveness might take longer than deciding to forgive. Also look for an opportunity to reinforce the idea that a person might sincerely decide to forgive and might hold perfectly to his or her resolve not to harm the offender, yet might not fully experience emotional forgiveness.

Enrichment for the Leader

The Scriptures tell a rich story about forgiveness. Just for your information and background, you should know that Matthew seems to have been concerned with a different problem than Luke. Matthew was writing mostly to Jewish Christians and seemed more concerned with forgiveness of sins—violations of law and interpersonal transgressions within the community. His emphasis, then, was decisional forgiveness. Because he was most concerned with helping people restore fellowship (with God and each other) when they sinned, he focused on more of the issues of relationship and granting forgiveness. Luke's major contribution to the understanding of forgiveness is more aimed at forgiveness of sin. He was more concerned with overall heart change.

In addition, you might think about how forgiveness can operate differently when a stranger transgresses against us and when we are in an ongoing relationship with someone. With a stranger, we probably do not have a relationship with the individual and will likely not have a relationship in the future. For example, I might never know the person consumed by road rage who runs me off the road. I mostly would decide to forgive him or her and then work to experience emotional forgiveness.

For the family member or employer, however, things are quite different. We have a history of interactions, and I interpret the person's acts today in light of the person's historic acts toward me. If the person offended me regularly for years, I might legitimately interpret even a slight twitch of his face as a judgmental condemnation of me. On the other hand, if we have had a peaceful loving relationship for years, even an angry outburst might be ignored. I also expect to have a future with the person. What I do today will affect our relationship tomorrow. What he or she does today likewise affects tomorrow. Because we will likely be in relationship in the future, apologies, making restitution, expressing sincere contrition, seeking forgiveness, and accepting forgiveness all are important. Finally, in an ongoing relationship, the likelihood is that there are no transgressions that are totally one-sided. If the person offends me, I probably to some degree contributed to that transgression through a previous provocation, slight, or devaluing. Cause and effect are harder to disentangle.

These are just some thoughts for you, as leader, that the group participants will not likely be reading. They can enrich conversations that might occur within or outside of the group.

Exercise 1-9

Deciding to Try to Forgive (5 minutes)

Set up for the exercise. This requires that you think about the event you identified during the Pre-group Assessments (or earlier in the present session). Referring to that particular transgression, can you make a decision right now that you are going to *try to forgive* and to *try to experience the freedom of emotionally forgiving* over the next five sessions?

Pitfalls. Importantly, this and the subsequent exercises refers to the transgression that was identified as the target transgression. Be sure that people realize this.

Your goal. In this exercise, we hope to motivate people to seek both to grant decisional forgiveness and experience emotional forgiveness through their experiences in the group. This is a verbal commitment to try.

Exercise 1-10*

Discuss the Implications of Completing the Following Statement (5 minutes/10 minutes)

Your goal. This is aimed at discussing the meaning of their commitment to try to forgive. It does not mean they are committing to actually forgive—just to try. It does mean that they are committing, by signing the statement in the following exercise, to give a good effort.

Exercise 1-11

Sign the Declaration of Intent (5 minutes)

Your goal. Ask each person who is willing to sign the statement to try and have another person sign as an accountability partner.

Pitfall. If a person does not want to sign, don't exert pressure.

Exercise 1-12

What Did Your Get Out of This Session? (5 minutes/10 minutes)

Why we do this at the end of each session. Each member of the group should state one (or more) thing that the member got out of the session. This will be the way we close each group. Ending the group by asking each person to state one bit of positive learning helps each person “own” the group experience. (Because this occurs at the end of each group, I won't discuss the exercise again.)

Conducting the Sessions: Session 2

Leader's Introduction to Session 2

Last session, we tried to see the Biblical context of forgiveness. Today, we begin our work at discovering how to forgive—by making a decision to forgive and by experiencing emotional forgiveness. But before we do that, we need to define what we mean by forgiveness. Forgiveness is not a simple concept. In the Scriptures, many different Greek and Hebrew words were used to convey the concept of forgiveness. It isn't surprising that people might mean different things when they say “forgive” today. It is important, though, that we come to agree about how we will treat forgiveness for the purpose of the group. That is what we are aiming at today.

Exercise 2-1*

What Did You Get Out of the Previous Session? (5 minutes)

Why we do this at the beginning of each session. Each member of the group should state one (or more) thing that the member got out of the previous session. This serves as a review that gets the person back into thinking about the continuity of the group. This exercise is recommended but is optional (depending on time). (Because it is repeated at the beginning of each session, I won't discuss it again.)

Exercise 2-2*

Why Forgive? (10 minutes)

Instructions.

- Have each person think of a time when he or she successfully forgave someone.
- Divide into groups of two or no more than three.
- Describe the time when they forgave.
- What were the benefits?
- Have each dyad share one benefit of forgiving with the group.

Why do we do this? It is often easier to generate a list of reasons if people work from a particular event than if they try to come up with a general list.

Exercise 2-3

Identifying the Benefits of Forgiving (10 minutes)

Instructions.

- Divide into four smaller groups of perhaps two or three people each. (If the group is very small, a person alone can act as a group.)
- Assign each of the four groups a task of listing as many benefits of forgiving as they can in five minutes. Each group considers a separate area: Benefits to the physical health, mental health, relationship, spiritual life. Allow about 5 minutes of discussion and listing of benefits. Direct attention to the section of the manual entitled, "A few benefits to get you started."
- Have each group share with the bigger group, and invite other group members to suggest additional benefits. As members share, list each benefit on newsprint.
- Note aloud that the group thought of many benefits not listed on the handout. You might point out some of the advantages that the group might not have mentioned in their discussion.

A Word-Picture of Forgiveness That the Leader Can Use

Give this rationale. It's good to have a positive picture of forgiveness and of a forgiving character before we start. One of the great stories of forgiveness was the novel, *Les Misérables*, by Victor Hugo (which was made into a great musical, *Les Mis*).

Tell the story of Les Misérables (Jean Valjean)—or Ask Someone who Has Read the Book, Seen a Movie, or Seen the Play to Summarize.

- Jean Valjean had a kind personality.
- Life conspired to turn him bitter and hateful.
- He had a transformative experience that showed him the beauty of one who forgives and had him emotionally experience the joy of being forgiven.
- Life did not stop pounding on him because his personality had been transformed.
 - Javert's hounding
 - Javert's trap
 - Forced to leave behind everything
 - Forced to endanger his life at the barricade
 - Forced to exact justice on Javert at the barricade
- Each transgression tested his character.
- By making loving and forgiving decisions at every point, Jean Valjean became clothed in a white robe.

Transition to Exercise 2-4.

Jean Valjean has a forgiving personality. His whole life was characterized by forgiveness. But what is forgiveness. We have used the term loosely up to now. Now, let's try to define forgiveness. What we want to do is arrive at a *working definition*. There are lots of definitions of forgiveness, and there are lots of things that people confuse with forgiveness. Those confusions often act as roadblocks to our forgiving. So, in groups of no more than three, let's look at Exercise 2-4.

Exercise 2-4**Which Two of the Following Is Forgiveness? (20 minutes/30 minutes)**

Why do this exercise? This is one of the most crucial exercises within the method even though it seems like a simple task. First, we know it is important because we have analyzed our own and others' interventions to promote forgiving and we have found that getting people to agree on a common working definition of what forgiveness is and is not predicts successful forgiving better than almost any other component. Second, we also know that by considering each one of the possibilities and seeing that each is not a form of forgiving can short-circuit misunderstandings (like "a woman should go back and reconcile with a person who is physically abusing her," which confuses forgiving and reconciling). Finally, we know that this reinforces the idea that decisional forgiveness is different from emotionally experiencing forgiveness.

Instructions.

- Tell people how important it is to agree on working definitions of forgiveness.
- Describe the task as choosing the two best definitions of forgiveness from the list.
- Tell people that it is equally important to figure out why each act on the list is not forgiveness and what it is.
- Therefore, each group should consider each of the items on the list.
- When they have decided what each item represents, they should check the answers.

Leader's Introduction to Dealing with "Recall the Hurts"

Group leader's "mini-lecture." Why Do We Hurt? (This is a short mini-talk by you as facilitator. It should last no more than two or three minutes.)

A. Basic Psychological Needs:

We all have two basic needs: (1) love and (2) significance. The ways we invest our time (in relationships and activities) are valuable because they meet these two basic needs.

1. We long for relationships, which make us feel loved and accepted.
2. We long for meaningful activities, which tell us that our actions make a difference and that we are worth something.

(Write on the board or a newsprint the words "Love" and "Significance.") When we experience a significant interpersonal hurt, we encounter several assaults to our sense of love and significance. These are captured in what we call the law of relationships.

B. Law of Relationships:

Just as there are certain laws of physics, such as the law of gravity and laws of motion and thermodynamics, and we can think that in the world of relationships certain laws are at work: certain ways that we interact with others produce effects. When someone acts abusively toward us, we experience the person as in debt to us because he or she has broken a law of relationships. **Hurtful or offending actions by others take away from our basic needs for security and significance.** The effects of their assaults on our security and significance can include

- negative emotions,
- a desire for retaliation or revenge, and
- a sense that our offenders are indebted to us for what they did.

Have each person individually complete the checklist for Exercise 2-5, Assessing the Hurts.

Exercise 2-5**Assessing the Hurts (10 minutes/15 minutes)**

Why do this exercise? It is important to realize that hurts and offenses come in a variety of types. All of them, however, either hurt us and make us feel angry and anxious, or offend us and make us feel angry. This exercise surveys the types of hurts by having each person discuss the hurt he or she experienced as the target transgression.

Instructions. This exercise is divided into two major parts. In part one, people will reflect on the type of hurt or offense experienced. In part two, people will think about the feelings they felt.

Part 1. Think about the time that someone hurt you. Try to get back into how you felt around that period of your life, so you can remember vividly how you reacted to the hurt. Talk with your dyadic partner about the qualities of the hurt? Which of these kinds of hurt did you feel from the person who hurt you?

Part 2. People are asked to think about, then write the types of feelings they felt. Whip around the group and solicit names for the feelings.

Conduct the Exercise and Then Make Transition to Exercise 2-6. Solicit from members what hurts they experienced. Summarize. After summarizing, you'll transition to the next exercise by saying something like:

Although your needs for security and significance have been threatened by the serious emotional hurts you have received, some of the effects that the hurts have had on your thought life and emotional life may "nurture the hurt," or cause it to recycle and re-inflict damage. This may be a way your memory works in order to prevent yourself from future hurt.

Exercise 2-6 Nurturing the Hurt: Small Group Discussion (10 minutes/20 minutes)

Why complete the exercise? It isn't hurts or offenses per se that lead to unforgiveness. It is ruminating about the hurts and offenses. This exercise shows people that they keep themselves feeling stirred up by ruminating.

Instructions. People look at the three stimulus questions and answer them in small-group discussions. The large group convenes and each small group shares its responses on each of the three questions.

Group leader's actions. Bring the big group back together. Ask for answers to question 1 and get several. Reflect back those to the group. Below are some ways that others have brought up in the experience of our past groups. In your brief summary, you might mention some if they weren't mentioned by group members.

Possible ways of nurturing the hurt: (a) reliving the injury; (b) rehearsing the offense; (c) comparing yourself to your offender; (d) rehearsing schemes of revenge; (e) thoughts of life being unfair; (f) telling numerous people about the rotten character of the offender.

Group Leader Poses Question

Ask, If you could really be in tune with God's heart, what do you think would be his desire for you? Hopefully, the group will bring out these two points:

God would not want us to nurture the hurt. It brings us pain, sadness, anger, resentment, and can even lead to bitterness and hostility.

Instead, **God would want us to grant forgiveness** (recall that was "decisional forgiveness" in our two definitions) and then **seek a lasting peace through experiencing emotional forgiveness** (our second definition). [This is a good little discussion to end the session. Move directly to announcing that we need to end the session, and say that you would like people to reflect back on what they got out of the session.]

Exercise 2-7* Pain Doesn't Have the Last Word (5 minutes/20 minutes)

The leader presents a sketch on a piece of paper of a sunrise over a mountain, with two rolling hills in the foreground. The leader says, "This is the promise of our life before the pain our offender inflicted on us."

The leader says that the offense marks an X over the beauty of the promise. That is the pain that tries to wipe out the promise. (Draws an X through the painting.)

Then the leader says, "God redeems our life through Jesus. Pain does not have the last word. This attempt to cross out our promise becomes the cross, which redeems our life and gives our spirit wings." (Leader

draws two smaller crosses, birds flying, and clouds being blown away).

After the leader talks about the hurt and illustrates it, the group can discuss whether there are times in their lives when pain happened but didn't have the last word. (This can be powerful in longer groups.)

Close by singing "Something Beautiful", or listening to an audiotape/CD of it

Exercise 2-8
What Did Your Get Out of This Session? (5 minutes/10 minutes)

Enrichment for the Leader

In the next session, we will start people working toward forgiveness. We will take two approaches. On one hand, we will try to help people rise above their experience of negative emotions and see things more objectively—more from a higher perspective. On the other hand, we will ask people to begin to empathize and identify with the person who hurt them. God sees things from above; God also became a man (in Jesus) and identified with humans. We are following a godly prescription in our approach to forgiving. Also, psychologist Karen Horney said that people either move against others, move away from them, or move toward them. Moving against others is responding to hurts in revenge. Moving away from them is seeking to take a higher ground and get a little detachment from our involvement in emotions. Moving toward people is empathizing, sympathizing, feeling compassion for, and loving others.

Conducting the Sessions: Session 3

Leader's Introduction to Session 3

So far, in Session 1, we looked at the way Scriptures portray forgiveness. In the second session, we looked at two ways to define forgiveness (decisional forgiveness and emotional forgiveness). We began to talk about the hurts we identified as our target transgressions at the end of last session. In this session, we explore those hurts further and get into looking at them differently than we might have in the past.

Exercise 3-1*
What Did You Get Out of the Previous Session? (5 minutes)

Exercise 3-2
Decisional Forgiveness (5 minutes)

Why do the exercise? This exercise, discussing with dyadic partners whether a decision to forgive has been made and what the implications of that decision are, is aimed at strengthening the decision to forgive.

Exercise 3-3
Recall the Hurt through Imagination (10 minutes)

Why do the exercise? By having people engage in a relaxation exercise, this breaks up the usual form of the group and keeps things fresh and new. It also helps people think of the transgression in a new way rather than in the same way they usually thought of it.

Instructions. Instruct people to get *comfortable and relax*. You can narrate a relaxing scene to help people feel calm. Sometimes scenes at the beach or in a comforting cabin in the woods or at a waterfall can stimulate mental relaxation. Have people concentrate on breathing deeply and slowly. Have them relax their muscles systematically—especially the head, neck and face.

Then have people *picture the person who hurt them and recall the experiences before, during, and after the hurtful incident*. Have them remember and reenact in their minds the conversations and other experiences of events.

Exercise 3-4**Recall the Hurt through Discussing What You Just Imagined (5 minutes/15 minutes)**

Why do the exercise? Discussing the recalled events in dyads helps people tell their story in a vivid and emotionally engaging way. People often get angry as they recall the events. Don't try to stifle the emotions or control the angry expression unless someone actually seems to be losing control. If that were to happen, which it almost never does, have the person calm down and breathe slowly. If you have the person breathe out completely, it insures that they inhale deeply to refill their lungs.

Basically, if you try to get people to recall hurts without feeling and expressing emotions, they will resist you. They will express their anger, resentment, and hurt. By allowing them to tell their story—complete with emotional expression—you will allow them to feel heard and validated. Because they are telling their story to another person who has also been hurt, the people can support each other.

People within a group, when asked to recount hurts, often elaborate more and more with each successive person. As a leader, you walk a delicate line between cutting people off or making a person who just gave an elaborate description feel “scolded” and keeping the group on track and moving at a good pace. If forced to choose, I'd say that the most important thing is to keep a good feeling in the group rather than make people think you are running a “program” on them that is mechanical and driven by deadlines. So, it's tough. You do have practical deadlines in that people commit to a psychoeducational group for limited period. But it can't feel that way to participants or they won't receive maximum benefit and they will resist you.

Enrichment for the Leader

The severity and the nature of hurts seem to make a big difference in how people deal with them. Relatively minor hurts provoke a sense of injustice, but we usually take care of that sense of injustice by trying to restore justice or by simply putting aside our feelings and moving on with life. We rarely ruminate about the minor hurts, and if we do, the rumination seems to occur only when we indulge it. It doesn't intrusively pop into our minds without our consent. We thus rarely develop much unforgiveness over small hurts and offenses.

With big hurts, or with injustices that attack our self-image or self-esteem, we seem more inclined to worry about. Rumination is often intrusive and we experience deeper mood shifts. We get depressed or very angry or anxious. Unforgiveness is common in the big hurts. This is often true at an emotional level even if we have granted decisional forgiveness and sincerely stick to our intention not to avenge ourselves or let our malice and unforgiveness show.

For the events people in the group have been coached to select—those of moderate severity—people might or might not have developed measurable unforgiveness. After recalling the hurts imaginally, as they have just done, and after talking about the hurts, people should know more about how deep the wounds were and about how hard the battle for emotional forgiveness is likely to be.

Exercise 3-5**Discussion of Events Objectively (10 minutes)**

Give this rationale. We aren't going to get anywhere if we keep telling the story repeatedly. We need another, more objective story. Someone once defined *insanity* as doing the same thing again and again and expecting a different result. We want to remember the hurt once again, but this time remember it in a way that is likely to help us forgive.

Instructions.

- Visualize as a 3rd party observer. Get more distance on the story. Share the story again but this time without emphasizing the perpetrator's badness or your own victimization or the consequences this has had.
- Come back in-group and process the differences in the two.

Enrichment for the Leader

Empathy is experienced at one of three levels. Sometimes we can only see another person's perspective. At other

times, we go deeper, seeing his or her perspective and feeling the things we imagine that he or she felt. At other times, we can identify closely with the person, almost getting into the emotional and personal experience with the other person.

We hope that people will be empathic with the one who harmed them, but we also want to encourage people to empathize with God. We should try to live so that we have a heart-to-heart intimate identificational knowledge of God. When, in the group, you encourage the person to discern God's heart, this is not an attempt to make the person feel guilty or to manipulate the person into doing something you want them to do. You are encouraging the person to seek a close intimacy with God—one that is so close that the person's knows what the Lord wants and can thus respond out of love and gratitude to him.

Exercise 3-6 Discerning God's Heart (10 minutes/15 minutes)

Why do this exercise? Depending on the time, you can set this exercise up by discussing Joseph's example. Then, people write brief answers to three questions that ask that they reflect on God's heart and what he wants in regard to the transgression they experienced. This exercise places the transgression in a divine context rather than focusing on the personal responses of vengeance that we are prone to. Here is the way the exercise might be conducted.

How to do the exercise.

1. Ask, where was God when these things were happening to you? Where was Jesus? Where was the Holy Spirit? Let me give you just a minute to think about this. [Let people think in silence for a minute or so.]
 2. Recall Joseph's captivity. Get someone to tell the story. (Quickly)
 3. Ask, where was God during this time in Joseph's life? (Quickly)
 4. Ask, are there are Scriptures that capture this lesson about Joseph's life? (Quickly) [A couple of good ones are Gen 50:11, Rom 8:28]
 5. Look at Exercise 3-6 in the participant's manual. Each person should *write a brief answer* to Question 1. (Have you ever experienced some awful events and later seen God's hand working for good in it?)
 6. Poll the group for a story or two.
 7. In Exercise 3-6, direct the group to *write an answer* to Question 2. (Let's revisit your transgression. Where was God? Can you see God's hand at all? Where would you look for it?)
 8. Have *dyadic partners discuss* this with each other.
 9. In Exercise 10, ask each person to *write an answer* to Question 3 (Who comforts you during your trials? Person? God?) [no discussion]
 10. Ask the group to share *answers aloud (without writing them first)* to Question 4 (Tell the group a lesson that you personally have gotten out of recalling the hurt in light of Scripture and in light of knowing God's heart.)
- [You might summarize the lessons on newsprint or board or just note them to yourself and try to summarize some of the main lessons.]

Exercise 3-7 Giving the Hurt Away (5 minutes)

Leader has the group stand. They hold out their hands (mime holding something in their hands). The leader says, "Imagine you are holding the hurt in your hands. Lift it up to God. Open your hands and let him take it. After you release it, show by rubbing your hands together that you have given your hurt into God's care."

Exercise 3-8* Reflecting on Recalling Hurts in Light of Understanding God's Heart (5 minutes)

Why do this exercise? Once people have reflected on God's heart in their situation, it is important that as many as are agreeable, express what they learned.

Transition to Promoting Empathy for the Person Who Harmed Us

As a group leader, you are going to try to build a sense of empathy by each group member for the person who

inflicted the harm. You want each group member to see that (1) we all do things for reasons and (2) we usually think our reasons are totally justified. This is a very hard thing to do. People usually don't want to see things from the point of view of the person who harmed them. They don't want to empathize with the person. The entire is to get group members to see that they, themselves, do things for what they think are good reasons. Then later, you'll try to get them to see the reasons that the offender had for hurting them.

Exercise 3-9

We Do Things for Reasons (5 minutes/20 minutes)

The instructions are these. Think of a time when **you hurt someone**. What did you feel, think, see, and do *before, during, and after*.

- a. Discuss in dyads
- b. Bring out in group what we did.

Make a list. As people discuss and contribute, list the things done under three columns: before, during, and after.

Draw a conclusion. We have what we think are good reasons for what we did.

The implication: Chances are, the person who hurt you felt he or she was doing right. No one says, "I think I'll offend someone terribly. I think I'll ruin a relationship today."

Exercise 3-10

A Thought to Ponder Prior to Next Session (1 minute)

Direct the attention of group members to the concluding thought. Get someone to read it. Don't discuss it unless there is a lot of time left in the session.

A concluding thought to ponder this week. Someone read the following conclusion aloud:

We all do things for what we believe at the time to be good reasons. (These might not seem like good reasons to the people who might have hurt.) Because we have all had this experience of hurting others even with the best of intentions, we can understand that the person who hurt us (in our target transgression) probably had what he or she believed to be good reasons.

Exercise 3-11

What Did Your Get Out of This Session? (5 minutes/10 minutes)

Conducting the Sessions: Session 4

Leader's Introduction to Session 4

So far, in Session 1, we looked at the way Scriptures portray forgiveness. In the Session 2, we looked at two ways to define forgiveness (decisional forgiveness and emotional forgiveness). We began to talk about the hurts we identified as our target transgressions at the end of last session. In Session 3, we explored those hurts further and got into looking at them differently than we might have in the past. At the end of the session, we examined how we always seem to have good reasons or justifications (or at least excuses) if we hurt or offend someone. In the current session, Session 4, we are going to tackle the hard work of experiencing emotional forgiveness—trying to empathize, sympathize, feel compassion for, or even love the person who harmed us. That is a very hard thing to do, but we will experience peace and emotional forgiveness to the degree that we are successful at doing this.

Importantly, there is enough material in this module for over two hours of groups. If you have extra time, this is one of the three places to add it. The most important is in Session 6.

Exercise 4-1*

What Did You Get Out of the Previous Session? (5 minutes)

Preparatory Note to the Group Leader

You are going to try to build a sense of empathy by each group member for the person who inflicted the harm. You want each group member to see that (1) we all do things for reasons and (2) we usually think our reasons are totally justified.

Exercise 4-2

Remember: We Do Things for Reasons (5 minutes)

Ask someone to read this aloud:

The previous session, you thought of a time when **you hurt someone**. We concluded this: We all do things for what we believe at the time to be good reasons. (These might not seem like good reasons to the people who might have hurt.) Because we have all had this experience of hurting others even with the best of intentions, we can understand that the person who hurt us (in our target transgression) probably had what he or she believed to be good reasons.

You have thought about this since the previous session. Do you still believe this idea has merit? Why?

Exercise 4-3*

Rate Your Positive Feelings toward the Person (3 minutes)

This, if done, should be done twice (the companion is Exercise 4-13). Before and after these exercises to promote positive feelings. Prepare rating scales ahead of time. Have each person rate their feelings. Allow about 2 minutes to talk about it.

Rate the amount of empathy (understanding), sympathy, compassion, and love you have on a scale from 0=None, 1=A Little, 2=Some, 3=Quite a bit, or 4=A lot.

Exercise 4-4

Trying to Understand Why the Person Hurt You (10 minutes)

Transition to Exercise 4-3. In the same way that you have good reasons when you hurt someone, probably the person who hurt you had what seemed to him or her at the time to be good reasons for his or her actions toward you. Can you discuss those possible reasons using Exercise 4-3. Your task, if you can do it, is to try to truly empathize with the person who hurt you.

Empathy = understanding the person's ...

- Orientation to life
- History
- Pressures and life circumstances at time of transgression
- Possible thoughts and feelings before, during, and after the event

(write these on the board)

I realize that I'm asking something enormously difficult. Usually, the last thing we want to do when someone has harmed or offended us is to understand the person. But, if you can put aside your natural desires, and if you can truly try to empathize with the person who hurt you, it will help you replace the negative emotions you feel for the person with more positive other-oriented emotions toward the person. It will help you experience emotional forgiveness.

Do the task. Pertaining to the target transgression:

- a. Talk with your dyad partner about what you think your offender was experiencing.
- b. Ask the dyad partner for other possible experiences the perpetrator might have had.
- c. Switch and the dyad partner talks, followed by your feedback.

Exercise 4-5

The Five P's (15/ 25 minutes)

Talk to the group about the purpose of this exercise. This is an attempt to see what might have been going on in

the life of the person who hurt you. It might make empathy for the person (or sympathy, compassion, of love) more likely.

- Either prepare ahead of time (which is best) or narrate the instructions, have people take a piece of paper, divide the paper into five sections. In the top section, write **Pressures**. In the next, **Past**. Then, successively, **Personality**, **Provocation**, and **Plans** (i.e., person's possible good intentions). Then—under the assumption that most people don't set out to harm others, write your understanding of what might have been going on that led to your being hurt or offended.
- After you have given people the chance to write, direct the people to discuss what they have written with their partner.
- Each person in the group may be asked to share what they got out of the experience.

Exercise 4-6*

Write a Letter from the Offender's Viewpoint (10 minutes)

If you have time for assigning homework, these (4-5 and 4-6) can be assigned for between session tasks. But it can also be done in the session. Say, "What if you were the person who offended you? Suppose you wanted to write a letter telling why he or she harmed you. What would the letter be like? In your dyad, narrate to your partner what you think the letter might say."

Exercise 4-7*

A Different Kind of Letter (10 minutes)

This can also be done at home or in session.

Suppose your offender were to write a different kind of letter to you—one that apologized profusely. Ignoring that you might think that the person might never actually write such a letter, what would it say if he or she did write an apology.

Exercise 4-8

Empty Chair (20 minutes/35 minutes)

Explain the task. Here is another way to really understand what your offender might have been going through that led him or her to hurt you. Pair up in a dyad. Both people will actually do the exercise, but we'll do it one person at a time. While one person is working, the other person is silently and supportively observing. The person NOT working doesn't say anything.

Now the person who is working will be sitting in one chair. We are going to pretend that the person who hurt you is sitting directly across from the one who is working. Actually there will be an empty chair there, and you'll just pretend to talk to the person.

That means, altogether, there will be three chairs involved. The observer sits on one and silently observes. The person who is actively working uses two chairs—one in which he or she is sitting and the other an empty chair.

After you have told the pretend-transgressor in the empty chair how you were hurt, I want you to move to the empty chair and then pretend you were the person who hurt you. Talk from that person's point of view. Tell your side of things—what you saw, heard, thought, felt. Once you have answered from the offender's point of view, then get back in your original chair and pretend you are you again. Keep moving back and forth having a conversation.

After a while, I'll tell you that it is time to switch roles so that the observer can move to the role as the one working with the empty chair. Keep your conversation going until I tell you it's time to switch.

Ask if there are questions.

Show them how this works by talking from your point of view, from the offender's point of view, from your point of view again, and saying that the conversation will continue.

Ask again if there are questions. After you've answered any (if any), then start them on the task.

How to direct the conversations. You probably could have them decide who is A and who is B. Have A work the empty chair first. Set the time limit for the exercise (let's say you want five minutes of conversation from each person). As you get one minute from time limit for A, give a 1-minute warning. At the end of person A's time, say, ok, try to finish up and if you haven't switched, do so in the next minute. Again, give a 1-minute warning for person B.

Process the learning from the exercise. Have the group process the empty chair exercise. Ask, Did you consider person's history? Pressures? Do you understand the person's perspective any better? What are your reactions to having done this?

A Word to the Leader about People's Reactions

It is not uncommon that people react strongly to this. Some cry. Don't be concerned. Don't feel that you must take away the tears or dry them up. Let the conversations happen.

On the other hand, it is also not uncommon at this point to have people complain that they *don't really want* to empathize with the person who hurt them or they *can't* empathize with the person. Do NOT try to convince them about how great this is or how necessary or how much it will help them. Rather, AFFIRM that it indeed is hard to do. AFFIRM that it is about the least desirable thing to think about doing. Instead of arguing with the person, let them know that you thought it was hard when you did it, too. Ask if others are struggling. Affirm how you appreciate their trying to do this and say that most people think this is perhaps the hardest part of trying to achieve lasting forgiveness. Say that this is particularly true if they have to keep interacting with the person and if the person has been hurtful more often than once.

At the end of the exercise, reaffirm that you appreciate their courage in trying this very difficult task.

Exercise 4-9

Empathizing with the Heart of God (5 minutes/10 minutes)

Transition to Exercise 4-5. "You have been empathizing with the person who hurt you. You have been sincerely trying to discern his or her heart. I'd like you to shift gears just a minute and try to discern God's heart. You have tried to think about what God would want of you several times in different contexts. Now, think about what God might want for both your offender and for you now that you have spent some time thinking about what it might have been like for the offender."

Leading the exercise. Tackle the questions one at a time. First, have group members think about, "What does God's heart want for your offender?" Then discuss it. Then repeat with the other question, "What does God's heart want for you?"

Closing the exercise. Paraphrase this rationale to the group members. "Remember, experiencing emotional forgiveness and peace, depends on your being able to replace negative emotions like bitterness, resentment, hostility, hatred, anger, or fear with positive emotions. You've been trying to feel empathy with the person—to understand the person's reasons for doing what he or she did, to feel with the other person, or even to identify to some degree with the person. That might, if you persist in it, help you experience emotional forgiveness and peace. It's probably too early to tell, but you are working toward replacing those negative emotions with more positive ones."

Exercise 4-10*

Sympathizing with the Offender (10 minutes)

Rationale. The group leader can say that sometimes people have a hard time empathizing. Usually, though, they can feel sorry for the person. How did the person get to the place where such a transgression could have been inflicted?

Part 1. To get in touch with any sympathy you can feel toward the offender, answer the following five questions to yourself:

- Are there any reasons to feel sorry for the person who offended you?

- Does he or she need forgiveness?
- From God?
- From you?
- Do you feel any sorrow on behalf of the person?

Part 2. In the large group, discuss anything you feel is relevant with the group.

*If the group is running behind schedule, this exercise can be omitted.

Exercise 4-11*
Compassion for the Offender (5 minutes/10 minutes)

Define Compassion. Compassion is “sympathy with work boots on.” That is, **compassion** is feeling that the person is needy and *wanting* to do something to help.

Ask this of the group: If you felt real compassion for the person who hurt you, what might you do to meet one of the person’s needs?

Conduct a discussion. Give a few seconds for people to think about the question, then ask people to discuss anything relevant with the group.

*If the group is running behind schedule, this exercise can be omitted.

Exercise 4-12*
Reflection on the Passion of Jesus (5 minutes/10 minutes)

Jesus said, “Love your enemies. Do good to those who despitefully use you?”

Imagery (Narrated to group or imagined after you read this passage)

Can you imagine what it must have been like to be arrested on trumped up charges, be beaten, not listened to, humiliated, brought in front of a scornful crowd who yelled for Barabbas instead of him, then walked to a hill and crucified? How might he have loved his enemies? How might he have blessed those who cursed him? What did he think?

Relax. Imagine the scene above. Ask yourself, what Jesus might have been thinking and experiencing.

Reflection on the imagery exercise: If we are *inadequately* to imitate Jesus, then what does this mean for your attitude toward the one who hurt you? Ask people to write a note to themselves in answer to that question.

Group discussion. Does anyone want to share with the group?

*If the group is running behind schedule, this exercise can be omitted.

Exercise 4-13*
Rate Your Positive Feelings toward the Person (3 minutes)

This, if done, should be done twice—and this is the companion exercise to 4-2. Before and after these exercises to promote positive feelings. Prepare rating scales ahead of time. Have each person rate their feelings. Allow about 2 minutes to talk about it.

Rate the amount of empathy (understanding), sympathy, compassion, and love you have on a scale from 0=None, 1=A Little, 2=Some, 3=Quite a bit, or 4=A lot.

Exercise 4-14*
Reflecting on Our Part (5 minutes/10 minutes)

Ask people to reflect on these two verses (have someone read each verse):

Jn 15:5—I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much

fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Phil 4:13—I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Do you agree with this?

We aren't capable, under our own power, to love our enemies. In our own power, we too often want to hurt our enemies, to see them pay for what they did to us, to see them suffer as we suffered. We want to call down fire from heaven on our enemies. Yet Jesus says to us to call down blessings from heaven on our enemies. We cannot love our enemies the way Jesus admonishes us to do in our own strength—only with God's help. Can you beam a blessing at the person who hurt you?

Conduct a group discussion.

Take a moment and pray for the person who harmed you in the target transgression.

Discuss what volunteers felt like when they tried to pray for the person who had hurt them.

*If the group is running behind schedule, this exercise can be omitted.

Enrichment for the Leader

A= Give an Altruistic Gift of Forgiveness. Sometimes this can be a troublesome step for some of the people in the group. They can easily see that they should forgive because they will be happier, less burdened, less stressed, perhaps healthier, perhaps less anxious or depressed, certainly less resentful and angry, have better relationships, have a better spiritual life. But why, they ask, would they want to forgive to bless the person who hurt them. Also, they might object, they don't intend to see the person again, so how would the person even know.

We have studied this scientifically. We know from our studies that people who forgive for unselfish altruistic reasons—because the person hurt them and they can return blessing for harm and thus bless the offender in a way that others cannot—will actually get more benefit than people who try to consciously get the benefits by forgiving. So apart from any other reason for pursuing altruistic forgiving, it turns out to be a paradox. Perhaps it is simply that God honors those who seek to act unselfishly or without self-interest. Perhaps there is something healing in sacrifice. Whatever the reason, having altruistic motives seems to be healing.

It seems more important that one forgive with altruistic motives than that one express that forgiveness to the person. Emotional forgiveness happens within the skin of the forgiver. When we express forgiveness, we are really talking about a different process—the process of reconciliation.

Because it is helpful for people to develop altruistic motives for their forgiveness, you are going to try to lead the person toward forgiving altruistically.

Group Leader Gives Important Transitional Talk

In the exercises you just did (or, that we skipped), you were asked to try to sympathize with the person who harmed you, to perhaps feel compassion for the person, and to love the person (as Jesus loves us). You are asked to “beam a prayer of blessing at the person who hurt you” if you feel angry or sense that you are ruminating about the harm.

This step of the model to REACH forgiveness is the crucial step. If you can feel true empathy for the person, or true sympathy, or true compassion, or true love, then those positive feelings will gradually eat up the negative feelings of resentment, bitterness, hostility, hatred, anger, and fear of the person who hurt you and will replace any feelings of unforgiveness with feelings of forgiveness.

Taking that step, though, of replacing the resentments you might have held onto with more positive feelings is one you can do for one of two motivations. You can give up the unforgiving emotions because you know that you will improve your health, your mood, your relationship, or your spiritual life—as we talked about early in the group. You can give up the unforgiving emotions and feel more positive emotions because you will be free

of the weight of unforgiveness that makes you angry.

Or, you can forgive because you are willing to give an altruistic, unselfish gift of forgiveness to the person who hurt you—because you are willing to give a gift of agape love, like Jesus did with his enemies, to the person who harmed you.

It isn't easy to give an altruistic gift of forgiveness. In fact, it's one of the hardest things we might be asked to do in this life.

Exercise 4-15

When Did You Do Something Altruistic for Someone Else? (5 minutes)

In dyads: Share a time when you did something altruistic for another person. Describe what you did. Describe how you felt about doing it. How did you feel after you had done this altruistic act?

Exercise 4-16

We Are All Capable of Evil (10 minutes/15 minutes)

- Someone in the group, read this aloud:

Yehiel Dinur was a holocaust survivor who was a witness during the trial of the infamous Nazi war criminal, Adolf Eichmann. Dinur entered the courtroom and stared at the man behind the bulletproof glass—the man who had presided over the slaughter of millions. The court was hushed as a victim confronted a butcher of his people. Suddenly Dinur began to sob and collapsed to the floor. But not out of anger or bitterness. As he explained later in an interview, what struck him was a terrifying realization. “I was afraid about myself,” Dinur said. “I saw that I am capable to do this... Exactly like he.” In a moment of chilling clarity, Dinur saw the skull beneath the skin. “Eichmann, “he concluded, “is in all of us.”

- Discuss these three questions:
 1. What is the point of this story? Do you agree with it? Why or why not?
 2. Do you think that Yehiel Dinur thought that he was in any way similar to Adolf Eichmann before his realization?
 3. Do you tend to underestimate your capacity, under a different set of circumstances, to commit atrocities?

Exercise 4-17*

For Meditation at Home

We often exaggerate the “psychological distance” between a person who has hurt us and ourselves. More frequently than not, a hard search of our lives will reveal the same energy to commit evil that is in our offenders, even if we do not act it out in the same ways or with the same severity of outcome.

People tend to attribute *their* negative behavior to thoughts or feelings due to circumstances outside of their control, but attribute the negative behavior to *others* to something wrong with *them*. (Example: What if either you or I arrived late today because of car trouble. If you arrive late, you are likely to say that you had car trouble. If I arrived late today, what would be some explanations that you might guess were the causes of my lateness?)

The act/disposition distinction is an important one to make, because we tend to judge our actions by a different set of standards than we do other people.

The truth is, everyone's negative behavior is a combination of circumstances happening to us and our natural tendency to behave selfishly and in ways that hurts others. The human tendency to blame others for the very thing for which we let ourselves off the hook creates an artificial psychological distance between others and ourselves.

Exercise 4-18

What Did Your Get Out of This Session? (5 minutes/10 minutes)

Conducting the Sessions: Session 5

Leader's Introduction to Session 5

So far, in Session 1, we looked at the way Scriptures portray forgiveness. In the Session 2, we looked at two ways to define forgiveness (decisional forgiveness and emotional forgiveness). We began to talk about the hurts we identified as our target transgressions at the end of last session. In Session 3, we explored those hurts further and got into looking at them differently than we might have in the past. At the end of the session, we examined how we always seem to have good reasons or justifications (or at least excuses) if we hurt or offend someone. In the current session, Session 4, we tackled the hard work of experiencing emotional forgiveness—trying to empathize, sympathize, feel compassion for, or even love the person who harmed us. In Session 5, we will work on giving a gift of forgiving to the offender and committing to the emotional forgiveness we experienced.

Importantly, there is enough material here for at least three hours of groups. If you have extra time, this is one place that can use more time. The most important is Session 6.

Exercise 5-1*

What Did You Get Out of the Previous Session? (5 minutes)

*If the group is running behind schedule, this exercise can be omitted.

Enrichment for the Leader

When we were forgiven by God, we might have repented of the sins we knew about and we might have renounced our life without Jesus and embraced a life with him. But, in the grand scheme of things, we know almost nothing about the total number of sins we have created. God forgave those anyway. We had little idea what it meant for us truly to turn from sin. God forgave us anyway and renews our mind. We had little idea of what costs we might encounter as a Christian. God forgave us anyway and sent the Holy Spirit to lead, empower, and comfort us. In the divine scheme, forgiveness was not earned by our repentance, our belief, and our faith. It was a divine gift of grace—unmerited favor.

At the same time, Paul appeals to us to seek the true crown and weight of glory. Jesus appeals to seek fellowship with God eternally and a place in his kingdom. There are unquestionable benefits for repentance, belief, and faith.

Our model of forgiving others, while in highly different circumstances than divine forgiveness, can profit by being informed by this grace. We thus seek to promote a forgiveness that is based on both a benefit to ourselves in forgiving and on a blessing for the one who hurt us.

Exercise 5-2

When Did You Need Forgiving? (10 minutes/20 minutes)

“Humility is the antidote to shame.” Dan Allender

Why do this exercise? Our appeal to people will be that they have worked hard to empathize, sympathize, feel compassion for, or love the person who harmed them. Now, having understood the other person, wouldn't the person like to give a gift of forgiveness—altruistically motivated because it can bless the person? To motivate the altruism, we try to help people see that when they were forgiven by a person, they were indeed blessed.

Conducting the exercise. In the first part of the exercise (5-2), people recall a time when they needed forgiveness and write answers to questions about the incident. These are to help the person focus on their feelings and emotions when they received forgiveness.

Exercise 5-3*

Dyad Partner Interviews You (5 minutes/10 minutes)

Why do the exercise? It is more powerful if a person expresses aloud their experience rather than merely write about it. Psychologists have shown that writing about our experiences can produce positive effects in themselves, but writing and then talking about the experiences creates more powerful effects.

Conducting the exercise. Each person's dyadic partner interviews the other person. This is the second part of Exercise 5-2. Direct people to follow the instructions in their manual.

Exercise 5-4

Getting in Touch with the Gratitude We Feel for Our Forgiveness (5 minutes/10 minutes)

Why do the exercise? This exercise is yet another way to help people get in touch with the blessing of feeling gratitude for being forgiven. Again, it is to strengthen the motivation to bless the person who harmed each person.

Conducting the exercise. Each person writes notes about what kind of letter of thanksgiving they would write. Then each person tells the other what the letter would say.

Exercise 5-5

Reactions to Being Forgiven (5 minutes)

Why do the exercise? As with the method used throughout these groups. People think privately about something, then express it in a safe relationship with a dyad partner. Finally, they share it with a larger number of people in the safety of the large group.

Conducting the discussion. Again, as with other discussions, reflect back the core of what each person says about his or her experience of being forgiven.

Exercise 5-6*

Being Forgiven (10 minutes)

One person in the group volunteers to be the forgiver. Each other person (one at a time), stands close to the forgiver and adopts a body position that signifies a request for forgiveness. (Some people have done things like kneel, hold onto the forgiver's feet, or adopt a hands-clasped, begging posture, for example.)

Exercise 5-7*

Expressing Gratitude for Having Been Forgiven (10 minutes)

The one person who is forgiven continues in that role. Each person (one person at a time) acts out the gratitude of having received forgiveness. If members cannot connect with the emotion, they can hold the forgiver's arms, one hand on each of the forgiver's biceps. Then look into the forgiver's eyes and act out gratitude. The touch can fill the emotional expression.

Exercise 5-8*

The Gift of Forgiving (15 minutes)

Give each member a piece of paper. Direct members to make a gift that they would like to give their offender. After that, group members explain the meaning and significance of what they made.

Exercise 5-9

A Crucial Question (5 minutes)

Why do the exercise? You are going to ask the most important question after several people have shared what it feels like to be forgiven. Say something like this:

You have worked hard throughout this group to empathize with the person who hurt you. You have

sought to discern what God's heart might be toward the person—a heart of mercy and love. You have thought about what it means to love you enemies.

You also have thought about how much blessing you felt when you received forgiveness.

Now—and this is an important question—are you willing to extend the gift of forgiveness to your offender? Can you declare that you have experienced complete forgiveness that matches the decisional forgiveness you have granted. Maybe you haven't experienced complete forgiveness yet, but maybe you've seen a large change over the course of the group.

Can you declare that you have experienced at least part of full forgiveness. How much forgiveness—in percent—have you experienced toward the person?

Conducting the exercise. Have people write down the percent of the negative feelings they replaced.

Exercise 5-10 Commit By Telling Others (5 minutes)

Conducting the exercise. Say, “Turn to your dyadic partner and tell him or her what percent of the emotional forgiveness you have experienced.” [Give just a few seconds for this.] Whip around the group and get each person to say aloud how much they have forgiven. Do not try to change people's percents if they don't feel they have forgiven much. Just ask people to report where they are.

Exercise 5-11 Completing a Certificate of Emotional Forgiveness (5 minutes)

Say, “By telling someone that you have forgiven emotionally, you commit to your experience.” We also can commit by completing a “Certificate of Emotional Forgiveness,” which you have in your manual. Can you complete it now.”

Exercise 5-12* What if Emotional Forgiveness Isn't Complete? (10 minutes)

Why do this exercise? Most people will not report that 100 percent of the negative feelings have been eliminated. You need to address that.

Conducting the exercise. Have one group member read each of the two statements. Then have the group as a whole discuss. You might or might not want to list important points on newsprint.

Exercise 5-13 Hand Washing (5 minutes/10 minutes)

Why do the exercise? This provides a graphic example that the forgiveness experienced in this group is not complete, but by repeating it, eventually people can completely forgive.

Conducting the exercise. Have people write a brief description of the transgression on your hand and then go to the restroom and wash it off. This will take a minute. When people return, ask whether they got it completely erased from their hand. Some will; some won't. Draw the following lesson:

We can move through the Pyramid Model to REACH Forgiveness once and it probably won't totally erase our bad feelings about the transgression. But it will lighten the feelings. Through repeated washings, we become free of the negative, unforgiving feelings.

Exercise 5-14* Barriers to Complete Emotional Forgiveness (5 minutes/10 minutes)

Conducting the exercise. Conduct a group discussion of the **barriers to emotional forgiving completely**. List them as people discuss. Some things that people may list include the following:

- Feels final to say I really forgave.
- Don't want them to enjoy freedom.
- Seems big step to forgive.
- It's like sitting in a dirty diaper. It's stinky, but its warm. We often don't want to give it up the familiar and launch out into the unknown, cold cruel world of not having the grudge.

*If the group is running behind schedule, this exercise can be omitted.

Exercise 5-15

A Hypothetical Letter Expressing Forgiveness (10 minutes/15 minutes)

Why conduct the exercise? Forgiving and expressing forgiveness are different. There are many times when a person might not find it possible, safe, or wise to express forgiveness. For example, a person might be working to forgive a deceased parent, a spouse who divorced them, or a friend who has moved away and with whom they have lost contact. Or for example, a person might not want to express forgiveness to an employer who still holds power over one and might fire one. Or, one might not want to express forgiveness to someone who doesn't think he or she did anything wrong. By writing a "letter" without having to send it, the person can express the forgiveness without having to worry about negative consequences.

Conducting the exercise. Be sure to emphasize that you are not recommending that the group members send the letters.

Exercise 5-16

More Forgiveness (10 minutes)

Group members stand. "Imagine you have a box in your hand. It is your gift of forgiveness to the offender. Lift your hands and offer it as a sacred gift to God. Forgiveness of the offender was not in your strength but was from God. Give it back to him."

The leader pauses and invites the members to lower their heads. Then the leader says, "Now stretch your hand out in front of you, palms up. You can feel God's blessing. Bring it to your heart to receive God's blessing to you."

Exercise 5-17

Writing an Actual Letter (15 minutes/25 minutes)

- Instead of Exercises (above) in which the letter is imagined, the leader can direct the group members to write a short letter (which you should caution them not actually to send). After writing the letter, have the group stand and shut their eyes.
 - Direct them to imagine the person in front of them, even though they are in the safety of the group and the person is not really here. Then direct them to imagine offering the letter to the person.
 - Imagine the person taking the letter and crying. (It doesn't matter if you believe that the person might not really cry.)
 - Now, imagine yourself holding the letter again. Now hold it outstretched, and offer it to God.
 - Imagine that in response, Jesus comes and stands in the midst of the group.
 - He just stands there. Are there things you said in the letter that you would like to change—things you left out that you would now add; things you put in that you would take out now.
 - What would Jesus do if he came to stand in front of you and the rest of the group just disappeared.
 - Offer the letter to the Lord.
 - Pray for the person or for yourself.
- After sitting down, have each person describe what went on for them.

Exercise 5-18

What Did Your Get Out of This Session? (5 minutes/10 minutes)

Each member of the group should state one (or more) thing that the member got out of the session.

Conducting the Sessions: Session 6

Leader's Introduction to Session 6

So far, in Session 1, we looked at the way Scriptures portray forgiveness. In the Session 2, we looked at two ways to define forgiveness (decisional forgiveness and emotional forgiveness). We began to talk about the hurts we identified as our target transgressions at the end of last session. In Session 3, we explored those hurts further and got into looking at them differently than we might have in the past. At the end of the session, we examined how we always seem to have good reasons or justifications (or at least excuses) if we hurt or offend someone. In the current session, Session 4, we tackled the hard work of experiencing emotional forgiveness—trying to empathize, sympathize, feel compassion for, or even love the person who harmed us. In Session 5, we worked on giving a gift of forgiving to the offender and committing to the emotional forgiveness we experienced. This session, Session 6, is the culmination. We began by saying that divine forgiveness is about forgiving sins and forgiveness of our condition of sin. In the same way, we have been working on forgiving a transgression against us, but our main concern is to become a person who is more forgiving as a person. That is what we are going to try to promote in Session 6.

This is the most important session in the program. Things have been building to this session. If you have extra time, this is the place to use the extra time first.

Exercise 6-1*

What Did You Get Out of the Previous Session? (5 minutes)

*If the group is running behind schedule, this exercise can be omitted.

Exercise 6-2

Review of Major Concepts (5 minutes)

Why conduct this exercise? This provides a review that allows people to get quickly back into the whole understanding of forgiveness we have been developing. Because the current session will ask people to use this system several times, it is good to begin the session by refreshing people's memories.

Conducting the session. The group leader should conduct a brief summary (by asking group members) of (1) the five steps (name them) and (2) the two types of forgiveness (name each type), and (3) the working definition of "granting decisional forgiveness" and "experiencing emotional forgiveness." Ask the group to recall each of these.

You might say the following:

Let's stop a minute and take stock. Where have we been? There are five steps to forgiving. Let's name the steps. Answer:

- R=Recall the Hurt
- E=Empathize with the One Who Hurt You (also includes Sympathy, Compassion, and Agape Love)
- A= Give an Altruistic Gift of Forgiveness
- C=Commit to the Forgiveness You Experienced
- H=Hold on to Forgiveness When You Doubt

There were two types of forgiveness. What were they? (Answer: Granting decisional forgiveness and Experiencing emotional forgiveness)

What is our working definition of emotional forgiveness? (Answer: Replacing negative unforgiving emotions by positive other-oriented emotions)

Exercise 6-3* Smile (10 minutes)

Group draws pieces of paper from a hat. One person is "it". All others form a circle. The "it" has 30 seconds to make each person smile. Any twitch towards a smile means that the smiler is "it".

At the end of the exercise, the leader says, "You have a choice about your emotions. You can hold onto

your unforgiving emotions, or if you have replaced those with love or empathy or sympathy or compassion, you can now hold on to your emotional forgiveness- even in the face of powerful events that demand that you give up that emotional forgiveness.”

Exercise 6-4*

Things That Might Make You Doubt Whether You Really Emotionally Forgave (5minutes/10 minutes)

Setting up the exercise. Have you ever thought you've forgiven someone and then later—without the person doing anything bad to you again—you have found yourself thinking, acting, or feeling angry or fearful about the person? You might have concluded that you hadn't really forgiven. In fact, you might be correct or only granted decisional forgiveness. But there are other reasons you might come to doubt your forgiveness. You've worked hard and experienced either complete or at least partial emotional forgiveness when compared to beginning the group. Can you think of some times when you might doubt that you have forgiven?

Conduct the exercise. Conduct a group discussion. List reasons for doubting that one's forgiveness was genuine on the board or newsprint.

Draw these conclusions. There are hot reminders (like seeing the person unexpectedly, getting hurt similarly again by someone else, getting hurt by the same person again). There are other times when we just worry or ruminate about the past.

Exercise 6-5*

Seeing the Person Again (10 minutes)

Group members are given small pieces of paper.

#1: Imagine seeing the person again. What feelings might you feel? Draw a picture of your face to show your inner feelings. (Whip around group)

#2: If you do feel anger, what do you plan to do? (Whip)

#3: Write a prayer for the offender that helps you hold onto your forgiveness.

Exercise 6-6

Prayer for Your Offender (10 minutes)

This is vital.

Read: Jesus said, “Love your enemies. Do good to those who persecute you.”

Leader whips around the group. Each person prays aloud for the person who offended him or her. Go around the group and each offers a prayer for the person.

Exercise 6-7

Hold on to Forgiveness When You Are in the Midst of a “Reminder” Experience (5 minutes/10 minutes)

Why do the exercise? People have usually developed many ways of dealing with doubts. You will want to draw out of the group a good list.

Conducting the exercise. Ask, “How can you avoid getting back into bitterness or hatred if you are in one of those “reminder” situations?” Conduct a group discussion. (List from the groups.) Examples people might list include are (1) Get out of the situation; (2) Remind yourself that you have been forgiven; (3) Remind yourself that this situation is different than the other. [There are lots of others.]

Exercise 6-8

Group Leader Tells Important Example (5 minutes)

Use this analogy. Having memories of past harms is our God-given way to protect ourselves from doing something dangerous again. If I burn my hand on a stove eye, I feel fear and anger when my hand gets near the eye again. That isn't “unforgiveness” against the stove eye; it's just my body's way of protecting me.

So, remember: *The pain, anger, or fear that arises due to a memory or that comes from encountering the person who hurt us once again are NOT unforgiveness.* When you see the person who hurt you and feel the

negative feelings (anger, fear, sadness) pop up again, you can remind yourself: *This pain, anger, and fear I'm feeling is not unforgiveness. It's just my body's way of protecting me so I won't make the same mistakes I made last time.*

Conducting the exercise. Have someone read the analogy and the paragraph following it (see these two paragraphs above). Ask for reactions from the group. Because this is a very important point, you'll also summarize. "In emotionally forgiving, we are to replace the negative emotions, *not* the memories. We can't (and we *shouldn't*) get rid of our memories of when we've been harmed. Having memories of past harms is our God-given way to protect ourselves from doing something dangerous again. That isn't "unforgiveness"; it's just the body God created protecting me. So, remember: when you see the person who hurt you and feel the negative feelings (anger, fear, sadness) pop up again, you can remind yourself: *This pain, anger, and fear I'm feeling is not unforgiveness. It's just my body's way of protecting me so I won't make the same mistakes I made last time.*

Exercise 6-9*

Control Rumination or Worry (5 minutes)

This is optional only if you are pressed for time.

Set up of the exercise. Say, "In just a minute, I'm going to take a little while and I want you to do exactly like I say. *Don't* think about white bears. Now, if you do think about a white bear, every time you do, raise your hand. OK, I'm about to start the clock. Remember, don't think of a white bear. Don't think about the black nose. Don't think about the white fur. Don't think about white bears at all. OK, go."

Conduct the exercise. Spend 20 seconds on the white bear task. Then, ask for ways groups members tried to distract self (group discussion). Examples people might bring up include: Don't dwell on the negative. Distract self. Don't think about stopping thoughts; instead move to a new activity. Maybe someone else can distract you.

Exercise 6-10*

Summary of Ways to Hold Onto Forgiveness (5 minutes)

Again, this is optional only if you are pressed for time.

In the manual are eight suggestions. If you have time, go over them, but even if you don't have time, you can point the list out to the members for their later use.

*If the group is running behind schedule, this exercise can be omitted.

Exercise 6-11*

Prayer of St. Francis (5 minutes)

Read the prayer of St. Francis. Play music in the background.

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.
 Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
 where there is injury, pardon;
 where there is doubt, faith;
 where there is despair, hope;
 where there is darkness, light;
 and where there is sadness, joy.
 O, Divine Master,
 grant that I may not so much seek
 to be consoled as to console;
 to be understood as to understand;
 to be loved as to love;
 for it is in giving that we receive;
 it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
 and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
 "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace...."

Exercise 6-12*

Helping You Remember (20 minutes/30 minutes)

This exercise will help the members retain the important parts to the group because when one helps someone else, that strengthens one's own memory. The leader gives the following instructions.

Assume that you have been talking to a friend about forgiving a hurt that he or she has recently experienced. The person has told you that forgiveness has been extremely hard. The person has been wrestling with two problems. First, the person says he or she has forgiven and really means it, but finds that he or she still gets resentful or angry when thinking about the harm done. Second, the person doesn't know how get rid of the resentment and anger.

Pair up with a partner. One of you will pretend you are a helper and will explain the answer to the first question: explain the difference between decisional and emotional forgiveness and how one can make a sincere decision to forgive and yet still feel resentment until emotional forgiveness is experienced.

Let the discussion proceed. Then stop it, and start the second discussion.

Now change roles. The second person will now explain the five steps to REACH emotional forgiveness.

Discuss in the group what was and was not helpful. The leader should summarize the best answers to each question.

Exercise 6-13

Dedicate Yourself to Being a More Forgiving Christian: 12 Steps (24 minutes/30 minutes/36 minutes)

Why do the exercise? This might be the single most important exercise in the program. It allows the person, in a worshipful way, to encounter the Lord directly and consider his or her life. A bare minimum of time is 24 minutes, but 30 to 36 minutes is optimum. This helps people bridge the gap between forgiving one transgression, which is all that has thus far been considered, and being a more forgiving person.

The rationale to explain to the group. The idea is that being a forgiving person involves being forgiving in most situations with most people. We can become unforgiving towards someone by being hurt. Usually, to hold a grudge against the person (rather than just being unforgiving about one transgression) we are hurt repeatedly. We eventually generalize and say we can't forgive *the person*. To become a more forgiving person, we reverse the process. We have tried to forgive one transgression through applying the five steps to REACH forgiveness of the transgression. In this section, we consider several other transgressions and several people. By the end, we hope that the group members are more forgiving people.

Setting up the exercise. You'll need to bring a worship CD or tape, with thoughtful, prayerful, worship songs. Sometimes it is helpful to bring a cross for meditation or even both a cross and a crucifix to emphasize the passion of Christ and the resurrection of Christ—the love and the power.

Conducting the exercise. Music will be played: 12 songs. During each 2-minute (or 2.5-minute, or 3-minute) period, work on one of the 12 steps in the workbook, writing out the answers in each step. The leader's role is simple. You are a time keeper.

Concluding the exercise. At the end, you can conclude with this Scripture reading that can serve as a prayer of commitment.

¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. ¹⁶Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Hebrews 4:15-16.)

Say, “We cannot forgive in our own strength alone. We are tempted to be vengeful, full of grudges, and filled with hatred. Yet, we have a high priest—Jesus—who was tempted in every way we are. He emerged as the essence of forgiveness. Let us approach the throne of grace boldly and ask that our high priest intercede for us. I invite you to pair up with your dyadic partner and pray for each other.”

Give a few minutes for prayer.

Exercise 6-14*
Learn the Lessons of a Pencil (5 minutes)

Give each person a short pencil with eraser. Each person looks at the pencil while the narrator reads:

Learn the lessons the pencil has for your life.

- It has a short life, yet it can make a significant mark- just like you.
- It is not a pen. Its mistakes can be corrected with effort, but it often means standing the pencil on its head. Instead of the power that the world advocates, seek love. Instead of revenge, seek to forgive.
- For the pencil- like you- what is inside, not outside, is responsible for its mark.
- The pencil needs to be ground down and sharpened regularly, so don't despise the sharpening that you must undergo. Often the hurts and wounds you feel as painful can be God's sharpening you where you can be his instrument to write the love of Christ on the hearts of the very ones who hurt you and on the hearts of those who see your reactions to those hurts.

Exercise 6-15
Mirror

Pass a hand mirror around the circle, inviting people to look into it. Pass it around the circle again.

After two complete passes, the leader then says,

You looked at two faces. The first face you saw was the face of a person who has been hurt and at the same time the face of a person who has hurt others. The second face you saw is the face of one who has struggled against the oppression of unforgiveness, revenge motives, and grudges. It is the face of one who has emerged victorious over unforgiveness. It is the face of a hero of forgiveness. Live like the hero of forgiveness that you are!

Exercise 6-16*
What Did Your Get Out of This Session? (5 minutes/10 minutes)

Each member of the group should state one (or more) thing that the member got out of the session.

Each person share one thing that happened that was meaningful.

(This can be omitted because you are going to process the whole group.)

Exercise 6-17
Processing the Whole Group Experience (10 minutes/30 minutes)

Process the group. Conduct a group discussion about what people thought were the best parts of the group, and what they got out of the group.

Complete the evaluation of the group and the evaluation of their own forgiveness.

Just to Give You Confidence in the Scientific Support

Books and Research and Writing on the Five Steps to REACH Forgiveness Model:

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- Burchard, G.A., Yarhouse, M.A., Worthington, E.L., Jr., Berry, J.W., Killian, M., & Canter, D.E. (2003). A study of two marital enrichment programs and couples' quality of life. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 31, 240-252.
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