

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

**Participant Manual**

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

***Everett L. Worthington, Jr.***  
***Virginia Commonwealth University***

August 4, 2006

## Contents

<b>Experiencing Forgiveness: Participant Manual</b>	
Introducing the Program	3
Before the Group Begins	3
Session 1: Forgiving in Christian Context	7
Session 2: What Is Forgiveness?	12
Session 3: Recalling the Hurt (in Helpful Ways)	17
Session 4: Empathy for the One Who Hurt You: The Hard Part of Experiencing Emotional Forgiveness	19
Session 5: Giving a Humble Gift of Forgiveness: Altruism and Commitment	24
Session 6: Holding on to Forgiveness and Becoming a More Forgiving Person	28
Appendix A: Bible Verses about Forgiveness	39

## Introducing the Program

In this book, you will work through practical exercises that are designed to be used in small groups. The goal is to help you become a more forgiving person through dedicating yourself to discerning God's heart and through applying a five-step method of forgiving transgressions that you have experienced.

The method is based on the idea that the Lord is the active agent in promoting forgiveness, but he uses our acts as vehicles he often works through to accomplish his agency. So, you practice an attitude of surrender to the lordship of Jesus and do so while practicing the five steps on a particular hurt you have experienced. Like learning any skill, it is best to practice on an issue that is of moderate importance to you. If a harm is too traumatic and emotionally raw, you might be so distressed it is difficult to learn the method. If the harm has already been put far in your past and no longer bothers you, you probably won't be experiencing enough emotional pain to learn that the method can actually help relieve emotional pain.

Once you have learned the five steps, you will apply them to a variety of hurts. By doing so, you can broaden your forgiving character. You can truly become a person who has few unresolved hurts and who can resolve new hurts quickly and thoroughly.

### *Design of the Book*

The book is structured into six sessions. Each session can be one hour, one and a half hours, or two hours. (You easily could split 2-hour sessions, making the course a 12-week course.) Many of the exercises allow conversation and discussion within the group. The group leader can allow the discussion to go on either a short time or a longer time. As I and others have conducted these groups, we have found that some exercises are more flexible than others. I denoted those by recommending an upper and lower limit of time. For example, I might have denoted one exercise as 10 minutes/20 minutes.

Also, we have found that some exercises are vital to the success of learning the method of forgiving that you are about to practice. Those exercises should compose the one-hour sessions. Six hours of practice is the bare minimum. Other exercises are optional, depending on whether more time is available. The fact is, the longer you spend in learning and practicing the method and allowing the Lord to work in your life, the more you will forgive and the more it will positively build the virtue of forgiveness into your life.

### *Effect of the Groups*

By studying these groups experimentally, we have found that six hours can make a great difference in people's development of a forgiving character. Twelve hours, though, makes almost twice as much difference. It appears to be the willingness of your heart and the time you practice within the group and also at home that will allow the Lord to help you become a more forgiving person.

## Before the Group Begins

### Welcome

Welcome to the group on "Experiencing Forgiveness: Six Practical Steps for Becoming a More Forgiving Christian." You probably saw an advertisement explaining a little about the group. If you haven't done so already, you can read the following description at your leisure.

### **Do you want to become a more forgiving person?**

**What?** A 6-session group is being formed that will help you develop a more forgiving character. In the group you will discuss what the Bible says about forgiving, and you will learn a method for forgiving a particular transgression. By praying, practicing that method, and reflecting on it alone and with others in the group, you will become a more forgiving person as the Lord builds a forgiving attitude, forgiving skills, and a supportive community.

**Who?** This is for people who want to learn to become a more forgiving Christian. They are willing to do this by learning and practicing a Christian method of forgiving that has been used and studied for years by Christian psychologist, Everett Worthington.

**How?** We best learn to forgive by seeking the heart of God. As we discern the Father's heart, Jesus' sacrifice, and the Holy Spirit's leading, we become more eager to forgive transgressions. To aid us, we learn a method of forgiving a particular transgression. Then, we learn to apply those skills to other hurts and offenses. We learn to forgive others, and we also can apply the same method to forgiving ourselves, though forgiving ourselves is particularly hard. This method works best if you work in the group with a hurt or offense that you might have tried repeatedly to forgive. Despite your efforts you might have **granted forgiveness** (or you might *not* have granted forgiveness), but the peace and the **emotional experience of forgiveness** has eluded you. The group will teach members how to REACH an experience of emotional forgiveness by working with a particular hurt that each member is willing to share in the group. (A requirement for participation is that the group members affirm that they will treat the events shared in the group as confidential.) Or, you might want to participate in the group because you've forgiven mostly automatically all your life, but have realized that there you have trouble forgiving some people or some events. You want to learn how to forgive faster and more thoroughly. Or perhaps, you just want to more closely align your heart with God's forgiving heart.

**When?** The group will meet for six sessions. The sessions can be one hour, one and a half hours, two hours, or even longer. One hour sessions are ideal for Christian Education hours. Longer sessions are good for groups that might meet during mid-week.

### **Effectiveness of the program to REACH forgiveness**

The REACH model has been subject of a Christian book, *Forgiving and Reconciling: Bridges to Wholeness and Hope* (InterVarsity Press, 2003), and a book for general audiences, *Five Steps to Forgiveness: The Art and Science of Forgiving* (Crown Publishers, 2003).

The program was developed by Christian Clinical Psychologist, Everett L. Worthington, Jr. He has conducted over seven scientific studies that support the effectiveness or the method to REACH forgiveness. The model has also been discussed at scientific conferences; in magazines like *People* magazine, *O* magazine, *Redbook*, *Reader's Digest Canada*, virtually every major US newspaper, television shows (like *Good Morning America*, *The Jane Pauley Show*, *The Leeza Show*, *The Iyanla Show*, *Starting Over*, the *700 Club*, *CNN*). Thousands have gone through forgiveness groups similar to the ones in this book, and countless others have read about, seen, or heard about the method and perhaps tried it more informally.

It has been used at two Christian universities involving the majority of their students. At John Brown University, students attending the group (in addition to the month focus) experienced more forgiveness than did students at that university who attended a special month focus on forgiveness—with chapel programs, debates, news articles, book reviews, and discussions.

Lampton, C., Oliver, G., Worthington, E.L., Jr., & Berry, J.W. (2006). Helping Christian college students become more forgiving: An intervention study to promote forgiveness as part of a program to shape Christian character. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 33, 278-290.

Analysis of data is still underway at Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky.

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

If people cannot complete these following assessments *before* the group begins, the assessments can be completed during Session 1 (a 30-minute time can be provided) or partially during Session 1 (to permit use in Session 1) with the remainder to be completed after Session 1.

You will learn to REACH forgiveness by working in the group with a hurt or offense that you might have tried repeatedly to forgive. You might have granted forgiveness (or you might not have granted forgiveness), but the peace and the emotional experience of forgiveness might have eluded you on this particular event. The group will teach members how to REACH an experience of lasting *emotional* forgiveness by working with a particular hurt that each member is willing to share in the group. We want you to think ahead of time about the hurt or offense that you are going to work with. You'll complete some instruments as you learn to forgive better. The instruments will that ask you to rate your feelings and motivations about the particular even you are working on and about yourself in general. It is important that you always complete the instruments about the same event.

A word about your choice of an event to work with: If you were learning to play a sport—like soccer—you wouldn't try to learn the skills you need to play well by playing in the World Cup finals. You'd learn the skills by playing in a low-stakes scrimmage or practice session. In the same way, if you choose a really difficult offense that you still need to forgive—such as physical abuse as a child, or murder of a close relative, or abandonment by your father at an early age—you'll have difficulty learning the skills because the event is simply too hard to begin with. Also, sometimes harms are one-time events (such as a boss who harshly criticizes you), but at other times the events are ongoing and seem to involve new transgressions every day. Those ongoing hurtful interactions also make it difficult to learn skills because it is hard to tell what the effects of one harm are when it is bunched with so many other events. Instead, choose a relatively isolated event of moderate hurtfulness or offensiveness but one that you still don't have complete emotional peace with. On such an event—even if you feel like you have already granted forgiveness—you can best learn to emotionally forgive.

Would you write a brief description about what happened in that event in the space below?

1. Describe the event. (Please don't use names. You can designate the person who hurt you by initials or by a pseudonym that you can remember.)

2. Write briefly how you felt and reacted to the event in the days following it.

3. Write briefly about things pertaining to the event that have happened since the event that have affected your current feelings and motivations.

Please complete the following instruments about how you feel at the current time about the event (and about yourself).

**TRIM**

**DIRECTIONS:** For the following questions, please indicate what you imagine your **current thoughts and feelings** would be about the person who stole from you. Use the following scale to indicate your agreement or disagreement with each of the statements.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	mildly disagree	agree and disagree equally	mildly agree	strongly agree

1. \_\_\_ I'll make him/her pay.
2. \_\_\_ I wish that something bad would happen to him/her.
3. \_\_\_ I want him/her to get what he/she deserves.
4. \_\_\_ I'm going to get even.
5. \_\_\_ I want to see him/her hurt and miserable.
6. \_\_\_ I'd keep as much distance between us as possible.
7. \_\_\_ I'd live as if he/she doesn't exist, isn't around.
8. \_\_\_ I wouldn't trust him/her.
9. \_\_\_ I'd find it difficult to act warmly toward him/her.
10. \_\_\_ I'd avoid him/her.
11. \_\_\_ I'd cut off the relationship with him/her.
12. \_\_\_ I'd withdraw from him/her.

**Single-Item Assessment of Two Types of Forgiveness**

Note: We want you to rate two types of forgiveness. For example, a person might perhaps decide to *grant* complete forgiveness but still *feel* very unforgiving toward a person.

*Granting forgiveness* is defined as **deciding (even if you don't say aloud) that you will not seek revenge against and not avoid but will try (as much as it is up to you) to put the relationship back on the pre-offense footing.** Using the scale below (from 0 = no forgiveness granted to 4 = complete forgiveness granted) estimate the current level to which you have granted forgiveness.

0	1	2	3	4
No Forgiveness				Complete Forgiveness

*Experiencing emotional forgiveness* is defined as **the degree to which you actually feel that your emotions have become less negative and more positive toward the person who offended or harmed you.** If 0 = No forgiveness experienced and 4 = complete forgiveness experienced (that is, if you have experienced complete emotional forgiveness, you have no negative feelings and perhaps even some positive feelings toward the person who offended or harmed you), then use the scale below to indicate to what degree you have experienced emotional forgiveness.

0	1	2	3	4
No Forgiveness				Complete Forgiveness

**DFS**

**Think of your current intentions toward the person who hurt you. Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.**

	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Disagree (D)	Neutral (N)	Agree (A)	Strongly Agree (SA)
1. I intend to try to hurt him or her in the same way he or she hurt me.	SD	D	N	A	SA
2. I will not try to help him or her if he or she needs something.	SD	D	N	A	SA
3. If I see him or her, I will act friendly.	SD	D	N	A	SA
4. I will try to get back at him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
5. I will try to act toward him or her in the same	SD	D	N	A	SA

way I did before he or she hurt me.					
6. If there is an opportunity to get back at him or her, I will take it.	SD	D	N	A	SA
7. I will not talk with him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
8. I will not seek revenge upon him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA

**EFS**

**Think of your current emotions toward the person who hurt you. Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.**

	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Disagree (D)	Neutral (N)	Agree (A)	Strongly Agree (SA)
1. I care about him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
2. I no longer feel upset when I think of him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
3. I'm bitter about what he or she did to me.	SD	D	N	A	SA
4. I feel sympathy toward him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
5. I'm mad about what happened.	SD	D	N	A	SA
6. I like him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
7. I resent what he or she did to me.	SD	D	N	A	SA
8. I feel love toward him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA

**TFS**

Directions: Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement below by using the following scale:

- 5 = Strongly Agree
- 4 = Mildly Agree
- 3 = Agree and Disagree Equally
- 2 = Mildly Disagree
- 1 = Strongly Disagree

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. People close to me probably think I hold a grudge too long.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I can forgive a friend for almost anything.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. If someone treats me badly, I treat him or her the same.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I try to forgive others even when they don't feel guilty for what they did.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I can usually forgive and forget an insult.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. I feel bitter about many of my relationships.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Even after I forgive someone, things often come back to me that I resent.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. There are some things for which I could never forgive even a loved one.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. I have always forgiven those who have hurt me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. I am a forgiving person.

**Session 1**  
**Forgiving in Christian Context**  
**Goals of Session 1**

1. To get to know each other within your group.
2. To investigate some of the things that the Scriptures say about interpersonal forgiveness—that is the forgiveness of one person by another.
3. To experience the heart of God—both his joy at forgiving us and his concern that we forgive others.

**A Few Thought Questions for Session 1**

1. To what degree do you think forgiveness by God might be a free gift? To what degree is it conditional on repentance of humans?
2. To what degree might forgiveness of one person by another be conditional on the repentance of the other? Do you think that perhaps the fact that God can know people's hearts yet people cannot know

each other's hearts might make divine forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness operate a bit differently?

3. In Texas, Carla Faye Tucker was executed for a brutal murder. She had become a Christian in prison. She had received a statement of forgiveness and support from one of the children of the people she had murdered. If God forgives a person and so does a person victimized by the offense, does that mean that Carla should have been pardoned by the state?

### **Leader Introduction of the Forgiveness Group (5 minutes)**

The goal of the group is to become a more forgiving person through (1) getting closer to God and (2) learning and practicing a five-step method of forgiving.

To accomplish this goal requires group members who are willing to share parts of their personal lives. That requires trust within the group. Group members should pledge themselves to safeguard the information shared within the group and not to divulge it to anyone outside of the group. Furthermore, group members should agree not to share information about third parties but to share only information that pertains to themselves and to guard the identities of anyone they identify as a transgressor. This usually means that it is better for a family member not to discuss transgressions by another member of his or her own family.

### **Exercise 1-1**

#### **Personal introductions of the group members (10 minutes)**

Each person introduces himself or herself by telling the following:

- a. Name, age, job, family, and your favorite dessert.
- b. Brief description of the hardest thing that you have ever forgiven or are still struggle to forgive?
- c. What do you want to get out of this group experience?

### **Pre-group Exercise**

#### **Assessments Prior to Beginning the Group (25-30 minutes)+**

+Ideally, these 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)**

Sing with hand motions.

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.

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-geth-), raise right hand above own left hand; on counts 5 (--ther) and 6 (Lord), clap twice.



**Exercise 1-3\***

**Scripture Art (15-20 minutes)**

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.

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

Listen to 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).

Draw in the bottom half a picture, some illustration showing what group members 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.

**Exercise 1-6**

**Experiencing the Scriptures (15 minutes/25 minutes)**

The following method is loosely based on a method of experiencing the Scriptures—*lectio divina*. The intent is to experience the Scripture personally rather than merely study about the Scripture or understand the Scripture with head-knowledge. This method is aimed at furthering, in group members, a heart-knowledge about God’s heart for forgiveness. There are four steps:

- The leader will read the Scripture.
- Each group member will say one word that is a reaction to the Scripture.
- The leader will read each Scripture again.
- Each group member will say a phrase that captures the member’s feeling about the Scripture.

**Matt 6:12, 14-5**

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.... For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matt 6:12, 14-5)

- Repeat the four steps with the following longer Scripture.

**Matt 19:21-25**

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

Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

“The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’”

“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.” (Matt 19:21-25)

- Repeat the four steps with the following Scripture. (Note. It is important that you do not skip the reading and reaction to this Scripture.)

### **Lk 15: 11-32**

Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country, and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of your was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’” (Lk 15: 11-32)

### **Exercise 1-7**

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

Now that you have tried to experience the Scriptures, break into groups of two or three and discuss the three Scriptures. Answer each of these questions?

- Who is doing the forgiving in each of the Scriptures?
- Is there anything different when God forgives a human and when one human forgives another? Can humans model their forgiveness from God’s?
- In Matthew 19:21-25 and Luke 15:11-32, Jesus deals with forgiveness of one human by another. Is there something different about the forgiveness that Jesus was talking about in Matthew 19:21-25 and in Luke 15:11-32?

**Exercise 1-8\***

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

In *Forgiving and Reconciling: Bridges to Wholeness and Hope* (InterVarsity Press, 2003), Everett Worthington suggests that divine forgiveness is tied to making a decision to forgive those who harm us. That decision binds people not to act negatively toward the person who hurt us. However, Worthington also suggests that experiencing emotional forgiveness might take longer than deciding to forgive and 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.

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

**Exercise 1-9**

**Deciding to Try to Forgive (5 minutes)**

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?

- Contemplate the heart of God toward the offender who hurt you or your loved one.
- Do you want to *try to forgive* and learn to stick by your decision?
- Do you want to *try to experience the freedom of better feelings of forgiveness*?

**Exercise 1-10\***

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

I declare to myself that on \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_, I intend to try to use these group experiences and my work at home to try to forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ and I also want to be open to God’s work in my life to become a more forgiving person.

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

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

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

**Exercise 1-11**

**Sign the Declaration of Intent (5 minutes)**

Complete the statement in Exercise 1-6 and sign it. Have someone in the group witness your signature.

**Exercise 1-12**

**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.

**For Further Study and Work at Home**

In the Appendix to this book, the Scriptures have been printed. Read over them and soak in the written Word of God, asking that the Lord show you his heart.

**Some Ideas in Response to the Few Thought Questions for Session 1**

1. To what degree do you think forgiveness by God might be a free gift? To what degree is it conditional on repentance of humans?

In *Forgiving and Reconciling: Bridges to Wholeness and Hope* (IVP, 2003), Everett Worthington suggests that the Lord forgives humans conditional on their repentance. Yet sometimes there is not time or opportunity to demonstrate the genuineness of the repentance. The thief on the cross probably received divine forgiveness in

God the Father's response to Jesus' prayer (Luke 23:34a). God knows our heart. He has a heart for both justice and mercy, and he longs to lavish love on those with a broken and contrite heart (Ps 51).

2. To what degree might forgiveness of one person by another be conditional on the repentance of the other? Do you think that perhaps the fact that God can know people's hearts yet people cannot know each other's hearts might make divine forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness operate a bit differently?

We can't know the other person's motives. Scripture calls on humans to be merciful and grant forgiveness generously. We are not to judge the heart of another. That is for God.

3. In Texas, Carla Faye Tucker was executed for a brutal murder. She had become a Christian in prison. She had received a statement of forgiveness and support from one of the children of the people she had murdered. If God forgives a person and so does a person victimized by the offense, does that mean that Carla should have been pardoned by the state?

Just as divine and interpersonal forgiveness differ from each other, social or societal forgiveness differs from both. A society has social rules that help bind it together, and so Carla Faye Tucker had to pay the social penalty for her brutal murders. In *Forgiving and Reconciling*, Worthington describes the murder of his mother. Although he forgave the murders, he still suggests that if they were to be apprehended, they would need to be imprisoned so that such a crime could not happen to other elderly women.

## Session 2

### What Is Forgiveness? Goals of Session 2

1. To agree upon a working definition of forgiveness that we will use for the group's purposes.
2. To understand that there are many reasons to forgive.
3. To understand that we often hold on to past hurts by worrying and ruminating about them.

### A Few Thought Questions for Session 2

1. The Old Testament uses two different words for forgiveness and the New Testament uses several different words to get across the concept of forgiveness. Each of the words has a little different meaning depending on the purpose of the writer and the context of the passage. In English, we usually translate all of those words "forgive" or some related word (like "forgiving" or "forgiveness"). Does it make sense that we might, in English, also make some finer distinctions in types of forgiveness?
2. Does it really matter how forgiveness is defined?
3. Why *should* I forgive? Should I forgive one who hurt me primarily because I don't carry around the anger, resentment, and unforgiveness? Should I forgive because I get physical, mental-health, relationship, or spiritual blessings? Should I forgive out of obedience because Scripture says so? Should I forgive because God first forgave me? Should I forgive to bless the person who harmed me?

### Exercise 2-1\*

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

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

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

### Exercise 2-2\*

#### Why Forgive? (10 minutes)

Think of a time when you successfully forgave someone. Divide into groups of two or no more than three and describe the time when you forgave to one person. What were the benefits?

Each dyad share one benefit of forgiving with the group.

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

### **Exercise 2-3**

#### **Identifying the Benefits of Forgiving (10 minutes)**

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 discussion and listing of benefits.

Have each group share with the bigger group, and invite other group members to suggest additional benefits.

List each on newsprint.

#### **A few benefits to get you started**

Health: Less physical stress, better immune system functioning, and less risk of heart problems.

Mental Health: fewer negative feelings; more feelings of control and freedom.

Relationship: no grudge intrudes in the relationships; able to work toward rebuilding trust and relationship repair by forgiving.

Spiritual: more in line with what we know from Scripture, closer to God because unforgiveness doesn't separate me.

### **Exercise 2-4**

#### **Which Two of the Following Is Forgiveness? (20 minutes/30 minutes)**

Some of the following ideas have been used to describe forgiveness in the past. Two of them are accurate definitions of forgiveness. Some of them are not quite right, and some of them are just plain wrong. Which are the right ones? What are the others if they are not forgiveness? Discuss each one in your group of two or three people.

1. Telling yourself that what happened wasn't really that bad, and that you ought to just forget what happened and move on
2. Forgetting that anything bad happened, simply pushing the event or relationship out of your memory
3. Starting up your relationship with the person who hurt you again, as if nothing happened
4. Opening yourself to be hurt again
5. Accepting an excuse or explanation for what someone did or is doing to you
6. Doing whatever you can to smooth over conflict
7. A voluntary release of your right to condemn and get revenge on the person who hurt you because you have different feelings toward the person
8. Tolerating negative things that someone has done or continues to do to you
9. Accepting people despite their flaws
10. Blaming and confronting the person who hurt you
11. Getting someone who hurt you to believe that everything is still OK

12. Getting even with the person who hurt you
13. Voluntary decision to give up the right to revenge and release a person from any interpersonal debt incurred by wronging you.
14. Having the other person apologize, express regret, or beg forgiveness until the balance of justice has been restored.

I choose \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_ as the definition(s) of forgiveness. Here's why: (write your reasons below)

### **Discuss this in your group**

Here are reactions to each incorrect definition of forgiveness. Read the definition on the previous page. Then read the reactions (on this page and the next).

1. This is denial. If you are hurt and you try to deny it to yourself, the denial almost never works. The hurt keeps resurfacing and you never seem to be free of it.
2. Forgetting is impossible. A memory has been formed. The memory may shift with time. It may change. Or the pain you associate with the memory may even diminish or disappear. But you simply won't be able to completely forget. The disturbing part of trying to forget is that the harder you try, the less you will succeed.
3. Trying to start over might actually smooth out the relationship. But smoothing out the relationship is not forgiving. In addition, pretending that the event didn't matter might communicate to the person who hurt you that it is okay to hurt you the same way again.
4. Opening yourself to be hurt again is possible if you continue or restart your interaction with the person who hurt you. That decision is separate from a decision to forgive or not. You can forgive and not restore the relationship (called reconciliation) or forgive and not restore the relationship. Or you can *not forgive* but choose to interact with the person (and risk further hurts) or *not forgive* and not choose to interact.
5. You can accept an excuse or explanation (whether a valid excuse or explanation or an inadequate one) and still not forgive the person for hurting you.
6. Smoothing over conflict can be done whether or not you forgive.
7. This is emotional forgiveness. It acknowledges that a wrong was done but chooses not to seek revenge and not to continue to condemn the person who hurt you. It is the experience of forgiving because you experience different feelings toward the person.
8. Tolerating negative things will generally not stop the negative, and it will generally keep you angry and unforgiving.
9. Accepting someone (with or without acknowledging the flaws) is not forgiving. We can accept a person and not forgive a hurtful act by the person. Or we can forgive a hurtful act and still not accept the person.
10. Blaming a person for hurting you certainly acknowledges the person's guilt but blame keeps the hurt "on the front burner." Confronting the person, which is directly talking with the person about the hurt, might help the relationship (if the confrontation is done gently in love and other person talks instead of attaching or defending). Confronting the person might also damage the relationship. Confronting is not forgiving.
11. Getting someone who hurt you to believe everything is OK when you feel hurt is not forgiving; it is deception. The deception might be done for good motives (such as to spare feelings or prevent being fired by a boss). Or the deception might have more complex or even evil motives (such as setting the person up so you can hurt him or her).
12. Getting even is revenge, not forgiveness.
13. This is decisional forgiveness. It involves your pledge that your behavior will not be aimed at revenge, but that you will try to behave as if the transgression never happened.
14. While having the person apologize, express regret, or beg forgiveness might make you willing to put the offense behind you and might allow you to feel at peace, it is more like getting justice than like forgiving. If the other person humbles himself or herself enough to satisfy your sense of justice, often the other person will feel resentful and feel that you might have asked for too much.

**Exercise 2-5**

**Assessing the Hurts (10 minutes/15 minutes)**

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?

- \_\_\_ Disappointment: I did not get from the person some things I wanted, some things I looked forward to, or some things that I expected.
- \_\_\_ Rejection: I experienced the loss of some important parts of our relationship and felt that some personal flaw of mine might have been the cause of the loss of the relationship.
- \_\_\_ Abandonment: I was left behind, physically or emotionally. This experience left me feeling fearful and insecure about the future.
- \_\_\_ Ridicule: I was the object of his/her anger and mockery. I sometimes wonder if the ridicule was deserved or accurate.
- \_\_\_ Humiliation: I lost every shred of pride and dignity I had.
- \_\_\_ Betrayal: My confidence was completely destroyed.
- \_\_\_ Deception: I was lied to, cheated on, or deceived.
- \_\_\_ Abuse: I was treated in a way that degraded who I am and robbed me of my dignity, emotionally, physically, or sexually.
- \_\_\_ Separated, unconnected, or estranged: I felt a loss of connection.
- \_\_\_ Other: What were they?

Describe your feelings when you learned about the person's hurtful actions. (Write at least 3 sentences about your feelings.)

**Exercise 2-6**

**Nurturing the Hurt: Small Group Discussion (10 minutes/20 minutes)**

Complete Exercise 2-6, Nurturing the Hurt, by answering the following three questions in groups of two or three. (You don't write the answers first. Just discuss.)

1. Are there any ways that you are possibly nurturing the hurt in your mind now? Can you think of any ways that you think about the events that happened to you that may serve to continue your pain?
2. What are some of the payoffs of nurturing your hurt?
3. What are some of the costs of nurturing your hurt?

Come back together into a large group and have each group share their responses on each of the three questions.

**Exercise 2-7\***

**Pain Doesn't Have the Last Word (5 minutes/20 minutes)**

The leader presents an illustration.

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.

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)**

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

### **For Further Study and Work at Home**

Think of two recent examples in which you were hurt or offended and forgave the person who harmed you both through making a decision to forgive and through emotionally forgiving the person. Pray that the Lord show you his heart in bringing about the healing you experienced. Also try to discern, relative to the period immediately after the hurt or offense, whether you feel differently toward the person. Do you think differently? Do you believe the person is safe to be around? Does that mean you didn't fully forgive, or is the feeling of lack of safety something else?

### **Some Ideas in Response to the Few Thought Questions for Session 2**

1. The Old Testament uses two different words for forgiveness and the New Testament uses several different words to get across the concept of forgiveness. Each of the words has a little different meaning depending on the purpose of the writer and the context of the passage. In English, we usually translate all of those words "forgive" or some related word (like "forgiving" or "forgiveness"). Does it make sense that we might, in English, also make some finer distinctions in types of forgiveness?

We made a distinction, based on different uses in Scripture, between granting decisional forgiveness, which we are obligated to do, and experiencing emotional forgiveness, which usually takes a while and is difficult to do. This group experience is primarily about how to experience emotional forgiveness more quickly and thoroughly.

2. Does it really matter how forgiveness is defined?

It is important that we adopt a "working definition" of forgiveness to use when in the group. People legitimately differ in whether they think forgiveness is best initiated by changing their thinking or beliefs, changing their motivations, changing their behaviors, changing their emotional experience, or simply allowing God to sovereignly build forgiveness in one's life. Regardless of how forgiveness is begun, when it is complete, we have made a decision to forgive and have different emotions. We might also have different thoughts, beliefs, and actions. Experience from the groups has taught us that it distracts from everyone's ability to allow God to build more forgiving characters in all the group members if we argue about the "correct" definition of forgiveness, as if there were only one correct definition. Instead, it mutually builds each person up to enter into trying to experience getting closer to God's heart and experiencing the forgiveness he can bring about. We encourage group members to debate what forgiveness is in all of its fullness, but to do so after trying to experience all six sessions of the group.

3. Why *should* I forgive? Should I forgive one who hurt me primarily because I don't carry around the anger, resentment, and unforgiveness? Should I forgive because I get physical, mental-health, relationship, or spiritual blessings? Should I forgive out of obedience because Scripture says so? Should I forgive because God first forgave me? Should I forgive to bless the person who harmed me?

There is no single reason why we should forgive. As complicated humans living in complicated communities, it is good for us to forgive—physically, mentally, relationally, and spiritually, and it is good for society that more people forgive. Yet, we have found that when people forgive for these "instrumental" reasons, they paradoxically often do not receive the depth of forgiveness that they get when they forgive because they love the Lord and are grateful for his mercy to themselves and because they want to bless the person who harmed them. This is a great mystery. The Lord wants us to bless others instead of being so self-focused, and when we bless others, the blessings flow automatically to us.



### Session 3

## Recalling the Hurt (in Helpful Ways)

### Goal of Session 3

1. To tell the story of how we were hurt or offended and then try to look at the story differently—through God’s eyes, through the eyes of an objective observer, and through the eyes of the person who hurt us.

### A Few Thought Questions for Session 3

1. Can you think of any Biblical examples in which someone harmed a person yet God’s hand was in it to bring about good from the event?
2. When you recall times that you were hurt, disappointed, misunderstood, betrayed, and dealt with unfairly, what are the effects of thinking and feeling the same way every time you recall or tell those events?
3. Is dealing with a transgression against you similar to grieving a loss?

#### Exercise 3-1\*

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

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

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

#### Exercise 3-2

#### Decisional Forgiveness (5 minutes)

Exercise: Discuss with your dyadic partner the following two questions:

Have you made a *decision* (regardless of your feelings) in the sense of Jesus’ command to *grant forgiveness* for the target transgression that you picked out at the beginning?

What does making such a *decision* mean for your behavior toward the person? Will you do anything differently than you have been doing?

### R=Recall the Hurt

#### Exercise 3-3

#### Recall the Hurt through Imagination (10 minutes)

Quiet yourself, relax. As the group leader narrates, picture the person who hurt you. Picture the experiences you had during and before and after the hurtful incident. Remember conversations and other experiences of events.

#### Exercise 3-4

#### Recall the Hurt through Discussing What You Just Imagined (5 minutes/15 minutes)

Go into dyads. Discuss your stories.

The person talking should try to create a vivid picture of event. The person listening should just support the talker, not try to solve problems or make suggestions.

Come back into full group and facilitator asks for people to share.

#### Exercise 3-5

#### Discussion of Events Objectively (10 minutes)

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. So visualize as a 3<sup>rd</sup> party observer. Get more distance on the story. Do imagery.

- a. Go back into your dyads. Share the story again but this time without emphasizing the perpetrator's badness or your own victimization or the consequences this has had.
- b. Come back in-group and process the differences in the two.

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

Write brief answers to each of the following questions as the facilitator directs you to do so:

1. Have you ever experienced some awful events and later seen God's hand working for good in it? (silent contemplation; then write an answer)
2. Let's revisit your transgression. Where was God? Can you see God's hand at all? Where would you look for it? (silent contemplation; then discuss with your dyadic partner)
3. Who comforts you during your trials? Person? God?

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

Imagine that God wants to take your hurt and redeem it. Stand and 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)**

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.

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

**E=Empathize with (and Sympathize with, Feel Compassion for, and Love) the One Who Hurt You**

**Exercise 3-9**  
**We Do Things for Reasons (5 minutes/20 minutes)**

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.

**Exercise 3-10**  
**A Thought to Ponder Prior to Next Session (1 minute)**

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)**

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

Make a list of five times in your life—thinking back to early childhood, adolescence, and more recently—that someone significantly betrayed, hurt, offended, or disappointed you. Ask that the Lord show you his heart. Who is the Lord comforting? Who is the Lord healing?

### **Some Ideas in Response to the Few Thought Questions for Session 3**

1. Can you think of any Biblical examples in which someone harmed a person yet God’s hand was in it to bring about good from the event?

It’s easy to come up with the example of Joseph because Joseph’s conclusion (Gen 50:20) is explicit—“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” There are many other examples—from the crucifixion to the stoning of Stephen (in which Saul participated and later became God’s apostle—to the martyrdom of the apostles.

2. When you recall times that you were hurt, disappointed, misunderstood, betrayed, and dealt with unfairly, what are the effects of thinking and feeling the same way every time you recall or tell those events?

Telling the story with all of its pathos and tragedy—whether to yourself or to others—will program you with the message that you are a victim. Is that the picture of yourself that you want to dwell on.

3. Is dealing with a transgression against you similar to grieving a loss?

When we are hurt, we *might* lose many things—our peace, our sense of safety and security, our close friendship, material things, our belief in a just world. We grieve those losses. Grieving comes in stages. We are at first upset and emotional. Later, we replay those events again and again—to others and in our own minds. Eventually, most of the events are accepted and we move on with life. If the period of time in which we are replaying the events in our minds and in conversations to others tell a story of victimization or hatred, it can program that view into our souls. But if our story is one of forgiveness, we program into our souls a story of redemption, mercy, and often responsiveness to the Lord’s prompting to forgive.

## **Session 4**

### **Empathy for the One Who Hurt You: The Hard Part of Experiencing Emotional Forgiveness Goals of Session 4**

1. To empathize with the person who hurt us.
2. To learn ways that we can promote empathy.
3. Even if we cannot empathize, to learn ways to sympathize and experience compassion for those who have harmed us—and ultimately to love our enemies.

### **A Few Thought Questions for Session 4**

1. How can we discern God’s heart? Isn’t God hard to identify with?
2. Does God really want us to get into the mind and heart of a person who inflicted harm on us? Should we identify in some way with heartless mass murderers, serial killers, people who abuse their children or family members, people who betray fragile trusts?
3. In empathizing, loving our enemies, and forgiving, what is our part and what is God’s part?

### **Exercise 4-1\***

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

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

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

**E=Empathize with (and Sympathize with, Feel Compassion for, and Love) the One Who Hurt You**  
(continued from the previous session)

**Exercise 4-2**

**Remember: We Do Things for Reasons (5 minutes)**

Someone should 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)**

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)**

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)**

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.

- On 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.
- Discuss what you have written with your partner.
- Each person in the group may be asked to share what you got out of the experience.

**Exercise 4-6\***

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

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)**

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)**

- a. Each person does empty chair conversation with person who transgressed.
- b. Group processing empty chair exercise. Did you consider person's history? Pressures?

**Exercise 4-9**

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

- a. What does God's heart want for your offender?  
Think  
Discuss in big group
- b. What does God's heart want for you?  
Think  
Discuss in big group

**Exercise 4-10\***

**Sympathizing with the Offender (10 minutes)**

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?

You might be asked to 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)**

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

**Answer this:** If you felt real compassion for the person who hurt you, what might you do to meet one of the person's needs?

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 spitefully 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? Write a note to yourself in answer to that question.

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**

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)**

**Reflect on these two verses:**

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?

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

**A= Give an Altruistic Gift of Forgiveness**

**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)**

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

**For Further Study and Work at Home**

In the Appendix to this book, the Scriptures have been printed. Read over them and soak in the written Word of God, asking that the Lord show you his heart.

**Some Ideas in Response to the Few Thought Questions for Session 4**

1. How can we discern God’s heart? Isn’t God hard to identify with?

God is unlike humans, but he became human so he could identify with us and we could identify with him. If you have trouble discerning God’s heart, ask yourself how Jesus would react.

2. Does God really want us to get into the mind and heart of a person who inflicted harm on us? Should we identify in some way with heartless mass murderers, serial killers, people who abuse their children or family members, people who betray fragile trusts?

Jesus invited us to love our enemies and to pray for those who inflict harm on us. That is a great challenge. It is one of the distinctives of the Christian religion. Most religions make a big distinction between those adherents to the religion and those who are hostile to it. Somehow, Christianity is different. How we can possibly love our enemies certainly falls to the mysterious and powerful work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Even praying to be receptive is enabled by the work of the Holy Spirit. Lord, we pray for your help.

3. In empathizing, loving our enemies, and forgiving, what is our part and what is God’s part?

We acknowledge that nothing good can come from within us. As fallen creatures, even though we are made in God’s image, we are incapable of uncontaminated good. Jesus wants to conform us to his image, and to do so is like building a complicated structure of indestructible concrete. But to allow the concrete to flow into the proper shape, we can provide structures—like wooden forms. Structures of liturgy or of worship allow the Lord to meet us in formal worship. Structures of disciplined Bible reading and Bible study permit God to speak through his written Word. Structures of public confession of sins can allow private confession. Similarly, following the five steps to REACH forgiveness can permit the Lord to work in our lives. Like worship, Bible reading, or confession, the Lord is not limited to working through the structure. But often, he does.

## Session 5

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

1. To create a sense of gratitude for the forgiveness we have received.
2. To motivate an altruistic attitude toward those who hurt and offend us.
3. To promote a commitment to express any emotional forgiveness that we experience.

#### A Few Thought Questions for Session 5

1. What are you grateful for? Do you consider yourself a generally grateful person? To whom are you grateful and for what?
2. Are you often altruistic? Altruism is unselfish behavior to aid another person. Can you think of a time when you behaved altruistically? What happened?
3. If you come to the conclusion that you have forgiven someone, do you expect that you should forget the incident? Should you be able to see the person and feel nothing but love in your heart for the person? Should you put by-gones aside and embrace the person with an open heart, ignoring all past history that might suggest that you be careful?

#### Exercise 5-1\*

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

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

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

#### A= Give an Altruistic Gift of Forgiveness (continued)

#### Exercise 5-2

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

“Humility is the antidote to shame.” Dan Allender

**Recalling a Time When You Needed Forgiveness.** Think back to a time in your past when you hurt someone or did something wrong, and you needed forgiveness, **and you were granted that forgiveness.** This might be an incident from your childhood, a time when you were in high school or college, a time in your marriage or relationship, or an incident in some other relationship. It might involve a need for forgiveness from a person or from God. What matters is that you had done something wrong and felt badly about it **and** that you were forgiven. Write a description of the event.

Now, answer the following questions in writing by jotting a few notes.

1. What did it feel like to be in trouble, to lose face, to lose respect or self-respect, and to need forgiveness?
2. What does it feel like in your stomach? How did your palms feel? Other parts of the body?
3. What would you call the emotions that you experienced as you realized that you had sinned and needed forgiveness?



4. What did it feel (or would it have felt) like to ask the person you hurt for forgiveness and to have received it? Were you humbled?

**Exercise 5-3\***  
**Dyad Partner Interviews You (5 minutes/10 minutes)**

Each person's dyadic partner interviews the other person. Ask the questions that you wrote down. After one interview is complete, the other person interviews. Here are the questions again.

1. What did it feel like to be in trouble, to lose face, to lose respect or self-respect, and to need forgiveness?
2. What does it feel like in your stomach? How did your palms feel? Other parts of the body?
3. What would you call the emotions that you experienced as you realized that you had sinned and needed forgiveness?
4. What did it feel (or would it have felt) like to ask the person you hurt for forgiveness and to have received it? Were you humbled?

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

**Exercise 5-4**  
**Getting in Touch with the Gratitude We Feel for Our Forgiveness (5 minutes/10 minutes)**

Focus for a moment on how good it felt to receive forgiveness and the feeling of freedom you received when the burden of guilt was lifted from you in that time in the past. When you have been able to adopt this state of gratitude, do this exercise.

Exercise:

- If you were going to write a letter of gratitude for being forgiven, what would you say? Write a few notes here:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- First one dyadic partner tell the other. Then reverse roles.

**Exercise 5-5**  
**Reactions to Being Forgiven (5 minutes)**

What did it feel like to be forgiven? Share your feelings with the group.

**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)**

Each member takes a piece of paper. 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)**

On a percent basis, what percent of the negative feelings have you replaced?

I have forgiven the person who hurt or offended me \_\_\_\_\_ percent of the negative feelings I held.

**C=Commit to the Forgiveness You Experienced**

**Exercise 5-10**

**Commit By Telling Others (5 minutes)**

- Tell your dyadic partner how much you forgave emotionally and how that feels.
- Each person shares with the group the percent of the negative feelings released.

**Exercise 5-11**

**Completing a Certificate of Emotional Forgiveness (5 minutes)**

Complete the following:

**CERTIFICATE OF EMOTIONAL FORGIVENESS**

I DECLARE TO MYSELF THAT AS OF THE DATE \_\_\_\_\_, 200 \_\_, I HAVE FORGIVEN \_\_\_\_\_  
FOR \_\_\_\_\_.

TO DATE I HAVE FORGIVEN \_\_\_\_\_PERCENT OF THE EMOTIONAL UNFORGIVENESS.

SIGNED \_\_\_\_\_

**Exercise 5-12\***

**What if Emotional Forgiveness Isn't Complete? (10 minutes)**

Someone read this aloud:

1. If you have experienced less than 100 percent emotional forgiveness, you might need to go back through the steps again.
2. If you have a history of mutual hurtful acts with your transgressor—perhaps some big hurts and many small hurts—you do not need to recall every hurt to effectively forgive your transgressor for his or her hurtfulness. You can forgive the hurtfulness by taking three steps.
  - a. Pick two or three of the most hurtful acts that will stand for proxies for all the hurts inflicted by the person.
  - b. Work through those two or three—one at a time—until each is forgiven.
  - c. At some point you will decide that you have forgiven enough of the individual acts, and you have thus forgiven the person.

Discuss these two statements.

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

**Exercise 5-13**

**Hand Washing (5 minutes/10 minutes)**

- Write a brief description of the transgression on your hand.

- Then go to the restroom and wash it off.

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)**

Group discussion of the **barriers to emotional forgiving completely**. List them as people discuss.

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

#### **Exercise 5-15**

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

With your dyadic partner, take turns telling each other what you would say if you were to write a letter to the transgressor expressing your **decisional** forgiveness and telling the person of your experience of emotional forgiveness.

(Note: I'm not recommending that you actually write such a letter. Sometimes that type of letter can offend the other person—especially if he or she isn't aware you still held unforgiveness against him or her.)

#### **Exercise 5-16**

#### **More Forgiveness (5 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.

Then, 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**

#### **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.

#### **For Further Study and Work at Home**

Using a concordance, look up the verses that pertain to "gratitude," being "grateful," "thanks," and "thanksgiving" (and other related words). To whom ought we to be thankful? To whom ought we to express our thanks? Do the same type of word-study with "altruism" or "unselfish" or the opposite—"selfish."

#### **Some Ideas in Response to the Few Thought Questions for Session 5**

1. What are you grateful for? Do you consider yourself a generally grateful person? To whom are you grateful and for what?

When we are grateful, we can feel that gratitude toward God, luck, or any person. Scientists have begun to show that an attitude of gratitude can produce better health. In fact, just writing down things you are grateful for each day can result in better health.

2. Are you often altruistic? Altruism is unselfish behavior to aid another person. Can you think of a time when you behaved altruistically? What happened?

Scientists are studying altruism, too. Some people argue that no purely altruistic act is possible, that all acts have some self-interested motives. Usually, though, such debates can distract us from trying to practice altruism. Let's not be distracted from acting in altruistic love at every possible opportunity.

3. If you come to the conclusion that you have forgiven someone, do you expect that you should forget the incident? Should you be able to see the person and feel nothing but love in your heart for the person? Should you put by-gones aside and embrace the person with an open heart, ignoring all past history that might suggest that you be careful?

“Forgive and forget,” is, of course, not Biblical. It’s social encouragement that once we forgive, try not to bring up the matter. In fact, though, forgiving implies that we don’t really forget. If we forgive it is because we remember and then choose to forgive and often experience emotional forgiveness as well. But when a person hurts us, they make it less safe to be around them. It is natural to be more wary—even if we have fully forgiven—about being harmed again. It takes a while for a person to regain our trust. Being prudent is not the same thing as being unforgiving.

## **Session 6**

### **Holding on to Forgiveness and Becoming a More Forgiving Christian**

#### **Goals of Session 6**

1. To develop a number of strategies to maintain emotional peace that comes from forgiveness and to practice those.
2. To expand the applications of the REACH model to other issues so that we can become truly more forgiving people.

#### **A Few Thought Questions for Session 6**

1. How do you try to hold on to forgiveness whenever you unexpectedly encounter someone that you forgave?
2. Do you have ways of getting your mind off of worry and rumination if you start to think negatively about an old wound? What strategies work for you?
3. If you wanted to design your own program to become more forgiving, what would you do?

#### **Exercise 6-1\***

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

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

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

#### **Exercise 6-2**

##### **Review of Major Concepts (5 minutes)**

Facilitator summary 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.

#### **H=Hold on to Forgiveness When You Doubt**

#### **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”.

Here’s the message: 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 (5 minutes/10 minutes)**

You've worked hard and experienced either complete or at least partial emotional forgiveness when compared to beginning the group. But it's possible you might doubt that you actually have forgiven. Can you think of some times when you might doubt that you have forgiven?

Group discussion. List on the board or newsprint.

One conclusion: 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. After all have finished, share with the group.

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

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

**Exercise 6-6**

**Prayer for Your Offender (10 minutes)**

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)**

How can you avoid getting back into bitterness or hatred if you are in one of those "reminder" situations?

Group discussion (List from the groups.)

**Exercise 6-8**

**Group Leader Tells Important Example (5 minutes)**

**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.*

**Exercise 6-9\***

**Control Rumination or Worry (5 minutes)**

- Experience in controlling your thoughts. Spend 20 seconds trying NOT to think about white bears.
- What worked and what didn't?
- What can you apply from this exercise when you start thinking about the time when the person hurt you?

**Exercise 6-10\***

**Summary of Ways to Hold On to Forgiveness (5 minutes)**

**WAYS TO HOLD ON TO FORGIVENESS IN THE MIDST OF A REMINDER EXPERIENCE**

- 1. GET OUT OF THE SITUATION**
- 2. DISTRACT YOURSELF**

**WAYS TO HOLD ON TO FORGIVENESS IF YOU START TO WORRY OR RUMINATE ABOUT IT**

- 1. REALIZE THAT THE PAIN OF A REMEMBERED HURT IS NOT UNFORGIVENESS.**
- 2. DON'T DWELL ON NEGATIVE EMOTIONS**
- 3. REMIND YOURSELF THAT YOU HAVE FORGIVEN THE PERSON**
- 4. SEEK REASSURANCE FROM A PARTNER OR FRIEND**
- 5. USE THE DOCUMENTS THAT YOU CREATED**
- 6. LOOK AT THE PYAMID MODEL TO REACH FORGIVENESS, AND THINK THROUGH THE STEPS AGAIN.**

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

**Exercise 6-11\***

**Prayer of St. Francis (5 minutes)**

Prayer of St. Francis.

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)**

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.

After that has been explained, 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.

**Exercise 6-13**

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

Music will be played: 12 songs. During each 2-minute (or 2.5-minute, or 3-minute) period, work on one step in the following booklet, writing out the answers in each step.

**Step 1: Why Forgive?**

Why do you want to be a more forgiving person? List as many reasons as you can while the first song is playing.

**Step 2: Identify the 10 greatest wounds you have experienced throughout your lifetime.**

(Note: Don't start this until the facilitator tells you to move to step 2.) List a short description (like: "Dad abandoned our family when I was young") of about 10 of the most severe wounds you have experienced.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

**Step 3: Forgive one wound at a time.**

Pick one of the wounds you listed in Step 2 as the third song plays, write a brief description of each.

**R= Recall the hurt (summary)**

**E=Empathize (from a sympathetic point of view, describe why the person did what he or she did)**

**A=Altruistic gift (write a reason why you might want to unselfishly grant forgiveness; you could bless this person?)**

**C=Commit to any forgiveness you experienced (write your intention to try someday, or soon, or when, to forgive)**

**H=Hold on to forgiveness (write how hard you think it would be to make this a lasting forgiveness)**

**Step 4: Identify your forgiveness heroes**

Looking back over your life and thinking of people you know or have read or heard about, identify 2 people you think of as forgiveness heroes—people who have forgiven much and whom you admire.

1. Someone you know
2. Someone from the past (examples: Jews, Gandhi, King David, Solzhenitsyn, Martin Luther King, Jr.)
3. Someone from the present whom you don't know personally

**Step 5: Examine yourself**

Write a prayer to the Lord expressing your heartfelt desire to be a more forgiving person.

**Step 6: Try to become more virtuous**

Write ways you would like to develop a more tender heart and a more virtuous character. Specifically, how do you think you could begin moving toward more virtue?

**Step 7: Change your experience with the past**

You can't change the past, but you can change the way you are going to talk about it. Pick out one of the ten events (step 2) and write how you are going to talk differently about it from now on.

**Step 8: Plan your strategy for becoming more forgiving**

Write below a way you are going to try better from now on to discern God's heart better.



Can you dedicate yourself to seeking God's heart more often, following the Lord's lead more conscientiously, and being more grateful that God talks to us?

Write something else that you really intend to do to become a more forgiving person.

**Step 9: Practice forgiving under imagined conditions**

Pick one of the people from your people from your list of ten events (Step 2). Imagine you are in a room with that person. Jesus is in the room with the two of you. What happens?

**Step 10: Practicing Forgiveness day to day**

Looking back at your list of 10 (see Step 2), choose the one person that you have the most negative feeling toward. Pray for that person until the song ends. Pray the Lord's blessing on the person.

**Step 11: Consult someone you trust**

Is there anyone you trust that you could talk to about your heartfelt desire to be a more forgiving person? Write that person, or persons, name(s) below.

**Step 12: Start a campaign to love your enemies**

If you took the Scripture seriously that we are to love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who despitefully use us, then write out things you would do to love one of those people you listed in Step 2.

**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 (5 minutes)**

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.

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

**Complete the evaluation.**

**Evaluation of the Forgiveness Group**

Rate each of the following on a scale of 1 to 5 representing the degree to which you experienced the item.

- 1 = Not at all
- 2 = A Little
- 3 = Moderate
- 4 = A Lot
- 5 = Tremendous Amount

	Not at all			Tremendous
1. I learned that making a decision to forgive doesn't necessarily mean I have forgiven emotionally.	1	2	3	4 5
2. I came to see better that God did not abandon me just because a transgression hurt me	1	2	3	4 5
3. I came to see the transgressor as more "human," fallible and needy than I did before	1	2	3	4 5
4. I became more eager to discern God's great heart more after.	1	2	3	4 5
5. I understand the transgressor better now.	1	2	3	4 5
6. I don't quite see myself as so pure and spotless as I did. I am capable of hurting other people badly.	1	2	3	4 5
7. I learned the five steps and can tell you what each is (test yourself R= ; E= ; A= ; )				

C=                    ; H=                    )                    **1      2      3      4      5**

8. To hold on to forgiveness, if I started to  
 ruminate about an old hurt, I have at least  
 two things I could do to snap myself out of it.                    **1      2      3      4      5**

9. I have committed to being a more forgiving  
 person (with God’s help) because of the  
 group.                    **1      2      3      4      5**

10. I have learned how I can be a more forgiving  
 person.                    **1      2      3      4      5**

**What feedback would you like to give your leader about your group experience?**

**What would you like to tell the leader about his or her leadership of the group?**

**TRIM**

**DIRECTIONS:** For the following questions, please indicate what you imagine your **current thoughts and feelings** would be about the person who stole from you. Use the following scale to indicate your agreement or disagreement with each of the statements.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	mildly disagree	agree and disagree equally	mildly agree	strongly agree

1. \_\_\_ I'll make him/her pay.
2. \_\_\_ I wish that something bad would happen to him/her.
3. \_\_\_ I want him/her to get what he/she deserves.
4. \_\_\_ I'm going to get even.
5. \_\_\_ I want to see him/her hurt and miserable.
6. \_\_\_ I'd keep as much distance between us as possible.
7. \_\_\_ I'd live as if he/she doesn't exist, isn't around.
8. \_\_\_ I wouldn't trust him/her.
9. \_\_\_ I'd find it difficult to act warmly toward him/her.
10. \_\_\_ I'd avoid him/her.
11. \_\_\_ I'd cut off the relationship with him/her.
12. \_\_\_ I'd withdraw from him/her.

Items 1-5 Revenge subscale; items 6-12 Avoidance subscale See McCullough, Rachal, Sandage, Worthington, Brown, & Hight (1998) *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Mean: 36; SD = 6.

### Single Item Assessment of Two Types of Forgiveness

Note: We want you to rate two types of forgiveness. For example, a person might perhaps decide to grant complete forgiveness but still feel very unforgiving toward a person.

*Granting forgiveness* is defined as **deciding (even if you don't say aloud) that you will not seek revenge against and not avoid but will try to put the relationship back on the pre-offense footing.** Using the scale below (from 0 = no forgiveness granted to 4 = complete forgiveness granted) estimate the current level to which you have granted forgiveness.

0	1	2	3	4
No Forgiveness				Complete Forgiveness

*Experiencing emotional forgiveness* is defined as **the degree to which you actually feel that your emotions have become less negative and more positive toward the person who offended or harmed you.** If 0 = No forgiveness experienced and 4 = complete forgiveness experienced (that is, if you have experienced complete emotional forgiveness, you have no negative feelings and perhaps even some positive feelings toward the person who offended or harmed you), then use the scale below to indicate to what degree you have experienced emotional forgiveness.

0	1	2	3	4
No Forgiveness				Complete Forgiveness

**DFS**

**Think of your current intentions toward the person who hurt you. Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.**

	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Disagree (D)	Neutral (N)	Agree (A)	Strongly Agree (SA)
1. I intend to try to hurt him or her in the same way he or she hurt me.	SD	D	N	A	SA
2. I will not try to help him or her if he or she needs something.	SD	D	N	A	SA
3. If I see him or her, I will act friendly.	SD	D	N	A	SA
4. I will try to get back at him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
5. I will try to act toward him or her in the same way I did before he or she hurt me.	SD	D	N	A	SA
6. If there is an opportunity to get back at him or her, I will take it.	SD	D	N	A	SA
7. I will not talk with him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
8. I will not seek revenge upon him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA

**EFS**

**Think of your current emotions toward the person who hurt you. Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.**

	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Disagree (D)	Neutral (N)	Agree (A)	Strongly Agree (SA)
1. I care about him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
2. I no longer feel upset when I think of him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
3. I'm bitter about what he or she did to me.	SD	D	N	A	SA
4. I feel sympathy toward him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
5. I'm mad about what happened.	SD	D	N	A	SA
6. I like him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
7. I resent what he or she did to me.	SD	D	N	A	SA
8. I feel love toward him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA

**TFS**

Directions: Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement below by using the following scale:

- 5 = Strongly Agree
- 4 = Mildly Agree
- 3 = Agree and Disagree Equally
- 2 = Mildly Disagree
- 1 = Strongly Disagree

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. People close to me probably think I hold a grudge too long.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I can forgive a friend for almost anything.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. If someone treats me badly, I treat him or her the same.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I try to forgive others even when they don't feel guilty for what they did.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I can usually forgive and forget an insult.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. I feel bitter about many of my relationships.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Even after I forgive someone, things often come back to me that I resent.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. There are some things for which I could never forgive even a loved one.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. I have always forgiven those who have hurt me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. I am a forgiving person.

In the Appendix to this book, the Scriptures have been printed. Read over them once again. Look for verses that apply to being a more forgiving person and to those that apply to forgiving isolated transgressions. Soak in the written Word of God, asking that the Lord show you his heart. Does he want you to be a more forgiving person? What is your evidence of that desire?

### **Some Ideas in Response to the Few Thought Questions for Session 6**

1. How do you try to hold on to forgiveness whenever you unexpectedly encounter someone that you forgave?

Sometimes we work hard to forgive, but we just stumble across the person in an unexpected location or context. We might feel those old familiar resentments begin to surface. Are you relegated to just getting away from the situation or avoiding the person and trying not to interact with him or her?

2. Do you have ways of getting your mind off of worry and rumination if you start to think negatively about an old wound? What strategies work for you?

Usually, it doesn't help to command ourselves not to worry. That just makes us worry more and worry because we cannot stop worrying. We need some sort of distraction. Perhaps praying for the person is a good distraction.

3. If you wanted to design your own program to become more forgiving, what would you do?

In this group experience, the main idea has been that we become a more forgiving person by forgiving one transgression at a time, having a heart that discerns God's heart, and allowing the Lord to work his love in and through us. We have used the structure of learning a five-step method to forgive individual hurts and broadening its application to other hurts we've experienced. We also have been focused on discerning the heart of God throughout our attempts to forgive. What other ways work for you?

## **Appendix A**

### **Bible Verses about Forgiving**

#### ***Decisional Forgiveness***

##### **Matthew 18:21-35**

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

Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

“The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything. The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’

“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, “I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

(Both end up in bondage when they both could have been free)

##### **John 29:23**

If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

##### **Matthew 5:23-26**

23“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you. 24 Leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

25“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. 26 I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

##### **Matthew 6:12**

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

##### **Matthew 6:14-15**

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

##### **Galatians 5:15**

If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

##### **Psalms 66:18**

If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened

#### ***Emotional (Warmth-based) forgiveness***

##### **Lk 15:11-32**

Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country, and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he

began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of your was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

### **Matthew 18:35**

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

### **Matthew 5:44**

But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

### **Matthew 9:2**

Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.”

### **Luke 6:27-38**

27 “But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

29 If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you. 32 “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ lend to ‘sinners,’ expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

37 Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. 38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured in your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

### **Acts 7:55-60**

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” At this they covered their ears and yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.



**1 John 4:20**

If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.

**John 12:47**

“As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it.”

**1 John 1:9**

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

**James 5:14-16**

*14* Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. *15* And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. *16* Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

**1 John 1:1-6**

If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

**1 John 2:11**

But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.

**1 John 1:7**

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his son, purifies us from all sin.

**1 John 2:10**

Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble.

**1 John 4:20**

*20* If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.

*21* And he has given us this command: Whoever love God must also love his brother.

**Colossians 3:16-17**

*16* Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. *17* And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

**Ephesians 4:31-32**

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

**2 Corinthians 2:10**

*10* If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake.