

charis

A Care and Counseling Initiative



Facilitating Forgiveness

finding healing and freedom through forgiveness



Charis is an Urban Alliance initiative. www.urbanalliance.com

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Through Charis, Urban Alliance works with churches and parachurch organizations to help them communicate about mental health in ways that offer hope and create safe environments where people feel comfortable seeking help.

Many people who are struggling with their relational, emotional and mental health do not receive the support they need. They often do not know where to turn for help, or are embarrassed to acknowledge they are struggling. Additionally, a lack of resources in the community, poverty and stigma are barriers that keep people from receiving help.

Research shows that the church is one of the most common places people go to seek help when they are struggling emotionally. This is why it is so important for pastors and care providers to be equipped to offer care and connect people to appropriate help. Many churches offer support groups, care ministries or pastoral care. And, professional counselors who offer care from a Christian perspective provide services in the community.

Through Charis, Urban Alliance works with churches and organizations to help them communicate about mental health in ways that offer hope and create safe environments where people feel comfortable seeking help. Urban Alliance also equips care providers to respond sensitively, effectively connect people who are seeking care to appropriate support, and provide care, so they may cope well and heal.

The Charis website is a tool, managed by Urban Alliance, that can be used by individuals and organizations to help connect people in need of support to high-quality professional counselors, support groups and specialized support services offered from a Christian perspective.

These collaborative efforts have helped hundreds of people overcome barriers and more effectively cope, have ongoing support, strengthen their relationships, experience hope, joy and peace, and persevere despite life's challenges.

To learn more about Charis, visit www.urbanalliance.com/charis.
To visit the Charis website, visit www.charisnetworkct.org.

Introduction

The idea of forgiveness is an essential part of the Biblical narrative. In the Old Testament animal sacrifice served as a means of obtaining forgiveness and in the New Testament Jesus was sacrificed on the cross so our sins can be forgiven. All people are in need of a Savior to forgive their sins and are called to forgive one another.

In Matthew 18, Peter asks Jesus, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” And Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” Some versions say, “seventy times seven.” This isn’t a math equation where Jesus is giving the precise number of times to forgive (77 or 490). Rather, the numbers have spiritual significance and represent infinity. Jesus is calling Peter to a new way of thinking and living where forgiveness is always unconditionally offered to others.

Further, the field of psychology has done extensive research on forgiveness and linked it to a number of positive outcomes, such as improved well-being, decreased depression, decreased anxiety, decreased stress, and improved physical health. Conversely, unforgiveness actually harms us and leads to a number of physically, emotionally, and spiritually negative outcomes.^{1,2} Taken together, forgiveness is a powerful process that is prescribed by God as a way of life and supports a person’s healing after a painful event.

While forgiveness is widely talked about in the Christian community, many do not fully understand what it is. Further, there are many myths and misconceptions that confuse believers and hinder the kind of forgiveness Jesus seeks.





Understanding Forgiveness

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Forgiveness represents a person’s decision to relinquish their perceived right to punish, judge, condemn, or harbor anger or bitterness against a person who has wronged them. Additionally, many assert that true forgiveness goes a step further and offers something positive, such as empathy, compassion, and understanding toward the offender.

The idea of blessing the offender is consistent with Luke 6:28 which states, “bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” and is what makes forgiveness both a virtue and a powerful construct in positive psychology.

The parable of the unmerciful servant offers great insights into Biblical forgiveness. It helps us to understand what it is, God’s plan for mercy, and His desire for us to offer forgiveness to others.

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

“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 bags of gold 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.

At this 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 silver coins. 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 it 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 outraged 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 handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

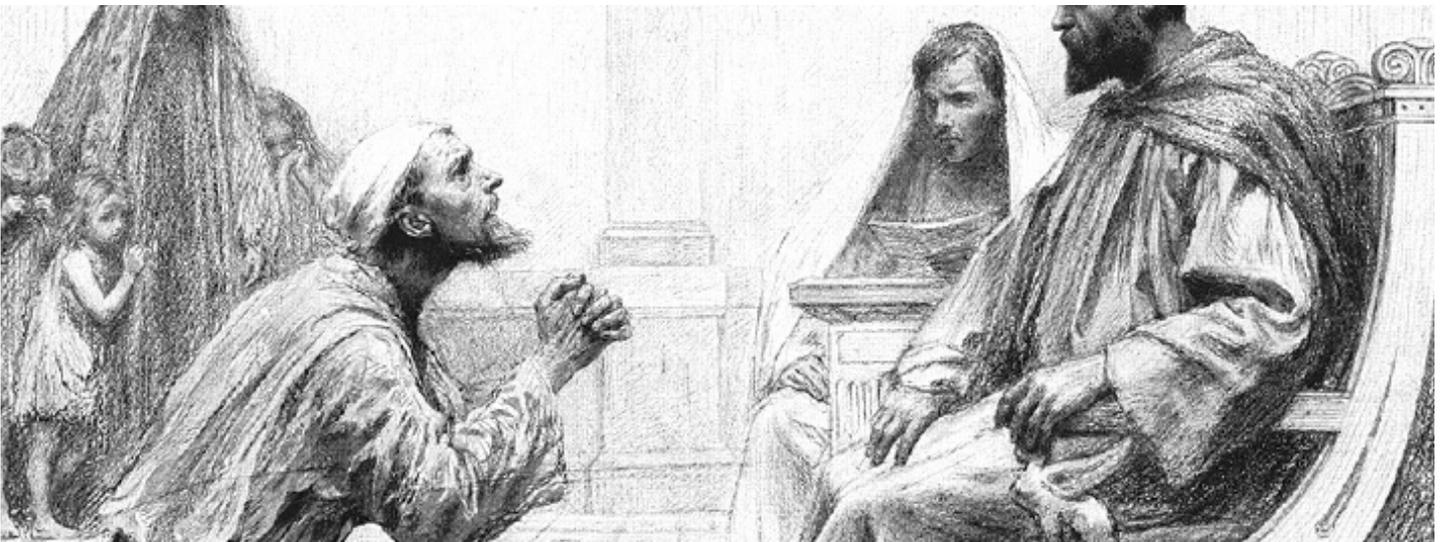
This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.” (Matthew 18: 23-35)

*Jesus models
forgiveness by
extending love
and mercy first.*

As Ephesians

4:32 states,

*“Be kind to
one another,
tenderhearted,
forgiving one
another, as
God in Christ
forgave you.”*



While much wisdom can be drawn from this parable, the following paragraphs highlight important points related to forgiveness.

- 1. Jesus models forgiveness by forgiving all of our sins.** Just as the king in the parable “canceled the debt and let the servant go,” Jesus paid the price for our sin when He died on the cross. Jesus models forgiveness by extending love and mercy first. As Ephesians 4:32 states, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”
- 2. Jesus calls us to respond to His mercy by forgiving others.** In the parable, the king expects the servant to respond to his mercy by being merciful to others. The king responds to the servant’s lack of mercy by asking the question, “Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” The king then turns the servant over to the jailor to be tortured. The parable ends warning the reader that God will respond to us as the king did to the servant unless we also choose to forgive.
- 3. Forgiveness is a choice.** In each interaction, the person who is owed a debt has to choose how they will respond to the person who owes it to them. In the same way we need to choose how to respond to people who sin against us. Forgiveness is a choice.
- 4. Forgiveness involves counting and acknowledging the debt.** The parable is quite specific about the debt owed in each interaction. The king is owed ten thousand bags of gold and the servant is owed one hundred silver coins. In order to release a person from their debt and forgive them, one must take stock of what is owed. In this parable the debt is monetary; however, debt can take many forms such as emotional pain (e.g., anger, hurt, sadness), broken trust, lost time, physical injury, broken relationships, or possessions.
- 5. Forgiveness involves relinquishing our right to collect the debt (extending mercy).** Once the debt has been counted, the person has to choose what to do with it. In this parable, we see that God calls us to forgive or relinquish the debt. This is what the king does for the servant and what he expects the servant to go and do for others. Forgiving debt involves relinquishing (or giving) it to Jesus. When a person gives debt to Jesus they are acknowledging that He is the judge. They give up their right to punish, judge or condemn. When someone is being passive aggressive, they are punishing indirectly because they feel wronged. This is an example of unforgiveness. Forgiveness is quite challenging and requires that the Holy Spirit help our hearts, so our emotions, thoughts, and actions align with our choice to forgive.
- 6. Forgiveness often involves empathy. In this passage the king “took pity on the servant.”** This means he saw the situation through the lens of compassion and responds by forgiving the debt. In addition to forgiveness, the person who is wronged may choose to offer something positive to the offender. They may choose to bless the person and extend empathy, compassion, and understanding.

“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.”

Misconceptions about Forgiveness

Often forgiveness is hindered by misconceptions. A healthy understanding of what forgiveness is and isn't can help a person as they walk through this process.

Forgiveness is not forgetting. Many people struggle to forgive because they feel they need to forget the offense and act as though it never occurred. This is simply not the case. Our experiences contribute to our growth, character, and development. This is true of both joyful and painful experiences, which must both be acknowledged. Pretending something never happened invalidates the experience of the victim and generally does not lead to true forgiveness.

Forgiving someone does not mean you no longer feel the pain of the other person's offense. All too often people worry they didn't really forgive the other person because they still feel hurt or angry. This is a common misconception. Forgiveness is a choice, and once a person makes that choice, they ask Jesus to help them with painful emotions rather than using them as a justification to punish the other person. It is common to struggle with the pain resulting from an offense for a period of time after making the choice to forgive; however, rather than directing that pain towards the offender, the person looks to Jesus for comfort and help.

Forgiving someone who has sinned against you doesn't mean you cease longing for justice. It is quite natural to long for justice when a person has been wronged. Forgiveness involves trusting God, the perfect judge, to make things right. This requires faith and patience, because sometimes things are made right on this earth and other times a person has to wait until heaven. Further, it is appropriate and Biblical to contact the police or child protection services if someone harms another person or breaks the law. God put authorities in their positions and can use them as vehicles to keep people safe and bring about justice. And, forgiving someone does not mean that you approve of or condone their actions or choices, but that you humbly recognize that we all sin, and we all have the opportunity to demonstrate in our lives the forgiveness God extends to us through Christ.

Forgiveness is rarely a one-time, climactic event. Very often forgiveness is a process that occurs over time. It involves choosing to forgive each time painful emotions arise. It is common for a person to make the choice to forgive, and from time-to-time struggle with anger or a desire to punish. When this happens, the decision to forgive must be affirmed and the person can ask Jesus for help. It is important to learn to manage these thoughts and feelings in new ways. Forgiveness is a process that involves building new habits to manage feelings of anger or bitterness.

*“You, Lord,
are forgiving
and good,
abounding in
love to all who
call to you.”*

Psalm 86:5

Steps in Forgiveness

Forgiveness can be offered to anyone regardless of their participation in the process. In general, forgiveness involves the following steps.

1. Acknowledge the debt (hurt) and its impact. Just like the king and the servant in the parable, it is important to acknowledge what happened. Do not hold back, minimize, or generalize. A person can only forgive what is acknowledged. In many cases, it is difficult for a person to heal when the debt has not been clearly defined. Many find it helpful to make a list and share it with a close friend. When reconciliation is the goal it is important to share the offense with the offending person. In addition to acknowledging what happened, it is also important to acknowledge the impact. The impact is often complex. Consider the emotional, relational, physical, practical, monetary, and spiritual impacts. Again, it is important to not hold back and to detail the impact.

2. Choose to forgive. Choose to forgive, and relinquish the right to punish, judge, or condemn. It is important to give space so a person has time to consider what they are relinquishing and makes the choice when they are ready. If a person feels pressured to forgive too quickly, they may say the words, before their heart was ready to make the choice.

3. Ask Jesus for help and comfort. When a person chooses to forgive it is because they have been wronged in some way. There is often a wound that needs comfort and healing. It is very important that this wound is acknowledged, and that the person asks Jesus for help emotionally, relationally, practically, and spiritually. Jesus knows that forgiveness is difficult and often painful emotions resurface. When this happens, the person can look to Him for help and comfort.

4. Offer something positive. Consider how you can bless the other person. A starting place is to show empathy or compassion. A person may choose to go further and pray for them and ask God to bless them. In Luke 23:34 we see Jesus beautifully display this on the cross when He exclaimed, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."

It is important to allow a person to walk through these steps at their own pace. For some, they may complete all five in a few minutes and for others it may take years.

"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."

(Colossians 2:13-15)

Reconciliation

All too often forgiveness and reconciliation get confused. For example, one spouse might want the other to act as though a painful interaction or event never occurred because they apologized. They may expect forgiveness to be extended and for the relationship to immediately be restored to the way it previously was. This way of thinking represents confusion about the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation. When this happens, the offender expects things will quickly return to normal. The person who was wronged often is afraid to offer forgiveness because they believe it will make them vulnerable to being hurt again and that their pain will not be acknowledged.

All believers are called to forgive regardless of the other person's engagement in the process. We can forgive people who have died, people we have not seen in years, and people who have wronged us but will not acknowledge the pain they have caused.

Reconciliation is different. It goes beyond forgiveness and also includes the restoration of trust. Reconciliation takes time and results in healing in a relationship. Reconciliation always involves two people (or more) who are actively engaged in the process. Of course, we should strive for reconciliation when possible, but there are some situations where wisdom and discernment lead a person to forgive, but not fully restore the relationship. In these situations, there is a change in relational boundaries, which results in a new pattern of interactions (often characterized by less intimacy and vulnerability).



For example, if a child is sexually abused it would be irresponsible for a parent to quickly forgive and extend trust to the offender. It would be inappropriate for them to allow the offender to spend time alone with their child. Another example would be a relationship where one person continually breaks the trust of another. The person whose trust is broken may decide it is not wise to share vulnerably in that relationship. These examples represent a change in relational boundaries resulting from patterns of untrustworthy behaviors.

The process of reconciliation involves the forgiveness steps described above, plus some additional ones. While there are many situations in which both parties feel wronged, it is best to address each person's hurts separately.



Reconciliation Process Steps

- **Acknowledge the debt (hurt).** It is important to start by acknowledging the debt. What happened? Who was the person wronged?
- **Share about the impact.** The person who was wronged shares how they were impacted emotionally, relationally, practically, physically, monetarily, and spiritually. The other person listens. It is important that they use “I” statements, share from their heart, and avoid criticism or contempt.
- **Acknowledge the impact.** The offender acknowledges the ways their actions impacted the other person and takes responsibility. They summarize back the impact they just heard. It is important that they listen well and avoid defensiveness.
- **Ask for forgiveness.** The offender asks for forgiveness, “I’m sorry, will you forgive me for...”. It is important to give time and space while the person who was wronged decides if they are going to offer forgiveness.
- **Extend forgiveness.** The person who was wronged chooses to forgive and tells the other person, “I forgive you.”
- **Discuss the process of building trust.** Both parties engage in a conversation about behaviors that will begin the process of building back trust. Conversely, they can also discuss behaviors that will break down trust. Trust is only restored when a person acts in a trustworthy way consistently over time. A piggy bank is a great metaphor for a relationship. Each positive, trustworthy interaction allows for a deposit into the “piggy bank”. It will take time and many interactions for the “piggy bank” to be filled and trust restored.
- **Check-in at regular intervals.** Both parties can check-in at regular intervals to discuss the relationship, anything that would help build trust, how full the “piggy bank” is, and next steps to grow the relationship.

Teaching Children to Forgive

Teaching children about forgiveness and reconciliation is an important, yet challenging role of parents and caregivers. Many of the same steps that can help facilitate forgiveness and reconciliation between adults can be applied to children; however, they must be taught in a developmentally appropriate way.

The International Forgiveness Institute has developed helpful resources, including the infographic to the right, that support parents and caregivers as they teach their children. This infographic offers steps and verbiage a parent might use as they help a young child navigate forgiveness.³

A commonly debated issue is whether adults should force children to apologize when they do not want to. An apology is often an important part of the reconciliation process. Effective apologies include each of the 4 R's⁴:

- **Recognition:** Identify the offense.
- **Remorse:** Express that you feel sorry for the action "I'm sorry. I blew it. I was wrong."
- **Repentance:** Expressing your intent to act differently in the future.
- **Repair:** Try to make amends.

Therefore, an "I'm sorry" that does include recognition, remorse, repentance, and restitution, may not feel genuine.

On the one hand, many adults want children to understand the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation and believe forcing an apology teaches them the steps to healing relationships and what Jesus asks of us. Others, feel a person should never be forced to apologize and that

Great!
SCHOOLS

A parents' guide to TEACHING KIDS TO FORGIVE

Teaching your kids to forgive each other heals hurts, keeps the peace, and gives them an invaluable life skill.

- 1 Ask the offended child to acknowledge the hurt. Address the offending behavior.
- 2 Have a cooling off period. (It's hard to forgive when you're upset.)
- 3 Ask your child, "Are you ready to consider forgiving?"
- 4 Assure your child that forgiving is NOT saying what the other person did is OK. It's saying, "I'm going to change my hurt, angry feelings toward him."
- 5 Make sure your child knows it's his decision and it's OK not to be ready! "I understand you're still hurt/angry and maybe you need a little more time."
- 6 If there's lingering hurt, ask again — but let your child know it's up to him. (If your child has moved on, there's no need to force forgiveness!)
- 7 If your child is ready, suggest he put on "forgiveness glasses" that help him see the offender beyond the offending action. Ask, "Can you think of your brother in a way that's bigger than this offense? Can you see the goodness in him?"
- 8 Now ask your child to notice how this changes how his heart feels. "Does it feel softer? How are you feeling inside now toward your brother?"
- 9 There are no magic words to say. Your child can show forgiveness with a smile or an offer to play. Ask, "Is there anything you want to say? You don't have to." (It may come out as "Want to go play?")

* Based on the research of Dr. Robert Enright, founder of the International Forgiveness Institute (Internationalforgiveness.com).

illustration by Aimee Sicuro

Teaching Children to Forgive Cont.

insincere apologies, whether from adults or child, do not actually bring about healing in relationships.

A pair of 2015 studies from the University of Virginia found that the words “I’m sorry” mattered to 6- and 7-year-olds. In the first study, researchers had kids build towers from cups. Then the children were asked to imagine how they would feel if someone “knocked over their tower and then apologized spontaneously, apologized after being prompted, offered restitution, or did nothing.” The kids predicted that they would feel better and would share more with someone who offered to fix things and apologized naturally. They thought if the apology were prompted or if the person said nothing, then they would remain feeling lousy and ungenerous toward them.⁵

This research suggests that a genuine “I’m sorry” and that making amends (through actions) helps children reconcile. Authors Faber and King suggest that finding ways to make amends and brainstorming strategies for next time (so the offense isn’t repeated) are important steps. Often children need adults to coach them after an offense and teach them how to forgive and make amends.

The goal of this coaching should be aimed at helping children develop empathy for the other. Greater empathy is likely to lead to an apology that is more sincere and greater motivation to make amends. Similar coaching can help children learn to have empathy after they are wronged so they are more compassionate toward the person who is apologizing and more likely to offer forgiveness. Instilling these values and fostering empathy and compassion often requires adults to give children space to share their thoughts and feelings and consider the other person’s perspective in a situation.



Struggles with Forgiveness

While forgiveness is often talked about as a single concept, there are many expressions of forgiveness in various contexts. It is important for people to learn to receive forgiveness from God and others, forgive others, and work through feelings of disappointment with or anger towards God. The following paragraphs offer prayers and techniques that can help facilitate the process of forgiveness.

Receiving Forgiveness: Receiving forgiveness is just as important as extending forgiveness. It is a truly humbling experience to wrong another and receive mercy. It is God's plan for us that we both forgive others and receive forgiveness. Sometimes a person struggles to receive forgiveness from God or others. They may have negative beliefs about God, themselves, or others that do not align with scripture and hinder their ability to receive forgiveness from others. It is important to address beliefs and any other underlying issues that make it difficult for a person to receive forgiveness. We all need to learn to participate with God and receive His forgiveness as well as the forgiveness of others.

- **Unworthiness** (I am not worthy of forgiveness): It is common for a person feel a need to punish, condemn, or judge themselves even after they have repented. Often people with this struggle have negative beliefs about themselves (e.g. I am unlovable, I am defective, I deserve to be punished, I am bad). Over time, this can lead to self-hatred, low self-esteem, poor self-image, depression, perfectionism, and isolation. People struggling with unworthiness often need help relinquishing punishment, condemnation, and judgement they hold against themselves to Jesus, so they feel freedom to receive His forgiveness. By relinquishing feelings of unworthiness, they are allowing Jesus to be the ultimate judge and participating with His plan for redemption.
- **Disapproving or Angry God** (distorted view of God): Another barrier to receiving forgiveness is a distorted view of God. Many imagine God as a distant, angry, or disapproving Father. They fear His response to them, even after they repent. People struggling with a distorted view of God need help understanding that God is a loving, gracious, patient Father. As it says in Isaiah 30:18, "Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore, He will rise up and show you compassion." The parable of the prodigal son can be used to help a person understand God's disposition towards them when they repent.

Offering Forgiveness: It is common for people to struggle to forgive after they have been wronged. Sometimes things happen that are so painful, a person cannot even imagine relinquishing their right to punish, judge, or condemn. When a person is struggling to forgive, it is important to give them time and space, ensure that they address each step described in the previous section, and encourage them to look to Jesus for help. It can also be helpful to pray through forgiveness with them and give them space to voice to you the ways they were wronged and the impact of the offense. In our flesh we would likely not choose forgiveness. Forgiveness is a supernatural transaction, that requires help from Jesus.

Disappointment with God: Life is full of loss and disappointment. Sometimes a person feels disappointed with God, hurt by God, or even wronged by God. While we know theologically God does not sin and never wrongs His children, a person may feel these things emotionally. When this is the case, it is important to address them directly. Often people feel they need to hide negative emotions they may feel towards God (e.g. anger, disappointment, betrayal); however, God already knows how they feel. He is a strong and loving Father who wants to help His children work through their thoughts and emotions so they can feel close to and loved by Him.

Prayers and Exercises to Facilitate Forgiveness

The following prayers and exercises can be used to help walk a person through the process of forgiveness. Care providers can lead the person in prayer using a “repeat after me” format. The care provider can pray and have the care receiver repeat after them. This allows the care receiver to close their eyes and focus on the words as opposed to reading from a paper. Some find it helpful to have another person come into agreement with them as they seek God and offer or receive forgiveness. Others prefer to work through the process on their own and then talk about it after. Either way, the support of another person is often an important part of forgiveness.

Prayer for a Person Struggling with Unworthiness

Father, please forgive me for _____ and any other ways I have fallen short of Your best for me.

You Word tells us that when we confess our sins, you are faithful and just. You forgive us from sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Father, because You have forgiven me, I choose to surrender to you all feelings of unworthiness for all of the ways I have hurt others and ways I have hurt myself.

I choose to release myself from all judgement, condemnation, hate, and punishment I have inflicted on myself or received from others.

I know You, Lord, accept me as I am and that you love me unconditionally as your child.

I trust that You are the potter, and I am the clay. I give You permission to mold me, shape me, and grow me so I am more like You. I trust You are making me into something wonderful! As I surrender to You, make me into the image of Christ.

I ask that You fill me with Your Holy Spirit and help me to see myself more as You see me. Teach me to understand and receive Your grace. Amen.

*“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”
(Hebrews 4: 15-16)*

Receiving Forgiveness

Receiving Forgiveness Prayer

Father, You have made it clear that You desire for me to have the healing and freedom that forgiveness brings. You call me to receive forgiveness from You and from other people.

I confess that sometimes I believe my sins are too great to be forgiven. I hold onto judgement, punishment, and condemnation against myself even when forgiveness has been extended.

I choose to receive Your forgiveness and the forgiveness that others extend to me. I believe You desire for me to have mercy and compassion.

When I return to You, I am embraced as the prodigal son was embraced by his father. You are happy when I repent and receive grace. This allows me to be close to You.

Father, fill me with Your Spirit and a deeper understanding of Your grace and mercy. Amen.



Prodigal Son Guided Imagery

“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 best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 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.” (Luke 15: 20-22)

This is how God treats and feels towards us when we come to Him with a repentant heart. He sees us as sons and daughters who are loved, righteous, and accepted because of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. He is a Father who longs to extend grace to his children (Isaiah 30:18).

The next time you approach God, hold this image in your mind and imagine Him placing the robe, ring and sandals on you. Allow yourself to receive His love and mercy.



Extending Forgiveness to Others

Extending Forgiveness Prayer

Father, You have made it clear that You desire for me to have the healing and freedom that forgiveness brings. You call me to forgive so I can receive Your forgiveness.

Therefore, I choose to forgive _____ for _____.

(Tell God what happened and how their offense impacted you emotionally, practically, spiritually)

I release _____ from any debt that I thought they owed me. I let go of any judgement, condemnation, or punishment that I wanted them to have.

I turn _____ over to You.

Father, I pray that You fill me and heal me from any wounds caused by this offense.

Specifically, I ask for _____ (ask for anything you feel you need as you heal). I pray for Your strength, comfort, and reminders of how much You love me as I heal.

Help me to have compassion and mercy for _____.

I pray that You _____ (name ways you would like God to bless them).

In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

Extending Forgiveness to Others Cont.

Addressing the Offender:

(Imagine the offender in front of you or, if that feels unsafe, stand with the Lord and address Him about the person)

1. “(Name), I forgive you for (list offenses).”
2. “What I needed from you was _____. What you did affected me in the following ways _____.”
3. “I choose to forgive you. I cancel the debt and release you from my judgment. I do not pretend to know your motives.”
4. “Offering forgiveness will give me freedom and help my heart to heal and glorify God”

Visualizing Forgiveness:

1. Count the debt. Consider what and how much is owed – what they did, how it made you feel, how you were impacted. Go into detail and count every cent. Write it out, speak it, and do not minimize it.
2. Consider any judgements you have made against the person.
3. Imagine what it would look like to hold the debt and judgements in your hands. Imagine yourself holding it.
4. Give it to Jesus (or imagine yourself letting it go). Use guided imagery to watch it go (e.g. watch Jesus take it, notice what He does with it). Scan your mind, heart, emotions for any remaining debt or judgement. Look for anger, bitterness, accusations, etc. Imagine yourself letting that go as well.
5. As you let go of the debt, ask Jesus to fill you and bring healing.



Extending Forgiveness to Others Cont.

REACH - Five Step Process

Everett Worthington has conducted extensive research on forgiveness. He believes there are two types of forgiveness. “Decisional forgiveness” involves deciding to forgive a personal offense and letting go of angry and resentful thoughts and feelings toward the person who has wronged you. “Emotional forgiveness” involves replacing the negative emotions with positive feelings like compassion, sympathy, and empathy. Emotional forgiveness is linked to many positive outcomes and Worthington has developed an evidence-based five-step model to help people achieve emotional forgiveness.⁶

R = Recall the hurt.

To heal, a person has to acknowledge that they have been hurt. Make the decision not to be nasty or hurtful, not to treat yourself like a victim, and not to treat the other person as the enemy. Make a decision to forgive. Decide that you are not going to pursue payback but you will treat the person as a valuable person.

E = Empathize.

Empathy means understanding the situation from the other person’s perspective. Pretend that the other person is in an empty chair across from you. Talk to him. Pour your heart out. Once you are finished, sit in the other chair. Talk back to the imaginary you in a way that helps you see why the other person might have wronged you. This builds empathy, and even if you can’t empathize, you might feel more sympathy, compassion, or love, which helps you heal from hurt. This allows you to give an altruistic gift.

A = Altruistic gift.

Give forgiveness as an unselfish, altruistic gift. Everyone can bring to mind a time when they were wronged by someone—maybe a parent, teacher, or friend—and they offered forgiveness. Receiving forgiveness makes a person feel light and free and often results in a genuine desire to make amends. By forgiving unselfishly, a person can give that same gift to someone who hurt them.

C = Commit.

Once you’ve forgiven, write a note to yourself—something as simple as, “Today, I forgave [person’s name] for hurting me.” This helps your forgiveness last.

H = Hold onto forgiveness.

Notes of commitment are important because most people will be tempted to doubt that they really forgave. It is common for feelings of anger to be stirred. In those moments a person can re-read their notes. In this way forgiveness is a process and often requires a recommitment.

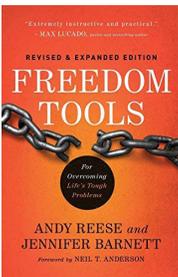
Helpful Resources



Tysa TerKeurst

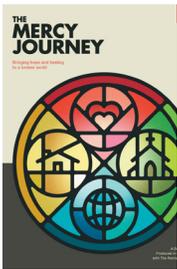
Forgiving What You Can't Forget: Discover How to Move On, Make Peace with Painful Memories, and Create a Life That's Beautiful

Have you ever felt stuck in a cycle of unresolved pain, playing offenses over and over in your mind? You know you can't go on like this, but you don't know what to do next. Lysa TerKeurst has wrestled through this journey. But in surprising ways, she's discovered how to let go of bound-up resentment and overcome the resistance to forgiving people who aren't willing to make things right.



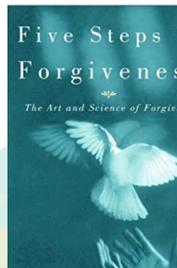
Andy Reese and Jennifer Barnett
Freedom Tools

With these simple freedom tools, learn how to facilitate healing in others with confidence through intimate and caring conversations. In these pages Andy and Jennifer give you the practical understanding and simple tools to do just that. You can fill even your casual conversations with the gentle yet transforming power of Jesus Christ. Here is what you need to confidently step out to bring peace, give grace and help others experience renewal.



Barna Research Group
The Mercy Journey

Living mercifully pertains to the posture of our hearts and the work of our hands, and this study covers both, asking about topics such as: giving and receiving forgiveness, what mercy looks like and to whom it should extend, and how individuals and churches go about providing relief to those in need. The call of the gospel is to be like Jesus, who modeled faith in both word and deed. More than ever, it is urgent for Christians to be not only messengers of truth but also ministers of mercy.



Everett Worthington

Five Steps to Forgiveness: The Art and Science of Forgiving

In *Five Steps to Forgiveness*, Dr. Worthington shares his proven program, the latest research, his own compelling story, and a wealth of wisdom from the experiences of those he has helped to enable you to attain the hope, health, and happiness forgiveness brings.

Citations:

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