

The FORGIVENESS FORMULA

It's Not as Easy as 1 + 1

*Leader's Guide to accompany
The Forgiveness Formula by Roberta Fish*

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iv
About iFollow.....	v
Tips for Success	vii
Chapter One	
<i>The Truth about Forgiveness</i>	1
Chapter Two	
<i>The Blessings of Forgiveness</i>	15
Chapter Three	
<i>The Miracle of God's Forgiveness</i>	27
Chapter Four	
<i>The Steps to Forgiving Others</i>	37
Chapter Five	
<i>The Steps to Being Forgiven by Others</i>	48
Chapter Six	
<i>Living a Life of Forgiveness</i>	57

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Dan Day

Executive Editor, iFollow Series

About iFollow

The iFollow series is designed to help individuals grow as disciples in a group setting. Discipleship falls into several areas of focus, demanding a wide palate of conversation. In order to assure that the iFollow series is broad enough and flexible enough to serve the needs of various congregations, we've created a set of categories into which the books are developed. These include:

- Journey
- Discovery
- Witness
- Church Life
- Leadership

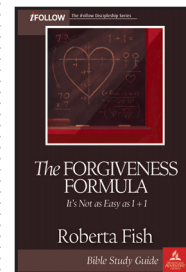
About This Title

Forgiveness is at the center of our faith. We forgive because Jesus has forgiven us and says we should forgive others. But what does it mean to forgive? Is it to forget any wrongdoings, to accept an apology, to reconcile, to move on? What does it look like in real life? *The Forgiveness Formula* offers many insights on developing a spirit of forgiveness and putting it into practice.

This leader's guide includes all of the information you need to start and lead a small group through *The Forgiveness Formula*:

- Step-by-step instructions for getting started
- Detailed information on how to lead a group
- Tips for conducting meetings
- Discussion questions for each chapter
- Spiritual growth activities
- Media resources
- Web links
- And more!

The Forgiveness Formula will lead you through Scripture to discover the different meanings and applications of Godly justice. This Bible study aims to ignite a powerful spark within each of us to spread the Gospel and God's message of peace and healing to the world.



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iFollow & Adventist Fundamental Beliefs

The iFollow series is structured around the 28 fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It provides a way for people to experience, study, and discuss various beliefs. *The Forgiveness Formula* includes study and discussion that will strengthen members in the following fundamental beliefs:

- Growing in Christ
- The Experience of Salvation

By including our beliefs throughout this series participants will experience these beliefs not as standalone doctrine, but as an integrated part of their growth as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Who Can Use This Resource?

Who might benefit from this series? What settings are these study guides intended for? Here are some possibilities:

- An elder of a local church looking for a resource to lead a prayer meeting group that meets once a week in your church
- A small group leader looking for a new curriculum
- A Sabbath school class
- A leader of a home Bible fellowship
- Anyone who wants to deepen their walk with God

This guide will help you as a small group leader understand the value of “group life.” It will lay the foundation for beginning a group and keeping it going.

Tips for Success

Group Dynamics

An intimate small group has many benefits to the Christian struggling to connect with God on a personal level. For one thing, it provides a sense of accountability. Some Christians need a friend or two to look them in the eye each week and ask, “How’s it going with your walk?”

Others need to practice methods and ideas among friends. They need to hear others’ stories of success and failure. They need to experiment and grow with a group. They need to gain knowledge and perspective from fellow Christians and they need encouragement when they feel like giving up.

As you lead your small group, keep in mind that Christ works through three primary means to help us grow: the Holy Spirit, the Word, and through God’s people. Each of these work together to impact our growth in Christ. The Holy Spirit speaks to our minds and hearts directly (see 1 Cor. 2:6-16). The Bible is a primary means of giving us instruction, correction, and reproof, etc. (see 2 Tim. 3:16).

The Value of a Focused Group

How does a leader help ensure that the group doesn’t simply become a social club? Group focus is key to not only experiencing fellowship as a group, but in specifically growing in your devotional life outside the group.

Let’s begin by asking, “Why come together?” We learn together to love God more deeply and love one another more authentically. Matthew 22:37-38 teaches us that the greatest commandment of Scripture is summarized in this dual-direction of loving—upward and outward, loving God and loving each other.

This iFollow discipleship resource will give you a clear focus for your group. By agreeing that your focus will be to become more Christlike (Romans 8:29) through strengthening the inward disciplines each person will grow as a disciple of Jesus.

Starting a Group

Establishing a strong foundation before you begin a small group can make or break the experience for everyone involved. The following is intended to be a quick reference list and is not meant to be exhaustive. You can find excellent books and seminar material giving greater depth on starting small groups.

Motivation Check

God plants passions and desires in our hearts to accomplish His will. Do you have an interest in getting a small group together? Why? What do you want to have happen? Are you willing to learn? Are you willing to explore new ways to hear God’s voice? Reflect on your motivations and/or needs.

Groups that begin simply to give a teacher an opportunity to teach or a leader an opportunity to lead are shallow ground for laying a foundation. Deep values make a strong foundation. If you feel convicted to begin a group, bring that conviction before God in prayer. Ask Him to cleanse your motivations and fill you with His will for beginning a group.

Leadership Support

Talk with your local church leadership. It's a great way to clarify your reasons for starting a group. Sit down with your pastor or head elder and explain what is on your heart. The act of talking through your ideas can sharpen your focus.

Outline your plans. Share when, where, how long you plan to meet, and what materials you might use. Show the study guides you plan to use, along with this leader's guide. And ask for prayer and support. You may even go so far as to suggest your church choose a leader or point person to encourage a small group ministry in your church.

By keeping in contact with your local church leadership, several things will happen. You will potentially receive their support, encouragement, and prayers. They will be better prepared to deal with criticism or attacks on your group if you keep leaders apprised of your plans.

Find a Partner

A crucial step is finding a partner. This kindred spirit should be someone with the same passion you have to begin a small group. By praying for, finding, and meeting with this person, you can begin to build a plan for a group meeting.

Don't neglect this step. There are many benefits to having a partner. This individual may be an apprentice who learns under your leadership or it might be a peer. Having an assistant takes pressure off you and provides balance in the group's ebb and flow. It also gives you a back-up leader if you cannot attend a group meeting.

Materials

Make sure you review the participant guide. Have a complete copy on hand, and become familiar with the overall approach and content. When you invite people to join your group you are in a far better position to compel them to join if you are familiar with the participant guides.

Invite People to Join

How do you build a group? Where do you begin? There are two general approaches: the personal invitation and the general announcement. Both work—though a personal invitation may bring together a more predictable number. If you use the general announcement approach (in the church bulletin, from the pulpit, in the church newsletter, etc.), we encourage you to use a sign-up sheet or online survey. This way you can plan on the numbers and have enough booklets on hand to lead the group.

What about group size? Small group theories vary on exact numbers. Some suggest no more than 12. Others recommend groups get into 4's for deeper sharing. Five to 12 people are recommended for the dynamics of a group to allow people to fully interact.

When too many people join a small group, the opportunity for everyone to share is limited. Don't be afraid to have a cut-off number (12, for example). If there is enough interest, begin a second or third group.

Conducting Group Meetings

How do you conduct group meetings? Here's a quick list to get you started. These suggestions are meant to be adapted to the unique circumstances and needs of your group.

The Meeting Place

A small group can meet at the church, in a park, or perhaps in a lunchroom or other private location at work. But the home atmosphere is conducive to group life. There's no place like home for group control.

As the leader, find a host or hostess to provide a place to meet. Since the leader will be dealing with the details of group time, sharing the responsibility of hosting gives someone else in the group a sense of belonging and purpose. Invite the host to provide light refreshments. Arrange seating so that everyone is on the same level, and in a circle so everyone can see each other.

Childcare arranged before the meeting is a tremendous benefit. Have childcare in a place other than the host's home since it will cut down on interruptions to the group. Perhaps a teenager can care for children in one of the other member's homes.

A rotation basis might be used in sharing this responsibility as well as providing refreshments. Stick with one meeting place for the duration of the meeting. Otherwise people might forget the location of the evening's meeting and precious time can be wasted driving to the wrong house.

Formatting Your Meetings

The format you choose may vary. This series suggests the following elements:

- Arrival/refreshment time
- Welcome
- Prayer
- Review/overview of chapter
- Discussion questions (included in leader's guide)
- Spiritual growth activities (included in leader's guide)
- Closing prayer

Some groups include music. Others may want to meet for a meal (potluck style), but this could become a barrier to some who may not have time to prepare anything.

First Session Details

We recommend meetings last 60-90 minutes. People need a chance to get acquainted, enjoy light refreshments, and get settled before starting. Make time for this informal settling in. But choose a formal starting time and stick with it. Time flies in small groups. Make the final decision on time frames as a part of your group's covenant.

A Group Covenant

Clarification of the group's purpose is helpful to its direction and success. Taking time to talk about the goals of your small group (deepening our personal walk with Christ) will give members a sense if this group is for them. The first meeting can be a trial event to give guests a chance to politely bow out. Ask for a commitment through a card or personal contact after the meeting. Don't corner people into making a public commitment. They may bow under pressure, but never really commit. Often the track record of attendance will reveal this when they quit coming.

You may make up a group covenant beforehand or with the group. It might read something like: "I commit myself to attending every session (excepting emergencies) of this group, with plans to meet every Tuesday evening from 7:00 to 8:30 in the months of February, March, and April. I also make a commitment to read each lesson before all meetings."

Is a group covenant necessary? There are several benefits to this step. People know what to expect. Set dates and let people know there is an ending to this group. A covenant also motivates people to show up. We tend to stick by plans we verbalize and commit to on paper. Some group members may want to write their commitment statements inside their study guides.

Ground Rules

Before you formally begin meeting as a group, a few ground rules will help for a smooth flow. These suggestions can help prevent conflict, embarrassment, or inappropriate behaviors that might disrupt a group or hurt someone's feelings.

- a) **Confidentiality.** Talking to those outside the group about things discussed in the group breaks the bond that holds the group together. Respect the thoughts of others and don't share them outside the group. Of course you will discuss some things with others, but be careful. If you are not sure about an issue, ask. People in the group will not be open if they have to worry about having their dirty laundry hung out for everyone to see.
- b) **Time.** You will do your group members a big favor by agreeing to start and end on time. It is not thoughtful to others to stretch times. People have personal schedules. Babysitters may be waiting. Others may have early appointments. You can always say, "I'll stay by for a little while if you want to talk more about that issue" or "Call me tomorrow."
- c) **Silence.** No person should ever feel obligated to share at any time. If a person feels uncomfortable responding to a question, other group members should respect that person's choice to remain quiet. A simple way for this person to respond is, "I'll pass on that one" or "I'd rather not share right now."
- d) **Criticism.** Some group members may struggle with giving lots of advice, even judging others. This is a great way to destroy a group. We recommend a leader never tolerate one person criticizing another in a group. Emphasize a focus on "ideas" rather than "John's idea." Remember: listen always, only share advice when asked, and never judge others.
- e) **Interrupting.** Establish a rule that no interrupting is allowed. Some members are so talkative they will not allow others to get in a word. Leaders may need to gently interrupt a talkative person as a means of giving others a chance to share. A leader may talk to an overly talkative attendee outside a meeting to gently remind them of the group's purpose to help everyone grow.

Discuss these rules and consider voting on them. Ensure complete buy-in from every group member. It will help avoid surprises or hurt feelings.

Tips for Success

Here are some simple tips for helping your group maximize the benefits of their time together. This list is not exhaustive, but provides a brief gathering of suggestions that can help you as a leader.

- a) **Cycles.** Groups go through cycles. Examples of these include periods of resistance to leadership, times of deep bonding, initial distrust, superficial sharing, frustration with the flow, etc. Your group may move back and forth between stages. This is normal.
- b) **Breaks.** Don't encourage members to commit to the group forever. Each iFollow book has six chapters, so before you start the next book you can give people the opportunity to drop out or new members to join.

- c) **Agendas.** Some people join groups but do not commit to the purpose of the group. They have an agenda and see the group as an opportunity to press their views. We recommend a direct and firm approach in dealing with these types of people. It may be best to talk with them outside the group and let them know they have a right to speak about their interest, but the group has chosen a different topic.
- d) **Anger.** It is possible, given the nature of small groups and the vulnerability of members, that someone is going to get angry. Anger is an acceptable emotion that can express itself unacceptably. Attacking others, regularly using foul language, banging objects, and shouting are not acceptable in a group. Gently respond to an angry member by suggesting they use “I” messages instead of “you” messages. “I feel angry when...” vs. “You make me feel angry....” “You” messages put others on the defensive and the angry person avoids owning their feelings.
- e) **Superficiality.** Some groups never seem to break through to deep levels of sharing. There is hesitancy and a shallow level of sharing on a facts level vs. feelings, opinions, and needs. This may occur because the trust level of the group has not thoroughly developed. Some ideas for this include: allowing time for trust to develop, reviewing the questions asked in the group, being vulnerable as a leader, and assessing attitudes in the group that might hinder trust (i.e. a critical or judgmental spirit, lack of confidentiality, etc.).

When You Need Help

Sometimes a group leader is overwhelmed by a difficult situation and does not know where to turn. Difficulties arise in the group that seem beyond the leader’s ability to deal with the problem. The forces of evil are certainly at war against God’s people gathering to grow spiritually. When the going gets tough, what can you do? Where do you go for help?

- a) Remember, these group members are not just your people; they are God’s people. You are not alone in caring for your group members. The Lord is by your side doing wonderful things in the hearts of these members. Claim Bible promises for strength, wisdom, and discernment in leading your group. Pray for members by name in your personal devotional time.
- b) Recognize the value of spiritual gifts in the body of Christ. As a group leader, you do not have all gifts. Lean on other members in the group. Some may be more discerning than you. Let their insights be a guide. Others may have spiritual wisdom. Allow their ideas to show the way. If the group faces a difficulty, use care and bring it up in the group. Pray together about problems.
- c) Look for appropriate support or help outside your group. Some churches request group leaders meet in their own group for encouragement and training. Meet as needed with a spiritual mentor, pastor, or elder in your church. Seek advice as needed from those with more experience than you. This may lead to a phone contact to someone with a specialty in dealing with the challenge you face in your group.
- d) Sometimes changes need to take place in the group structure. A person may need to leave. A volatile situation may require an individual to join another group. Reconciliation may need to take place outside group time. Occasionally a group leader discovers another person in the group might be the best person to lead while they assist. Don’t think of this as stepping down. Affirm spiritual gifts in your group. If you are attempting to lead a group but have better gifts at hospitality, be the host or hostess and allow someone else to lead if God brings this person to your group.
- e) Study and educate yourself by attending training classes on small group leadership. Look for books, DVDs, seminars, or conference on training group leaders. You are a valuable asset to the body of Christ. Take care of your gifts by developing them for the glory of God.
- f) Avoid burnout. Take care of yourself as a group leader. Don’t run too many groups in a row. Take breaks. Perhaps it would be best on occasion to join a group and NOT be a leader in order to be fed, gain new strategies, and feel less pressure. There is no glory in being a workaholic in the church. Be balanced.

Master or Slave?

A final thought on the use of resources: some people become so engrossed in a resource that they become enslaved to it. The resource becomes the master, not the tool.

Use this iFollow resource as a tool and recognize its limitations. There will be times in a small group when the next discussion question is not nearly as important as listening to the member whose husband just left her, or the man whose father just passed away, etc. Be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit in your group.

Chapter One

The Truth of Forgiveness

Each participant is encouraged to read the chapter before coming together as a group. After a welcome and prayer, give a short overview to make sure everyone starts at the same place.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Look at the list of lies about forgiveness. Which of them have you believed? Do you think differently about them now?
2. Look at the list of truths about forgiveness. Which one means the most to you?
3. How should justice relate to forgiveness in your opinion? Can you forgive, even if it is “unfair”? Why or why not?
4. What did your upbringing teach you about forgiveness? Tell a story if you can.
5. What do you dislike about the idea of forgiving? What do you like about it?
6. Do you think that forgiving is the same as condoning what happened? Why or why not?
7. Does forgiving someone mean that the offense is forgotten with no further consequences?
8. Have you experienced or witnessed false forgiveness in your life? How did you know it was false?
9. What is most important to you in your life and how can forgiving help?
10. Have a few people share stories of giving or experiencing forgiveness. How did it make them feel?

SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP ACTIVITIES

These activities are intended to increase interest and generate deeper thought and experience with the topic.

Activity #1

Ask the small group to create an advertisement for forgiveness. (If you have a large group, break into smaller groups.) It can be designed for a magazine, newspaper, radio, the web, or television. Provide paper and pens. If they are designing a print version, they should write the copy and/or draw the illustration; if they are designing an audio or video version, they should write the script and/or perform it for the group.

Activity #2

Place individual poster-size flip chart sheets around the room. Write one of the following statements (or use your own) on each sheet. Draw a horizontal line in the middle of each chart with “agree” on one side and “disagree” on the other. As people arrive in the room, give them stickers or markers and ask them to place a sticker or mark an “x” at the place on the line that represents their view.

Statements:

1. There is someone I need to forgive.
2. Not forgiving someone is adding stress to my life.
3. I have been hurt, betrayed, and/or let down.
4. I am carrying a burden of pain because I haven't forgiven someone.
5. I need to be forgiven for something I did or said.
6. Justice is more important to me than forgiveness.

After you have reviewed the shared views, invite comments on the responses.

Activity #3

Why People Forgive - according to Robert Enright, the reasons that people forgive fall into the following eight categories:

1. You forgive to quiet your angry feelings.
2. Forgiveness changes destructive thoughts into quieter, healthier thoughts.
3. As you forgive, you want to act more civilly toward the one who hurt you.
4. Forgiveness of one person helps you interact better with others. Perhaps your anger with your supervisor has spilled over to your relationship with children. Forgiving your boss would be a gift to your children.
5. Forgiveness can improve your relationship with the one who hurt you.
6. Your forgiveness actually can help the one who hurt you to see his or her unfairness and take steps to stop it. Your forgiving can enhance the character of the one who hurt you.
7. You forgive because God asks you to do so. You forgive as an act of love toward God.
8. Forgiveness, as an act of kindness and love toward the one who hurt you, is a moral good regardless of how the other is responding to you. Loving others, while protecting yourself from harm, is a morally good thing to do.

Prepare a handout of these reasons. Ask your group to discuss the validity of these reasons. See if they would add any other reasons to the list.

Activity #4

You may copy this and hand it out the first week and the sixth week of the study. The participants will be able to see if their attitudes and beliefs about forgiveness have changed.

Forgiveness Attitudes and Beliefs ¹

For each statement, choose one response using this scale:

SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; NS = Not sure; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly disagree

	SA	S	NS	D	SD
1. If I forgive someone, that means I have to forget what that person did.					
2. It is okay to not forgive someone.					
3. It is easier to forgive if I pretend that the hurt never happened.					
4. Forgiving someone is a clear-cut, one-time decision.					
5. In order to forgive someone, I need to make peace with the person face-to-face.					
6. The person who did wrong must apologize or ask for forgiveness before I can forgive him or her.					
7. Forgiveness means setting aside all my anger about the person or event.					
8. By forgiving someone, I am saying that what he or she did was okay.					
9. Feeling empathy toward the person who did wrong can make it easier to forgive that person.					
10. Before I can forgive someone, I need to look at all the thoughts, feelings, judgments, and attitudes I have about them.					

How will you apply what you learned today to your life?

Please write any comments you have about this lesson on forgiveness

¹ Adapted from Cooperative Extension Service, Oregon State University



Investigating Forgiveness

This is the Bible study included in the Participant's Guide. Additional notes in this Leader's Guide are italicized and are included to expand the study to make it more interesting and applicable to your group.

Look up the scripture and answer the question in your own words.

Read Romans 3:23. Who needs forgiveness?

Read Psalm 99:8 and **2 Samuel 12:13-19.** Does forgiveness take away the consequences of doing wrong?

We see that God forgives, but the consequences of wrongdoing are not necessarily removed. David's story is very clear about this. Can you think of some other biblical stories where this was true?

Read Exodus 9:27-35. Can people use the right words and still not be sorry?

Sometimes people say the right words, but are only interested in removing the consequences of the wrongdoing. Perhaps you've heard people say they are sorry but it does not seem so. Saying, "I'm sorry you feel that way" or "mistakes were made" or "I apologize if I offended anyone" are all examples of a non-apology apology.

Read Exodus 32:32 and **Luke 23:24.** Can we ask God to forgive others?

Asking God to forgive someone is a part of intercessory prayer. It does not mean we have the power to forgive their sins or that they must go through us for forgiveness. It means we care about them and want them in a right relationship with God.

Read 1 Samuel 25:20-24, 28, 32-35. How did Abigail's forgiving spirit avert a disaster?

Abigail's speech to David is one of the longest speeches in the Bible. Even though what David was about to do was wrong, she did not condemn or criticize. She called forth in him a spirit of forgiveness by her loving actions.

Read Genesis 33:1-4. Jacob wronged Esau. In what practical ways did Jacob show he was sorry? What was the result?

It was clear to Esau that Jacob was coming to him in peace. He gave gifts, he humbled himself. We are not told if he said the words, "I am sorry," but his actions showed his repentance.



Read Luke 7:41-43. As we open our hearts to God's forgiveness, what will we experience more?

The forgiveness of God in our lives will increase our love for Him and for those around us. Love is at the heart of forgiveness. We love because we are forgiven and we forgive because we love.

Read Philippians 2:5. If forgiveness is part of God's nature, what does that mean about us?

The command "let this mind be in you that is also in Christ Jesus" is a promise. God will put the mind of Christ in us so that we may live a forgiving life.

Read Genesis 50:14-21. What does forgiveness do in relationships?

Forgiveness brings healing to broken relationships. It is the oil that keeps our relationship gears running smoothly.

Read Matthew 6:12-15. What do Christians lose if they refuse to forgive others?

If our hearts are closed and hard toward another, we are not open to receive God's forgiveness.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-6. What motivates us to be forgiving?

This is agape love, a selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love, the highest of the four types of love in the Bible. We can only receive this love from God; it doesn't come naturally.

Read 1 John 1:9 and Matthew 6:14-15. Does God place conditions on His forgiveness? Why or why not?

God has forgiven us, even while we were yet sinners, but we cannot receive that forgiveness until we open our hearts 1) by confessing our sins and 2) by forgiving those who have hurt us. "We are not forgiven because we forgive, but as we forgive. The ground of all forgiveness is found in the unmerited love of God, but by our attitude toward others we show whether we have made that love our own." Ellen White, The Faith I Live By, pg. 131

Read Matthew 5:44 and Luke 23:24. Do we only forgive people who have asked for forgiveness?

Jesus is our example in this.

Read Matthew 5:23-24. What is important before giving an offering or worshiping? Why?

Forgiveness and healing in a damaged relationship are important to resolve first, then we can be open-hearted to God in our offerings and worship.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-5. How does God desire for us to use the memory of our pain and hurt?

If we totally forgot our hurts and troubles, how would we be able to use it to comfort others? We remember it in a different way.



The Quintessential Parable on Forgiveness in Matthew 18:24-35

Background

The Gospel of Matthew has five great discourses of Jesus: the Sermon on the Mount (5-7); the commissioning of the disciples (10); the parables of the kingdom (13); life in the church (18); and the end of the age (24-25).

In talking about the life of the church, chapter 18 begins with a discourse on who is the greatest using a child as an example (1-10). Then He tells the parable of the lost sheep showing the mission of the church is about the one lost sheep rather than the 99 safe in the fold (11-14). This is followed by a discourse on how to deal with sin in a fellow believer (15-20). In this context, Peter asks how many times we should forgive (21-22). Jesus answers this question with a statement and a story (23-34) followed by a final warning (35).

Read Matthew 17:24, 18:21

Where was Jesus and who was He with as He told this parable? What was the situation?

Read Matthew 18:21-22

Why do you think Peter asked how many times he needed to forgive someone?

What was Jesus' answer?

Do you think Peter was surprised at Jesus' answer?

The religious teachers said the accepted number of times to forgive was three. If someone hurt you a fourth time, you were not required to forgive. Peter thought Jesus would have a different teaching. He thought he would say three isn't enough. So He doubled what the rabbis said and then added one—seven times, and it was a perfect number. Peter wanted a rule to follow.

What point do you think Jesus was trying to make?

Seventy times seven was not a math formula for 490; rather, it was a colloquialism meaning, forever. Jesus basically said, "don't count, just forgive." As part of Jesus' answer to Peter, he told a parable.

As part of Jesus' answer, he told a parable.

Read Matthew 18:23-25

What does the king in the parable decide to do?

A servant was "brought to him." The Greek very indicates the servant was dragged before the king to settle the case.



How much did the servant owe?

This debt was so large; it doesn't seem possible it is a personal debt. The value of a talent varied from 6,000-10,000 denarii. One denarius was the daily wage of a common laborer. In today's terms, if minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour, the daily wage would be \$58. If we take the middle of the variable value of a talent at \$8,000, that would be \$464,000 in today's market. 10,000 talents would be over \$4 billion (\$4,640,000,000). This is a ridiculous sum of money. The disciples would have registered shock.

What did the king decide to do to the servant?

Even if his possessions, wife, and children were sold, would this have settled his debt?

It would have been impossible to settle his debt. Jesus wanted His hearers to understand this as a hopeless situation.

Read Matthew 18:26

What did the servant do and what did he ask for?

What was the king's reaction? What is your reaction to the king's generosity?

Read Matthew 18:28-29

This section of the parable is identical in structure to the first part. *It helps us notice even more the stark contrast between the king's behavior and the forgiven but unforgiving servant's behavior.*

Where did the forgiven man go when he left the king?

Notice they are fellow servants.

How much did the servant owe him?

One denarius was the daily wage of a common laborer. In today's terms, if minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour, the daily wage would be \$58. One hundred denarii would be \$5,800.

What did the forgiven servant do to the servant who owed him money?

Choking shows the forgiven man had anger and bitterness. When we do not practice grace, we become resentful and demanding.

What did the servant that owed money say to the forgiven servant?



Was it possible that he could pay the debt over time?

This is a different situation from the first servant who could never have repaid the debt he owed.

What did the forgiven but unforgiving servant do to him?

This was a common practice in the first century. Torture could be part of the imprisonment, especially if they thought the debtor was hiding money somewhere.

What is your response to the forgiven but unforgiving servant?

Read Matthew 18:31-34

What was the reaction of the other servants who witnessed or heard about this experience?

Who did the servants tell?

What did the king say and do? State verse 33 in your own words.

What is your reaction to what the king said and did?

Jesus said that when we refuse to forgive, we set ourselves up to be turned over to tormentors. Have you ever felt tormented by the results of unforgiveness? If you are willing, share what that torment looked like in your life.

Read Matthew 18:35.

What does Jesus say will happen if we don't forgive?

What does it mean to forgive from your heart?

"It is the attitude of the heart that imparts to the words ['I forgive you'] a fullness of meaning they would otherwise lack. The pretense of forgiveness ... may deceive the one to whom it is accorded, but not Him who looks on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7)." -SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 450.

In your own words what did Jesus want to teach in this discussion with Peter and in telling the parable?



Final Reflections

Imagine yourself in the parable that Jesus told to his disciples. Choose one of the characters: the king, the forgiven servant, the fellow servant, or the servant who witnessed the act of unforgiving behavior. As you imagine yourself in the story, what are you thinking and feeling? Who did you choose? What did you learn from this experience?

Based on your study of this chapter, what is your definition of forgiveness?

What one thing in this chapter had the most meaning to you? What does it inspire you to do?

Prayer

Lord, thank You for Your willing forgiveness of my sins. My debt is large and You have forgiven it freely. Lord, I choose to obey You. Be with me in the rage and pain of my woundedness. Slow Your pace to walk with me. Help me to be willing to forgive. Travel with me in the process and bring me to complete freedom in You. Amen.

Fundamental Belief #11 Growing in Christ

#11 The Experience of Salvation

By His death on the cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus' victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. Now the Holy Spirit dwells within us and empowers us. Continually committed to Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, we are set free from the burden of our past deeds. No longer do we live in the darkness, fear of evil powers, ignorance, and meaninglessness of our former way of life. In this new freedom in Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of His character, communing with Him daily in prayer, feeding on His Word, meditating on it and on His providence, singing His praises, gathering together for worship, and participating in the mission of the Church. We are also called to follow Christ's example by compassionately ministering to the physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual needs of humanity. As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to His salvation, His constant presence with us through the Spirit transforms every moment and every task into a spiritual experience. (1 Chron. 29:11; Ps. 1:1, 2; 23:4; 77:11, 12; Matt. 20:25-28; 25:31-46; Luke 10:17-20; John 20:21; Rom. 8:38, 39; 2 Cor. 3:17, 18; Gal. 5:22-25; Eph. 5:19, 20; 6:12-18; Phil. 3:7-14; Col. 1:13, 14; 2:6, 14, 15; 1 Thess. 5:16-18, 23; Heb. 10:25; James 1:27; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18; 1 John 4:4.)



Media Resources

◆ Books

A Pocketful of Forgiveness

Mary Barrett (*Stanborough Press, distributed by Review and Herald Publishing*)

Drawing on both the Scriptures and a wealth of literature about forgiveness, Mary Barrett demonstrates the dangers of nursing a grudge, and shows that learning how to forgive is not only beneficial for us, but also required from us by God.

Forgiveness

Lourdes Morales-Gudmundson (*Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2007*)

“I forgive you.” These are some of the most powerful words in the English language. Forgiveness features short, choice quotations from Lourdes E. Morales-Gudmundsson’s book *I Forgive You*, but . . . and pairs them with a corresponding biblical text. The result is 52 weekly readings that will help you see forgiveness in a fresh, new light.

I Forgive You, But. . .

Lourdes Morales-Gudmundson (*Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2006*)

Of course, I’ve forgiven him, but . . . You find yourself mentioning the offense to a friend, remembering how the incident made you feel, and how it affected your life. Afterward, you feel guilty. Why? Because you’re a Christian. Christians are to forgive and forget, right? This book is for Christians who believe that forgiveness is important to their spiritual journey, but who may not understand what forgiveness really is. It’s for those who just can’t seem to move on from a deep hurt.

(Also available in French and Spanish.)

Forgive to Live Devotional: 56 Spiritual Insights on Forgiveness that Could Save Your Life

Dick Tibbits (*Florida Hospital Publishing, 2007*)

In his powerful new devotional Dr. Dick Tibbits reveals the secret to forgiveness. More than a learned behavior or a thought process—it’s a life-transforming experience. Drawing on recent research and years of study, Dr. Tibbits discloses why so many of us struggle to forgive those who hurt us or disappoint us. The journey is essential. Written from three unique perspectives of counseling, medicine, and faith this passionate and compassionate devotional is a stirring look at the true meaning of forgiveness. Each of the 56 spiritual insights includes motivational Scripture, an inspirational prayer, and two thought-provoking questions. The insights are designed to encourage your journey as you begin to Forgive to Live.

**◆ DVD/CD****Embracing Forgiveness: What It Is and What It Isn't****Barbara Cawthorne Crafton (*Morehouse Education Resources, 2014*)**

It features two components, purchased separately: (1) A DVD with five 10-15 minute presentations, followed by a video of the guest lecturer interacting with a small group as they discuss the issues, and (2) a participant workbook containing all the material needed by class participants as well as for the facilitator.

With wisdom, wit, and theological depth, Barbara Cawthorne Crafton explores the perennial topic of forgiveness from the perspective of gift rather than duty. Along the way, she exposes patterns of resistance and popular understandings that undermine our ability to receive and share the gift with others. Her informal and accessible style, together with the questions and responses of those taking part in the video recorded sessions, open the way for groups, aided by the accompanying workbook, to expand the exploration with their own insights and reflections.



Web Links

With sample excerpts from the website

◆ Online Articles

“Forgiveness Is Not Saying It Is Okay,” by William Earnhardt (*Sabbath School Net*, September 17, 2013)

William Earnhardt, a Bible Worker, literature evangelist and lay pastor in Oklahoma, Texas and Florida, gives excellent information on what forgiveness is especially in the context of Jesus, our Savior. He writes, “Suddenly I realized something I had never seen before. I realized that retaliation against my enemy will never bring me healing. I am healed by the stripes of Jesus, and not the stripes of my enemy. Jesus suffering for my sins can only bring partial healing and partial reconciliation. I am made whole, and totally reconciled, not just to Jesus but to my brothers, when I realize Jesus suffered for their sins too.”

“Can You Forgive and Forget?” by Loren Seibold (*Signs of the Times*, May, 2013)

This is the official website of Ravi Zacharias—noted Christian philosopher and apologist. This site also contains numerous articles dealing with morality and issues involved in justice and the character of God. Video presentations are also available.

“Forgive is NOT _____,” by Bonita Joyner Shields (*Adventist Review*, January 13, 2005)

Bonita Joyner Shields is an assistant editor of the *Adventist Review*. She writes, “‘Forgive and forget’ is such a warm fuzzy adage—but I believe an erroneous one. We beat ourselves up thinking we haven’t truly forgiven someone if we remember what they did to us. But forgiveness doesn’t require amnesia or senility! In forgiving, yes, we give up our hatred, our self-preservation, our right to get even—but we don’t give up our memories. In forgiving, we heal our memories.”

“Forgiveness in the Light of the Hebrew Language,” by V. Norskov Olsen (*Ministry Magazine*, April, 1963)

Dr. Olsen, theologian and religion professor, writes, “The words ‘forgive’ and ‘forgiveness’ in the Old Testament of the English Bible are the translation of three Hebrew words, namely *kaphar*, *nake* and *saletch*.”

“The Usage of the Greek Words Translated Forgive and Forgiveness,” by V. Norskov Olsen (*Ministry Magazine*, May, 1963)

Dr. Olsen, theologian and religion professor, writes, “Of the about five thousand words in the Greek New Testament, approximately three thousand are found in the ancient or classical Greek writings from Homer to Demosthenes covering a period from about 700 B.C. to 300 B.C. Until fifty years ago New Testament scholars reckoned about 550 words to be peculiar to the New Testament. Through the discovery of the Koine Greek, especially in the papyri, the number of Greek words peculiar to the Bible has been reduced to less than fifty. In the study of the New Testament, whether doctrinal or devotional, a word study of the papyri becomes valuable. The papyri show that the Greek of the New Testament is not a language that stands by itself, but its main feature was, that it was the ordinary vernacular Greek of the period.”

“Forgiveness in the New Testament,” by V. Norskov Olsen (*Ministry Magazine*, July 1963)

Dr. Olsen, theologian and religion professor, writes, “In the New Testament “forgive” and “forgiveness” appear 66 times as the translation of four Greek words which appear in about 250 places with different renderings. Because of the translation by one English word of several Greek words, each with different renderings, it is important that careful study be made of the usage of these words in order that a clear conception of “forgiveness” may be obtained.” He then goes on to discuss the Greek words: *apolo*, *aphiemi*, *charizomai*, and *aphesis*. The explanations are understandable and inspiring.

◆ **Web Pages****The Power of Forgiveness Film Website**

<http://www.thepowerofforgiveness.com/quiz/index.cfm>

You may complete the Forgiveness Quiz – How Forgiving are you?

Fetzer Institute

www.fetzer.org/resources

The Fetzer Institute is a private operating foundation based in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Established by broadcast pioneer John E. Fetzer (1901-1991), the Fetzer Institute uses its philanthropic resources to create programs that foster awareness of the power that love, forgiveness, and compassion can have in our world. Numerous books, videos, audios, and other resources are available on forgiveness.

Fetzer Institute Forgiveness Participant Guide

http://fetzer.org/sites/default/files/images/resources/attachment/2012-07-12/forgiveness_participant.pdf

Free downloadable PDF guide on “Conversations about Forgiveness.” There are three essays and four conversations: What Is the Nature of Forgiveness? Why Forgive? The Journey to Forgiveness, and Forgiving the Unforgivable. Each of these topics includes discussion questions and learning activities. There is a helpful list of resources at the end of the guide.

◆ **Films*****Journey Toward Forgiveness***

Burton Buller, Director (Mennonite Media, 2011) 57 minutes

This documentary powerfully demonstrates that those who are able to embark on a process toward forgiveness - though heartrending and difficult - find it to be the path to inner healing.

The Forgiveness Journey: Take the Road Less Traveled

Matt Duhamel, Director (Metamora Films, 2015) 1 hour, 14 minutes

The film is a look into the difficult process of forgiveness, both self-forgiveness and forgiving others. The film strives to answer a variety of questions: What happens emotionally and spiritually when we forgive? Is every act forgivable? Do I need to be religious or spiritual to be able to forgive? Doesn't forgiving mean that I condone the harmful act? What is the new “science” behind forgiveness?



VeggieTales: God Wants Me to Forgive Them!?!

Brian K. Roberts, Director (Big Idea Entertainment, 1994) 32 minutes

Two great stories on forgiveness! “The Grapes of Wrath” features Junior Asparagus as the hapless target of teasing from a bunch of cranky grapes. Junior learns that forgiveness is the best choice, even when people aren’t being nice to you! “Larry’s Lagoon” is the story of a three hour cruise that takes a turn for the worst when first mate Larry absentmindedly crashes into an uncharted tropical island. Will Skipper Bob be able to forgive Larry for making such a huge blunder?

◆ **Video Clips**

What is Forgiveness? (2:43 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdqrOplaufA>

Dr. Arlene Taylor, brain function expert, gives a definition of forgiveness. Dr. Taylor comments on some common misconceptions about forgiveness, and then shares her own definition.

Processing Forgiveness - Should we forgive and forget? (3:31)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9qW-dgE7Xk>

Dr. Arlene Taylor, brain function expert, talks about forgiveness.

Should we only forgive those who repent? (3:22)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1G00MDqEqGO>

Dr. Arlene Taylor, brain function expert, discusses whether we should only forgive those who repent.

The Importance of Forgiveness and Jesus (2:28)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umDJ-ourHGY>

Professor Lisa Clark Diller talks about the importance of forgiveness for the Christian. Dr. Diller shares about the need for personally forgiving others for wounds which they may have inflicted upon us, following the example of God forgiving us through the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

◆ **Music**

Song: I Want a Heart that Forgives

Kevin Levar (5:02 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=indCvnD4Ji4>

Chapter Two

The Blessings of Forgiveness

Each participant is encouraged to read the chapter before coming together as a group. After a welcome and prayer, give a short overview to make sure everyone starts at the same place.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is forgiveness? What is the opposite of forgiveness?
2. Do you feel forgiveness is important in our world today? If so, why?
3. Is forgiveness optional for believers?
4. Who benefits the most from forgiveness?
5. What are some of the benefits of forgiveness?
6. Which of the benefits of forgiveness have been the most valuable to you?
7. What are some payoffs for not letting go of your hurt?
8. Can you think of any physical symptoms in your own life that may have been the result of holding on to hurts?
9. What positive emotions and thoughts came from forgiveness?
10. Describe your experience of forgiveness changing your focus from the past to the future.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP ACTIVITIES

These activities are intended to increase interest and generate deeper thought and experience with the topic.

Activity #1

God gives us the choice of freedom, fullness, and fruitfulness, in forgiveness ... or bitterness, bondage, and barrenness, without forgiveness. Draw a picture of a balance scale and write down the words that fit on the two sides. What could make the scale tip one way or another? What are the benefits of hanging on to your anger and bitterness? What are the benefits of forgiving your offender? With God in the picture, does that change the tipping of the balance scale?

Activity #2

What are beautiful moments of offering or asking for forgiveness you have seen in literature, cinema, or poetry? What is so beautiful about these moments? Share with the group.

Perhaps you've seen a parent, friend, coworker, or acquaintance offer forgiveness with dignity and grace? What was so beautiful about these moments? Share with the group.



The Blessings of Forgiveness

This is the Bible study included in the Participant's Guide. Additional notes in this Leader's Guide are italicized and are included to expand the study to make it more interesting and applicable to your group.

Read each text and record the blessings of forgiveness.

Genesis 50:17-21

Matthew 6:14

Luke 6:37

Luke 7:45-48

Luke 15:17-24

Stories of David

We will study four stories from the life of David that give us insight into why true forgiveness is so important. We will contrast David with others to better understand the blessings of a forgiving spirit and the curses of an unforgiving spirit.

Blessings are favors, grace, and protection from God. Curses are the disfavor, reproof, and/or harm a person experiences who has rejected God's forgiveness and harbored an unforgiving spirit towards others.

David and Saul

Saul was the first king of Israel. He was chosen by God, but disobeyed God's commands in the war with the Amalekites. Samuel, God's prophet, confronted him.

Read 1 Samuel 15:20-24

How would you describe Saul's response? Was his request for forgiveness genuine? Was Saul forgiven by God? Explain.

"When Saul turned away from the reproof sent him by God's Holy Spirit, and persisted in his stubborn self-justification, he rejected the only means by which God could work to save him from himself. He had willfully separated himself from God. He could not receive divine help or guidance until he should return to God by confession of his sin." PP 633



Read 1 Samuel 16:14

What effects does Saul's unwillingness to honestly confess his sin have in his life?

Saul's servants told him he needed a musician to play soothing music so he would feel peace again. One of the servants knew about David's ability to play the harp. David was summoned to the palace to play for King Saul when he felt depression and torment. Scripture says Saul loved him greatly. David was successful in whatever Saul asked him to do.

Something happened that changed their relationship.

Read 1 Samuel 18:6-11

What happened? What was Saul's reaction?

Saul continued on a path of attempting to destroy David. Here are a few more of those incidents.

Read 1 Samuel 19:9-10 and 20:30-33

What did Saul feel, and how did he treat David?

This hatred and hunting of David continued for the rest of Saul's reign. Saul died by committing suicide in a battle with the Philistines.

What curses (disfavor, reproof, or harm) did Saul experience because he was unforgiven and had an unforgiving spirit toward others?

David certainly had reason to feel angry and resentful towards Saul for all the attacks on his life.

Read 2 Samuel 1:17-18

Did David retaliate? What, in fact, did he do to honor Saul's life after his death?

What blessings did David receive because he had a forgiven and forgiving heart?

David and Abigail

David sent a group of his men to ask assistance from Nabal, a wealthy farmer, whom they had helped by protecting his livestock. Nabal refused, screamed insults at them, and sent them packing.

**Read 1 Samuel 25:12-13, 21-22**

What was David's reaction?

Nabal's servants told Abigail, his wife, what had happened. She wasted no time. She gathered some gifts and went to greet David and his men.

Read 1 Samuel 25:26-31

What did Abigail say?

How did she bring the blessing of forgiveness both to David and to herself?

David and Bathsheba

The story of David and Bathsheba tells of great sin and amazing forgiveness.

It was spring and David's army was off to war. He stayed in Jerusalem. One day after his afternoon nap, he was taking a walk on the roof of the palace.

Read 2 Samuel 11:2

Whom did he see?

Read 2 Samuel 11:3

He sent someone to find out who she was. Who was she?

Read 2 Samuel 11:4

What did David do?

Sometime later Bathsheba sent him a message. These are the only words we hear from her about the whole experience.

Read 2 Samuel 11:5

What did she say?

David now tried to cover his sin by committing another sin. After unsuccessfully trying to get Uriah to sleep with his wife, Bathsheba, he arranged for the death of Uriah. After Bathsheba's mourning period for Uriah's death, Bathsheba was brought to the palace to be one of David's wives (12:26-27).

David was in deep denial of his great sins. The Lord was displeased with what he had done and sent Nathan, the prophet to visit him. Nathan confronted David through a story, then tells David, "You are the man!"



Read 2 Samuel 12:13

What was David's reaction?

David was forgiven, but there were consequences. The child conceived by David and Bathsheba died and David had great trouble from his own family. We don't know Bathsheba's reaction to this. We are not told she needed to repent. Did David use his position to coerce her participation? We don't know. Was she resentful toward David? We don't know. There is a lovely picture of David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 12:24, saying that David comforted Bathsheba, his wife.

David's confession and repentance is recorded in two remarkable Psalm 32 and 51.

"In a sacred song to be sung in the public assemblies of his people, in the presence of the court—priests and judges, princes and men of war—and which would preserve to the latest generation the knowledge of his fall, the king of Israel recounted his sin, his repentance, and his hope of pardon through the mercy of God. Instead of endeavoring to conceal his guilt he desired that others might be instructed by the sad history of his fall." PP 725 Read Psalm 32:1-5 and respond to the following questions, applying them to your experience.

Who is blessed by God? (1-2)

What happens in our bodies and souls when we keep our sins a secret? (3-4)

When we acknowledge and confess our sins, what happens? (5)

Read Psalm 51:1-10 and respond to the following questions, applying them to your experience.

What about God's character makes Him willing to blot out my sins? (1)

What needs washing and cleansing? (2)

What do we need to acknowledge? (3)

Even when we hurt people, who are we really sinning against? (4)

Does it come naturally for us to live sin free? (5-6)

When God forgives us, what happens? (7)



How will I feel when I've forgiven? (8)

How does God treat our forgiven sins? (9)

What is God willing to create in us? (10)

Prayer

You are a God of compassion and mercy. Your blessings pour over me like rain water on a warm summer day. Open my heart so the rain water of Your love can flow from me to others. I do not deserve Your kindness, but You give it freely. Others may not deserve my kindness, but help me to give it freely. I am weak, but You are strong. Teach me to love others in Your strength and power. Amen.

Fundamental Belief of the Book (could be #10 The Experience of Salvation and/or #11 Growing in Christ)

#10 The Experience of Salvation

In infinite love and mercy God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God. Led by the Holy Spirit we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions, and exercise faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord, Substitute and Example. This saving faith comes through the divine power of the Word and is the gift of God's grace. Through Christ we are justified, adopted as God's sons and daughters, and delivered from the lordship of sin. Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God's law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life. Abiding in Him we become partakers of the divine nature and have the assurance of salvation now and in the judgment. (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 45:22; 53; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 33:11; 36:25-27; Hab. 2:4; Mark 9:23, 24; John 3:3-8, 16; 16:8; Rom. 3:21-26; 8:1-4, 14-17; 5:6-10; 10:17; 12:2; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Gal. 1:4; 3:13, 14, 26; 4:4-7; Eph. 2:4-10; Col. 1:13, 14; Titus 3:3-7; Heb. 8:7-12; 1 Peter 1:23; 2:21, 22; 2 Peter 1:3, 4; Rev. 13:8.)



Media Resources

◆ Books

The Healing Power of Forgiveness.

Sharon Platt-McDonald (*Stanborough Press, distributed by Review and Herald Publishing, 2014*)

Most of us at some point in our lives have had an issue with forgiveness. If you have been wounded by the hurts others have inflicted on you or struggled with the regret of causing pain to someone else, then this book is for you. The author believes that forgiveness could be the prescription that you need to experience resolution, restoration, and healing, which will enable you to release the pain of the past, free yourself from the stress of the present and embrace a future filled with hope. In each section you will be introduced to individuals who have been successful and have a story to tell. Experience the healing power of forgiveness as you allow God to heal the hurts of your yesterdays, provide help for your struggles today, and give you endless hope for all your tomorrows.

Forgiveness and Health: Scientific Evidence and Theories Relating Forgiveness to Better Health

Toussaint, Loren, Edward L. Worthington, and David R. Williams (*Springer, 2015*)

This volume collects the state-of-the-art research on forgiveness and mental and physical health and well-being. It focuses specifically on connections between forgiveness and its health and well-being benefits. Forgiveness has been examined from a variety of perspectives, including the moral, ethical, and philosophical. Ways in which to become more forgiving, and evolutionary theories of revenge and forgiveness have also been investigated and proposed. However, little attention has been paid to the benefits of forgiveness.



Web Links

With sample excerpts from the website

◆ Online Articles

“How to Forgive in Time of War,” Lourdes Morales-Gudmundsson (*Adventist Review*, June 5, 2003)

Lourdes Morales-Gudmundsson, Ph.D., chairs the Department of Modern Languages at La Sierra University and regularly presents seminars on forgiveness. Dr. Morales writes, “Does forgiveness obviate the need for justice? No, indeed! One may seek to apply the full extent of the law to a perpetrator of evil—that is the function of international tribunals for war crimes, for example. But it is not always possible to achieve justice, particularly in the context of war. And even when justice is achieved (i.e., some form of equitable punishment is administered), the victims still are faced with the choice of continuing to harbor hatred or to forgive.”

“Effects of Group Forgiveness Intervention on Perceived Stress, State and Trait, Anger, Symptoms of Stress, Self-Reported Health and Forgiveness (Stanford Forgiveness Project),” A. H. Harris, et al., (*Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 2006)

This is the first study to attempt a forgiveness intervention with a large number of participants and that recruited a large cohort of men. This randomized study of 259 adults compared effects of a six session (90 minutes each) manual-based cognitive behavioral intervention with assessment control group on perceived stress, state/trait anger, symptoms of stress, self-reported health, forgiveness self-efficacy and forgiveness likelihood. The intervention focused on core components of forgiveness: taking less personal offense, blaming the offender less, and offering more personal and situational understanding of the offender and of oneself. Implications are considerable, including the possibility that skills-based forgiveness training may prove effective in reducing anger as a coping style, reducing perceived stress and physical health symptoms, and thereby may help reduce allosteric load (e.g., immune and cardiovascular functioning) in daily living.

“Live Longer by Practicing Forgiveness,” Susan Krauss Whitbourne. (*Psychology Today Blog*, 2013)

Susan Krauss Whitbourne is a professor of psychology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Dr. Whitbourne writes about the results of a study on forgiveness, “After controlling for religiosity, social class, and health-related behaviors (smoking and drinking), the one quality of forgiveness that predicted mortality was conditional forgiveness of others. People high on the scale of conditional forgiveness, meaning they will only forgive others on conditional terms, died before people who scored low on this measure.”



The Scientific Case for Forgiveness,” Mike McHargue. (*Relevant Magazine*, September 3, 2015)

The Bible makes me think Jesus was obsessed with forgiveness. He never stopped talking about the need to forgive others. His parables spoke of a God who was forgiving, and expected His creations to be forgiving as well. Jesus portrayed forgiving others as essential to living life abundantly. Jesus and science are in complete agreement on that matter, as studies have given scientific evidence for many of the things the Bible tells us about forgiving others.

◆ **Film**

The Power of Forgiveness.

Martin Doblmeier, Director (Distributed by *Review and Herald Publishing*, 2010)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1-BDwAqaPg> (This is the entire film) (78 Minutes)

To forgive someone can be simple. But this simple act can have powerful consequences - and may lead to a personal and spiritual transformation. Recently, the study of forgiveness has come into its own. Researchers are examining the psychological and physical effects of forgiveness under an amazingly wide variety of conditions, ranging from petty insults to sexual assault to 9/11. Clinicians now help guide people to forgive transgressions and get on with their lives. From Ground Zero to Northern Ireland to the Amish countryside, *The Power of Forgiveness* explores this important concept, and reveals how forgiveness can transform your life.

<http://www.thepowerofforgiveness.com/resources/index.html>

Forgiveness: A Time to Love & A Time to Hate.

Helen Whitney, Director (IMDbProPremiered, 2011) 180 minutes)

Acclaimed writer, producer, and director, Helen Whitney, explores a compelling range of stories from personal betrayal to global reconciliation after genocide. The film provides an intimate look into the spontaneous outpouring of forgiveness: from the Amish families for the 2006 shooting of their children in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania; the struggle of '60s radicals to cope with the serious consequences of their violent acts of protest; the shattering of a family after the mother abandons them; the legacy and divisiveness of apartheid and the aftermath of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings in South Africa.

<http://www.pbs.org/program/forgiveness/>

◆ **Video Clips**

Forgiveness, Stress Management, and Happiness (5:39)

Fred Luskin

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKDM5QH_wlo

Frederic Luskin, Ph.D., is the Director of the Stanford University Forgiveness Projects and an Associate Professor at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. There are numerous YouTube videos by Fred Luskin on various aspects of forgiveness, including results of his research.

**The Physiology of Forgiveness (1:57)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rx3nENfVbzA>

Recent research into how our brains function confirms the importance of forgiving others, as God has asked us to. Dr. Arlene Taylor, brain function expert, explains that there are physiological health benefits to forgiving others.

The Physiology of Forgiveness (46:35)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SE4FTDZVXrY>

Christians in general, from an early age, are taught to be forgiving. In some cases, it can verge on, “do it, no matter how much it hurts.” It may not be nearly as often that we consider the benefits of forgiveness, not only for the forgiven, but perhaps even more for the forgiver. And these benefits may be more than just spiritual, but emotional, intellectual, and physical. Join with Dr. Arlene Taylor, Ph.D., a specialist in brain function and behavior as she explores the implications and benefits of forgiveness.

Facts with Hope – Forgiveness (1:00)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVIBQKsyNek>

Learn the facts about forgiveness from FactsWithHope.org. Sponsored by the Seventh-day Adventist church - NAD Health Ministries.

The Power of Forgiveness (28:30)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnG7czsKFWM>

What is true forgiveness? Can we truly forgive and forget? There is an insightful interview with “Forgive to Live” author Dr. Dick Tibbits.

**“Dimensions of Forgiveness: Psychological Research and Theological Perspectives,”
Worthington, E.L., Jr. (Ed.). (The Templeton Foundation Press, 1999)**

This volume investigates forgiveness from a standpoint of sound research and provides people with general knowledge and tools that can touch lives. The book is made up of many researchers and scholars reporting on the results of studies focused on forgiveness.



“Studies Suggest Forgiveness Has Health Benefits,” *National Public Radio: Talk of the Nation*, January 2, 2008 (29:56)

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=17785209>

NPR's Talk of the Nation interviews: Melissa Healy, author of the article "You're not sorry? That's OK," Frederic Luskin, director of Stanford University's Forgiveness Projects, and Jeanne Safer, psychotherapist. Religious leaders have long hailed forgiveness as an act of virtue. Now, some researchers are claiming that, in addition to improving your spiritual health, forgiveness may have benefits for your physical health, too.

Why you should forgive and how to do it (18:40)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Or9OuxuYKw>

Everett Worthington, Jr. (Psychologist at Virginia Commonwealth University) offers practical advice on how to forgive those who have wronged us, backed by years of psychological research.

◆ **Forgiveness Skit**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFxerBCiFQc>

The point of the skit was to define what it's like to not forgive. We all can choose to hold grudges, be angry, cast blame, and/or be resentful toward others. It ultimately binds us up with feelings and emotions that makes it hard to move on with life for the better. In this skit, the actor decides to hold on to the baggage, and lets it bind him up - controlling him - instead of forgiving.

Chapter Three

The Miracle of God's Forgiveness

Each participant is encouraged to read the chapter before coming together as a group. After a welcome and prayer, give a short overview to make sure everyone starts at the same place.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe what it means to be a child of God. How does that change your view of yourself and your mistakes?
2. What hesitations do you feel about receiving God's love and forgiveness? Share any barriers that come to mind that keep you from embracing the idea that God is passionately pursuing a relationship with you regardless of past mistakes.
3. What are some of the promises God gives us about His forgiveness? List some words that describe God's forgiveness toward us.
4. Why do people have such a hard time feeling forgiven by God?
5. What does Satan want you to think and feel about your past sins and mistakes?
6. How different would life be to feel completely free of shame? (Shame is never from God. Satan is the accuser.)
7. If someone is a follower of Jesus, how does it affect the way they live their life if they doubt God's forgiveness?
8. How has God's forgiveness affected your life and your willingness to forgive?
9. If God will always forgive us, why do we need to even ask for His forgiveness?
10. How does God forgive us and what is the cost? Did we deserve His forgiveness?

SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP ACTIVITIES

Activity #1

Sin Bonfire

Give everyone a piece of paper and a pen. Ask them to think back over the past week and mark a tick on the paper for each time they can remember doing something wrong or not living as God wants. Make it clear that they won't have to show this to anyone else!

Then fold up the papers and collect them in a pile on a fire resistant dish. Remind the group that when Jesus died He broke the powerful force of sin and made it possible for people to be free and receive God's forgiveness. If we trust in Jesus then God will not condemn us for our sins, and we are no longer slaves to sin because God's power working in us can give us the strength to overcome temptation.

Then slowly and quietly, set light to the pile of papers. As they burn, pray together, thanking Jesus for dying in the cross, our freedom from the powerful force of sin, and the forgiveness and new life we have from God.

Activity #2

God is . . .

Give everyone a blank sheet of paper and a pen. Invite the group to draw their own symbol to represent their own understanding, belief, or unbelief in God. They cannot use words, lettering, or numbers. The picture should represent what they think about God. Emphasize that you are not looking for a work of art!

Allow three minutes to complete the symbol and ask them to reveal their picture to the rest of the group. Invite the group to guess what they think each symbol represents about God, after which the artist can confirm if anyone got it right.



The Lost is Found

Luke 15 contains three interconnecting parables. In Luke, Jesus often tells “twin parables” followed by a larger story called an example story. All three express the theme of what sinners mean to God. The theme of lost and found gives us the tension/resolution of the stories.

Have you ever lost anything valuable? What was the search like? Did you find it? If so, how did you respond? If not, what was your reaction?

The Setting

Read Luke 15:1-2

Who came to listen to Jesus?

The Pharisees and teachers of the religious law were upset. Why?

Parable of the Lost Sheep

Read Luke 15:3-7

How many sheep did the shepherd have and what happened to one of them. What did the shepherd do?

This would have been a common occurrence. One hundred sheep would have meant the shepherd was moderately wealthy. Jesus asks two questions in verses 3 and 4. We can imagine the tax collectors and sinners nodding their heads in agreement. They know the answer. The sheep is valuable and a lost sheep is in great danger from accident or predators. Of course the shepherd will go after the sheep.

When the shepherd finds the sheep, how will he bring it safely home and what does the shepherd feel while he is bringing it home?

Picture yourself literally being carried by God. What are your thoughts and feelings?

Read Luke 15:7

What does Heaven do when a sinner turns to God?

Imagine a party in Heaven because of you.

Notice the words “likewise” or “in the same way.” That means just like the shepherd, God is joyful and throws a party when a sinner repents and comes home to the Father. In this parable the shepherd is God and we are the sheep.



Parable of the Lost Coin

Read Luke 15:8-10

What did the woman lose?

How does she search for it?

What does she do when she finds it?

Imagine a party in Heaven because of you.

We see here again the phrase “likewise” or “in the same way.” Jesus wants to drive home the joy that God feels when a sinner is found. Heaven throws a party for just one sinner who repents. In this parable the woman is God and the coin is us.

The Parable of the Lost Son

Now Jesus drives His point home with a human story. No sheep or coin, but a real live person. Even though by the title we say this is a story about the son, it is much more about the father and his reaction to both his sons. We perhaps should call it “The Parable of the Forgiving Father.” Parent-child relationships and sibling rivalry make this story very relatable and touching to each of us.

Read Luke 15:11-13

What does the younger son ask of his father?

What is the father’s response?

What does the son do once he gets the money?

What is your reaction to the younger son’s request? Does God allow us to move away from Him?

Apparently the younger son is still single, so most likely he would have been in his late teens. He asks for the money he would receive when his father dies. This was an unusual request in today’s culture. We might think he was selfish or uncaring. But, in first century culture, this would have been unthinkable. It brought shame to the son and dishonor to the father. The people listening would have been shocked at the son’s request and even more shocked that the father honored it. A few days later he leaves. This was not a vacation or a year abroad. The son took everything he owned and moved away. This was also unusual. It was important to be imbedded in a group or family; kinship was very important. The idea of an individual life was antithetical to the values in the first century.

Read Luke 15:14-16

After wasting his money on wild living, what happens in the place he lived?

What was his solution?



What are your reactions (thoughts and feelings) to the words, “But no one gave him anything”?

He becomes a hired hand in the lowest of low status. Feeding the pigs for a Jewish boy must have been the worst thing he could imagine. He was hungry, dirty, degraded—a wretched man. Away from his Father’s house he is totally alone. To be outside God’s family means we are utterly alone.

Have you had an experience of being outside God’s family and feeling utterly alone?

Read Luke 15:17-19

What did he finally realize?

What did he decide to do?

What speech did he prepare?

When he finally came to his senses, he realized that being a servant at his father’s house was better than being a servant at the pig farm. Any place at his father’s house was better than where he was. He lost all his rights to be a son, he has nothing to rely on except his father’s mercy.

Read Luke 15:20

When he returned home, what was his father doing?

What did his father do when he saw him?

What were the father’s feelings about his son being home?

Put yourself in the son’s place. What thoughts and feelings surface?

Put yourself in the father’s place. What thoughts and feeling surface?

The action of the father breaks all Middle Eastern protocol; no father would greet a rebellious son this way. But as often happens in Jesus’ parables, the twist in the story makes the point. Literally, the father “fell on his neck” or “drapes himself on his son’s neck.” He is overjoyed to see his son again.

Read Luke 15:21-24

What is the father’s reaction to the son’s apology?

What articles does the father give to the son? What significance do you think they have?

What contrasting words does the father use to describe the changes in his son?

What does the father throw in his honor?



The father interrupts the confession. The son will not be a servant; he will be restored to full son-ship. The fattened calf was saved for rare and special occasions like the Day of Atonement. This was not just a party; it was a high celebration. The son came from destitution to complete restoration. This is what God's grace does for a penitent sinner. What if the son had refused to believe the father? What if he kept saying, "Make me a servant, I'm not worthy to be your son?" When we do not forgive ourselves, it is a refusal to fully accept God's forgiveness.

If you struggle with accepting the father's forgiveness, ask a friend to say the following to you: "If God has forgiven you, who do you think you are to disagree with God?"

Read Luke 15:25-27

What has the older brother been doing that made him miss all the action?

What does he hear?

Who does he ask for information and what is he told?

Read Luke 15:28-30

When the older brother refused to go in to the party, what did the father do and say?

What did the older brother say?

The elder makes a serious complaint: "I have been so good," he pleads; "you are ungrateful. You are unfair!" Every parent, at some time or another, has heard such a complaint. The elder brother is self-righteous and self-oriented. He has no joy about the return of his younger brother. The elder brother is too consumed with issues of fairness and equity to be caught up in grace and joy. He shows no forgiveness or compassion. His anger is so great that he refers to his own brother as "this son of yours."

Read Luke 15:31-32

What does the father say to his older son?

What contrasting words does the father repeat to describe the changes in his younger son? Have you experienced these changes in your own life?

These parables teach the wonderful truth of God's love and forgiveness. There is an absolute reversal of the younger son's standing. The lost becomes a family member again. The father's acceptance of his repentant son is total. This is God's amazing grace.

Put yourself in the place of one of the tax collectors and notorious sinners. What do you think they are thinking and feeling after these stories?

There is a second truth: others should have joy when the sinner returns.



Put yourself in the place of the Pharisees and teachers of the religious law. What do you think they are thinking and feeling after these stories?

We really don't have an ending to the story. The older brother is left to reflect on the father's words. We don't know if he comes to the party. What do you think he will do?

What does Satan want you to think and feel about your past sins and mistakes?

With which son do you identify? Why?

What is your response to the father?

Prayer

Lord, I praise Your name for Your love and forgiveness. I accept Your death on the cross as a payment for my sins. Forgive me for wandering away from You. Thank you for being the loving Father who restores me to the joy of salvation. Thank You for the party You have prepared for me. Teach me to be forgiving of others as You have forgiven me. Amen.

Fundamental Belief of the Book (#10 The Experience of Salvation and/or #11 Growing in Christ)

#10 The Experience of Salvation

In infinite love and mercy God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God. Led by the Holy Spirit we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions, and exercise faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord, Substitute and Example. This saving faith comes through the divine power of the Word and is the gift of God's grace. Through Christ we are justified, adopted as God's sons and daughters, and delivered from the lordship of sin. Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God's law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life. Abiding in Him we become partakers of the divine nature and have the assurance of salvation now and in the judgment. (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 45:22; 53; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 33:11; 36:25-27; Hab. 2:4; Mark 9:23, 24; John 3:3-8, 16; 16:8; Rom. 3:21-26; 8:1-4, 14-17; 5:6-10; 10:17; 12:2; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Gal. 1:4; 3:13, 14, 26; 4:4-7; Eph. 2:4-10; Col. 1:13, 14; Titus 3:3-7; Heb. 8:7-12; 1 Peter 1:23; 2:21, 22; 2 Peter 1:3, 4; Rev. 13:8.)



Media Resources

◆ Books

Face to Face with Forgiveness

Kay Rizzo (*Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2012*) paperback and e-book.

“From the moment the church elders burst into her home, Mary knew she was a dead woman. There would be no plea-bargaining, no mercy. She’d been caught in the act of adultery. She turned to the man who spent the last hours promising love. He was gone. She was all alone.

No story in the Bible better illustrates Jesus’ mission on earth than does the story of Mary Magdalene, presumed to be worthless and hopeless by her church and community. Jesus’ actions showed a different face of God.

“Mary’s story brings hope to the most guilt-ridden sinner. No matter what you’ve done or where your sin has taken you, sweet forgiveness can be yours. As Mary was, you will be astounded by the love you see there—the love Jesus has for you personally.”

God Forgives Me and I Forgive You

Max Lucado (*Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2012*) hardcover and e-book

Children’s book about Hermie and his friends. Hermie learns the importance of offering forgiveness and discovers how incredible God’s grace really is. There is a lot of excitement in the garden as all the bugs prepare for the harvest festival. Hermie has promised to help Wormie but then forgets. Luckily, Wormie is quick to forgive Hermie. But later when Hermie is the one who is disappointed, will he be able to forgive too? God gently reminds Hermie that God continues to forgive us when we make mistakes, and it’s important that we do the same for others.

Outrageous Grace: Finding a Forever Friendship with God

Dwight K. Nelson. (*Pacific Press Publishing, 2015*)

Focusing on principles revealed in the parable of the prodigal son, Nelson shows us that God values relationships, not rules. God is a parent, teacher, leader, and friend. Most of all, He is a God of outrageous grace—a relentless lover and an unconditional forgiver whose loving goal is to take His children home to Heaven.

The Hiding Place

Corrie Ten Boon. (*Bantam Books, 1974*)

Here is a book aglow with the glory of God and the courage of a quiet Christian spinster whose life was transformed by it. A story of Christ’s message and the courageous woman who listened and lived to pass it along—with joy and triumph!

The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming

Henri Nouwen. (*Image Books, 1994*) hardcover, paperback, e-book

The beloved spiritual writer meditates on the parable of the prodigal son’s return - a powerful drama of fatherhood, filial duty, rivalry, and anger between brothers - and its enduring lessons for Christianity.



Web Links

With sample excerpts from the website

◆ Online Articles

“Forgiveness: Seven Accomplishments of Christ’s Sacrifice,” by Roy E. Gane. (*Adventist Review*, 2013)

Dr. Gane, professor of Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern languages of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, looks at the magnitude of Jesus’ sacrifice. “Roman soldiers recognized that in doing their job, they had unwittingly committed a crime of cosmic significance. But the full, vast scope of what was accomplished that day would have stunned them much more: The world had just changed hands forever, and the Son of God would rise to call for their allegiance.”

“The Stench of Betrayal, the Scent of Forgiveness: Meeting Ourselves in the Story of Christ’s Love,” by Randy Roberts. (*Review and Herald*, 2014)

Randy Robert, senior pastor of the Loma Linda University church and a professor in the School of Religion at Loma Linda University, writes, “Peter will once again walk away from a key encounter smelling of smoke! But instead of the stench of denial, this time his clothes will reek with the scent of forgiveness. This time he experiences the forgiveness of a God who hurls all our sins into the deepest sea; who separates our sins from us as far as the east is from the west; and who turns our scarlet sins into the snow-white robes of His righteousness (see Micah 7:19; Ps. 103:12; Isa. 1:18).”

“Radical Grace: Unmerited, Undeserved, Unearned,” by Mark Finley. (*Adventist Review*, 2014)

Mark Finley, editor-at-large for the *Adventist Review* and *Adventist World* magazines, and as an assistant to the General Conference president, writes, “Christ’s grace is unmerited, undeserved, unearned. Jesus died the agonizing, painful death that lost sinners will die. He experienced the fullness of the Father’s wrath or judgment against sin. He was rejected so we could be accepted. He died the death that was ours so we could live the life that was His. He wore the crown of thorns so we could wear a crown of glory. He was nailed upright in torturous pain upon a cross so we could reign on a throne with the redeemed of all ages wearing the robes of royalty forever. Marvel of all marvels, wonder of all wonders, in our shame and guilt Jesus did not reject us—He reached out in love to accept us.”

“God’s Power to Pardon and Forgive,” by G. D. Keough. (*Ministry Magazine*, 1966)

Pastor Keough, missionary to the Middle East and professor at Newbold College, writes, “God’s power to pardon and forget the sins of the redeemed is all the more remarkable because He assures us that He never can forget His people. A woman, He said, may forget her baby, and, in a time of crisis, perhaps to save her own life, may let it perish, but God can never forget His redeemed (Isa. 49:15). He would sacrifice His own life rather than lose a single soul.”



“They Called Her a Whore. Jesus Called Her a ‘Woman,’” by William Earnhardt. (*Sabbath School Net*, 2014)

William Earnhardt, a Bible Worker, literature evangelist and lay pastor in Oklahoma, Texas and Florida, gives excellent information on what forgiveness is, especially in the context of Jesus our Savior. He writes, “Terrified as she was, she was ready to face the consequences without blaming anyone else for the choices she had made, and the role she had played, which now brought her half-naked and humiliated into the presence of a Man of righteousness. Yet incredibly, as guilty as she was, it was her accusers who slunk away. As she lay helpless at His feet, there was no one to condemn her!”

◆ **Video Clips**

How to Forgive – excerpt from a sermon (7:14)

Corrie Ten Boom

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3cfp51vLZb4>

The Joy of Forgiveness (3:28)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4u9prmhPY5g>

Shawn Boonstra talks about the joy of confessing our sins and receiving forgiveness.

The Love Story of Forgiveness (26:00)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oU-h11isUgI>

Everett Worthington, Jr. (Psychologist at Virginia Commonwealth University) gives a chapel talk on God’s loving forgiveness and how to pass it on to others.

Testimony - Josiah’s Story of Being a Modern Day Prodigal Son (9:55)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYs1rJDOPV4>

It wasn’t until Josiah lost everything and hit rock bottom that he fully surrendered to God and experienced His amazing grace. In this video Josiah shares his inspirational testimony on what it looks like to truly be a prodigal son. He shares how God literally chased him down with love and mercy.

Chapter Four

The Steps to Forgiving Others

Each participant is encouraged to read the chapter before coming together as a group. After a welcome and prayer, give a short overview to make sure everyone starts at the same place.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What kind of offense do you find most difficult to forgive?
2. What are the greatest obstacles to forgiveness?
3. When in your life did you find it extremely difficult to forgive someone, but still chose to do so? How has the decision to forgive influenced your life?
4. What are your current impressions of forgiveness? (A one-time event? A forgone conclusion? Something you earn? Always available? Something you offer? Impossible?)
5. What do you think are the mistakes most people make in organized religions when it comes to forgiveness?
6. What would you counsel a friend to do who was trying to forgive but just could not do it?
7. Why do you think forgiveness takes courage?
8. How do you know you have really forgiven?
9. Respond to the Lewis Smedes quote, “When you refuse to forgive, you are giving the person who walloped you once the privilege of hurting you all over again—in your memory.” Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?
10. How does our unwillingness to forgive make us victims? How does a victim mentality affect our ability to respond to circumstances?

SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP ACTIVITIES

Activity #1

My Experience with Forgiveness

This activity allows participants a chance to ponder their own experiences with forgiving or being forgiven. Either print the following questions on the board or write them on slips of paper that you distribute to the participants. Allow some individual time for silent reflection and writing before returning as a group for discussion.

- Write about a time when you were wronged by someone and forgave him or her.
- Write about a time when you were unable or found it difficult to forgive.

Have pairs share the responses given to the questions. Then lead a group discussion on the question:

- What makes forgiveness easy at times and difficult at other times.

Activity #2

Make copies of the following survey. Have each individual complete it and then discuss it as a group. Mark one of the following beside each item:

Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A); Agree & Disagree (AD); Disagree (D); Strongly Disagree (SD)

1. A Christian should always try to forgive and forget.
2. A Christian should forgive even if the person who hurt them does not repent.
3. A Christian should always be willing to be reunited with the person he/she forgives, as if the injury never happened.
4. A Christian should try to forgive others quickly and completely.
5. A Christian should abandon all ill will toward the person they forgive.
6. A Christian should never hate those who wrong them.
7. Over time, a Christian's forgiveness of another will usually come about by itself.
8. To forgive completely, a Christian should try to make everything go back to the way it was before the injury.

Activity #3

Two Chairs

Place two chairs side by side. Ask for a volunteer who is willing to share a situation requiring forgiveness. Invite the volunteer to sit in one of the chairs and tell the story from the point of view of the person asking for forgiveness. Now ask the person to switch chairs and tell the story from the point of view of the person being asked for forgiveness. Afterward, discuss the ways in which the stories are the same and/or different, and the implications for offering or receiving forgiveness.

Close the conversation by going around the room and asking each participant to use one word to say how they are feeling. (Allow people to pass.)



Investigating Forgiveness

This is the Bible study included in the Participant's Guide. Additional notes in this Leader's Guide are italicized and are included to expand the study to make it more interesting and applicable to your group.

Anger is a particularly difficult feeling for a lot of people, especially Christians. The Bible is instructive regarding anger. Many people find the book of Psalms very helpful. David seems to have been an expert on the expression of feelings, including anger. He was honest and his feelings were authentic and raw. Over and over he ranted and raved about injustice and troubles. By the end of each Psalm, he usually came back to this: "God, I don't understand it, but I trust in you."

Does scripture affirm that anger is part of being human?

- Ephesians 4:26a
- Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Two Greek words in the New Testament are translated as "anger." One means "passion, energy" and the other means "agitated, boiling." Anger, like every other human emotion can be used for good or ill. Biblically, anger is God-given energy intended to help us solve problems.

Explore the following scriptures about anger:

- Confronting something (someone) directly
 - o Leviticus 19:17-18 (especially see NLT)
- The importance of thinking something through
 - o Nehemiah 5:6-7
 - o Psalm 4:4 (NLT)
 - o James 1:19
- Controlling your anger
 - o Psalm 37:8
 - o Proverbs 16:32
 - o Ecclesiastes 7:9
 - o Ephesians 4:26a
- Taking your time and counting to 10
 - o Proverbs 14:29



- The importance of dealing with anger quickly
 - Ephesians 4:26b
- The value of not provoking anger in others
 - Colossians 3:21
- Leaving revenge to God
 - Romans 12:17-19 (NLT)
- Knowing that God will not abandon us while we rage
 - Psalm 18—Often, we are afraid that if we get angry, God will abandon us. We need to be assured that God is bigger than anger and He holds us in the hollow of His hand while we rage.

What do Jesus and God get angry about?

- Exodus 22:21-24
- Psalm 7:11
- Mark 3:4-5
- John 2:13-16

God is angry at injustice. When injustice is inflicted against us, anger is appropriate. For instance, we need to be angry about abuse. God is angry about abuse. However, in the expression of our anger, we may not hurt others or ourselves.

As Christians we need to be accepting of people's anger. When someone is deeply hurt, anger is a natural human response. Jesus was angry when people hurt other people. Susan, a client of mine who survived childhood abuse, said, "When I'm angry, it's because I know I'm worth being angry about."

Some people fear they will stay stuck in their anger. But, if we keep expressing these feelings as a part of the work of healing, we will move through them to the other side. In the process, we will become more alive and able to express the whole range of feelings open to us as children of God. When we suppress angry feelings, other feelings deaden as well.

Often, we live in a chronic state of low-level anger. It's just below the surface. There are things we haven't dealt with and we stay habitually resentful. We may not even be aware of it, but others, especially our children, are very aware. It's like living with a volcano; we're never sure when it's going to erupt, but we know it's there seething under the surface. This chronic resentment turns to bitterness.

**What does scripture say about bitterness?**

- Ephesians 4:30-32 (notice that bitterness is mentioned first)
- Hebrews 12:15

Biblical Example of Bitterness**David and Michal**

Michal was King Saul's younger daughter.

Read 1 Samuel 18:20

What were Michal's feelings toward David?

This is the only place in the Old Testament it states a woman loved a man. Saul gives her in marriage to David reluctantly, after David fulfills Saul's requirements to have her as his wife. Saul really wanted David to be killed in the process.

Saul sent his soldiers to David and Michal's house to arrest David so he can kill him.

Read 1 Samuel 19:11-16

What does Michal do?

Read 1 Samuel 25:44

After David escaped, what did Saul do with Michal?

Ten years later, David was to be crowned king of Israel.

Read 2 Samuel 3:13-15

What request did he make? What happened?

Poor Palti. Michal had a rough life. She had no choice about how she lived her life. She was first married to David whom she loved. She protected him against her father's wishes. He deserted her because he ran for his life. She was taken from David and given to Palti as a wife. She was married to him for ten years and it seems he loved her a great deal. She was forcibly taken from him and returned to David who by now had other wives as well. Apparently Michal had resentment and she expressed herself negatively toward David during a festive time in Jerusalem.

Read 2 Samuel 6:16, 20-21

What was Michal's reaction?

Michal, it seems, had an unforgiving spirit. Granted, she had a lot of things that must have hurt her deeply, but her unforgiving spirit put a wall between David and herself.



Read 2 Samuel 6:23

What curse (disfavor, reproof, or harm) resulted from her unforgiving spirit?

God desires us to be authentic and bring everything including our anger to Him. God says, “Come, just as you are and tell me about it.” God’s promise is that He reaches “from on high and takes hold of me; He draws me out of deep waters. He rescues me. He brings me out into a spacious place. He rescues me because He delights in me.” (2 Samuel 22:17, 18, & 20 adapted)

Reaction: *What are your thoughts and feelings about anger and bitterness in scripture? What is your conclusion about how anger fits or does not fit into our lives as Christians?*

Prayer

Thank You, Lord, for using each person in my life as a tool to deepen my insight into Your grace and conforming me to the image of Your Son. Amen.

Fundamental Belief of the Book (#10 The Experience of Salvation and/or #11 Growing in Christ)

#10 The Experience of Salvation

In infinite love and mercy God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God. Led by the Holy Spirit we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions, and exercise faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord, Substitute and Example. This saving faith comes through the divine power of the Word and is the gift of God’s grace. Through Christ we are justified, adopted as God’s sons and daughters, and delivered from the lordship of sin. Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God’s law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life. Abiding in Him we become partakers of the divine nature and have the assurance of salvation now and in the judgment. (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 45:22; 53; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 33:11; 36:25-27; Hab. 2:4; Mark 9:23, 24; John 3:3-8, 16; 16:8; Rom. 3:21-26; 8:1-4, 14-17; 5:6-10; 10:17; 12:2; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Gal. 1:4; 3:13, 14, 26; 4:4-7; Eph. 2:4-10; Col. 1:13, 14; Titus 3:3-7; Heb. 8:7-12; 1 Peter 1:23; 2:21, 22; 2 Peter 1:3, 4; Rev. 13:8.)



Media Resources

◆ Books

A Time to Forgive

Darold Bigger (*Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2015*)

This book has three parts. In the first, Darold Bigger tells us the story of his daughter's death and what he went through after it. This isn't a view from a distance. Dr. Bigger lets us into his heart, lets us see what he was thinking and feeling, and how he finally found what he needed to carry on. The second part is an in-depth look at forgiveness. Why God requires us to forgive our enemies, what that means, and how we can do what He's asked us to. The third part, much briefer than the first two, offers a rather unique—and helpful—look at love. The perspective it provides enables us to more easily love our enemies and forgive them.

Forgiveness: The Mystery and Miracle

Annette Stanwick (*Review and Herald Publishing, 2008*)

This book is an amazing true story of Annette Stanwick's journey of healing from the violent murder of her beloved brother as well as other painful life experiences. The compelling narrative in each chapter combined with a personal application and healing process for each reader, gives this book a unique quality that will aid the reader in navigating their own painful or troublesome situations.

Available in Paperback, Kindle, and 4 CD audiobook with Personal Application Guide booklet.

Forgive to Live: How Forgiveness Can Save Your Life

Dick Tibbits (*Thomas Nelson, 2008*)

Everyone has a "grievance story"—we've all been hurt or rejected by someone who mattered to us. Unfortunately, while most of us have been told to forgive, we've never been told how or why to forgive. Dr. Dick Tibbits is here to say that understanding and practicing forgiveness can literally save your life! It's a scientific fact that anger kills—spiritually, emotionally, relationally and physically. Tibbits reveals the clinically proven steps and tools every person needs to uncover their grievance story, eliminate the unresolved anger that they can and can't see—and forgive for good. He also delivers self-tests, activities and other interactive resources and reading to help people measure their progress and ultimately enjoy a long and anger-free life.



Forgive to Live Workbook

Dick Tibbits (Distributed by *Review and Herald Publishing*, 2011)

In this spiritual workbook noted author, psychologist, and ordained minister, Dr. Dick Tibbits takes you step-by-step through an eight-week forgiveness format that is easy to understand and follow. His clinically proven concepts are a practical way of dealing with life's hurts and disappointments. The power of forgiveness is that when you forgive someone else, you cleanse your own life of bitterness, which can and does poison the soul. That is the beauty of forgiveness; it blesses you when you receive it and again when you offer it to others. You could say it is the gift that keeps on giving. You are about to begin your forgiveness journey; a journey that will change your life forever. Forgiveness can be tough work, but if you keep at it, you will be able to forgive. And you will have help. Remember God has promised: "My grace is sufficient for you." (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Five Steps to Forgiveness: The Art and Science of Forgiving: Bridges to Wholeness and Hope

Everett L. Worthington, Jr. (*Crown Publishers*, 2001)

You've been wronged, but you want to do the right thing. You want to be free of the burden of a bitter grudge that weighs you down during the day and keeps you up at night. You're wasting time and energy ruminating, railing, perhaps even plotting revenge. You're sick and tired of being a victim, but you feel stuck.

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.

◆ **DVD**

Forgive Now Workshop DVD Set with Workbook

By Darold Bigger and Barbara Hernandez (*Chapel Music*, 2015)

The *Forgive Now Workshop* is a series of DVD presentations for use by individuals or groups. Recorded live, the workshop explores the physical, mental, relational and spiritual aspects of forgiveness. It describes the advantages of forgiveness and the consequences of non-forgiveness, then points the way toward letting go of even the most grievous offenses and experiencing peace and hope. A Coordinator's Guide or Participant's Workbook include discussion suggestions and exercises.

Session 1: Non-forgiveness and Physical, Mental and Spiritual Health

Session 2: Non-forgiveness and Physical, Mental and Spiritual Health

Session 3: Surviving Offenses You Don't Deserve

Session 4: Facing the Truth

Session 5: Getting Over It

Session 6: Coping with Sadness, Anger, Resentment and Loss

Session 7: Becoming a Forgiving Person

Session 8: Reorienting Your Thinking and Relationships



Web Links

With sample excerpts from the website

◆ Online Articles

“Forgiving Those Who Hurt Us,” by J. David Newman. (*Adventist Review*, 2005)

J. David Newman, senior pastor of the New Hope Seventh-day Adventist Church in Burtonsville, Maryland, writes, “Jesus shows us what it means to forgive relationally. He was unfairly arrested. He was condemned to death in an illegal trial. He was tortured by Roman soldiers under the command of Pilate. His closest friends deserted Him. He stood alone.”

“Forgiveness: A Part of the Journey to Healing,” by Pattie Ecker. (*Ministry Magazine*, 2009)

Pattie Ecker, mental health therapist at Crosspoint Human Services, a community mental health agency in Danville, Illinois, gives a practical discussion on the why, when, and how of letting go of a painful past. She writes, “Forgiveness also does not say that you must trust your former spouse again. A spouse who has been violent or committed adultery or lied to you repeatedly, will need to regain your trust by demonstrating that they have repented and are working on making restitution (if necessary).”

“A Formula for Resisting Revenge,” by Delbert W. Baker. (*Adventist Review*, 2013)

Delbert W. Baker, vice-chancellor of the Adventist University of Africa, and is a long-time pastor, editor, and administrator. He writes, “Revenge has become a popular response of choice in today’s social environment. When confronted with meanness, crimes, and atrocities, Christians as well as non-Christians often find themselves fantasizing about the prospect of revenge. When we are treated badly, physically or emotionally, it is natural to feel bad, then get mad. The offended party just wants revenge.”

“Forgiveness,” by Norman W. MacFarlane. (*Ministry Magazine*, 1998)

Norman W. MacFarlane, a pastor of the United Church of Christ in Reisterstown, Maryland, writes, “Even those who have been “washed in the blood of the Lamb” sometimes still have ring around the collar. As the prophet Hosea lamented, “There is enmity in the very temple of God” (REB). General Oglethorpe told John Wesley, “I never forgive.” To which Wesley replied, “Then, sir, I hope that you never sin.” An unforgiving Christian is an oxymoron. Failure to forgive is a result of either the failure to accept or appreciate forgiveness.”

**“The Essential Art of Forgiveness in Ministry,” By Daniel Darling. (*Christianity Today*, 2015)**

Daniel Darling, vice-president of communications for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission and author of several books, writes, “To minimize sin—even sin against ourselves—is to hollow out the gospel message that offers forgiveness in the first place. Christ, in his death and resurrection, offers forgiveness for those who repent and believe. It’s free, but it cost Christ his life. The sins we committed against God were heinous violations of his holiness and tragic trespasses against our fellow man. The only way we can begin to offer forgiveness is if we call our hurts what they are: evil.”

◆ Audio Clips**“Freeing Myself Through Forgiveness” (September 24, 2007)****Yolanda Young (4:34)****<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14547176>**

Yolanda Young, a lawyer in Washington, D.C. is author of the book and syndicated column, “On Our Way to Beautiful.” She witnessed her father shoot her mother and later beat a woman. She had forgiven him and says, “I believe in forgiveness. I give it freely and in doing so, free myself.”

“If I Fail to Forgive Others, Will God Not Forgive Me?” (August 24, 2015)**Audio Interview with John Piper (10:38)****<http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/if-i-fail-to-forgive-others-will-god-not-forgive-me>**

John Piper, chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary and author of over 50 books, says, “What destroys us is the settled position that we are not going to forgive and we have no intention to forgive and we intend to cherish the grudge and fondle the wrong that someone did to me and feel the bitterness. It feels good. I like to go to bed with my wrath at night, because he legitimately wronged me. I am going to hold this against him the rest of his life.”

“The Major Obstacle in Forgiving Others” (October 29, 2015)**Audio Interview with John Piper (11:12)****<http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/the-major-obstacle-in-forgiving-others>**

John Piper, chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary and author of over 50 books, says, “So here we are told how to relate to a person who is not repenting, not recognizing any wrong being done, or maybe they are and they are glad they are doing it. And the answer is: Don’t return evil for evil. Rather, bless them. So it is not an issue of the fullest kind of forgiveness. You could call it, maybe, one-sided forgiveness.”



◆ **Video Clips**

An Unforgettable Act of Forgiveness in Court - by the Father of a Murder Victim (1:00)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ElkywrKVWAo>

This is one act of forgiveness that you will not forget - this father, a Christian, had the courage and strength to forgive the person who murdered his daughter.

Amish Forgiveness is Christ Like (4:38)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjJt3wKXdRc>

MSNBC interview with a midwife, Catherine Saunders, who lives among the Amish community, after the shooting death of several Amish children.

Forgiving Your Enemies (5:05)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDaLemqxhkk>

Bible Study by Mark Finley on forgiving your enemies.

Chapter Five

The Steps of Being Forgiven by Others

Each participant is encouraged to read the chapter before coming together as a group. After a welcome and prayer, give a short overview to make sure everyone starts at the same place.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If you had the opportunity to apologize for something you did when you were a kid, what would you choose?
2. Tell about a time you were treated unfairly as a child. What were your feelings and behaviors related to the event? What is your perspective of the incident now?
3. When in your life did you do something that you weren't sure could be forgiven? Were you forgiven? How has that influenced your life?
4. What does making amends mean to you? What are your fears and obstacles?
5. Name some people you admire who have fought for justice and fairness for others.
6. Have you ever wanted to be forgiven, but the other person would not? How does that feel?
7. What if the offender is 99 percent wrong in the hurtful circumstance and you are only one percent wrong? How do you think God wants you to respond?
8. What was your reaction to the various steps mentioned in the chapter in order to be forgiven by others?
9. Is making amends important? Why or why not?
10. Should people make restitution even if their mistake was unintentional? Why or why not?

SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP ACTIVITIES

Activity #1

Spend time journaling a message of forgiveness, whether asking for forgiveness or offering forgiveness, whether to God or another person. Do this exercise with a prayerful heart and invite the Lord's compassionate quality to flow through you.

Activity #2

Here are four inappropriate apologies. Ask the group to change them to an appropriate apology. You can write them on the board or make up a handout.

Three ingredients to an effective apology:

- Include a statement of regret for what happened (I feel so bad for...)
- Clearly state "I'm sorry..."
- Request for forgiveness (I hope you can forgive me...)

According to Ryan Fehr and Michele J. Gelfand, three additional key components are:

- Empathy (I can see how hurtful that was when I...)
- Offers of compensation (next time I'll be sure to talk with you first)
- Acknowledgement of the violation (that's not at all how I want to treat my friend.

Inappropriate	Appropriate
"I'm sorry... you just make me so mad sometimes!"	
"I don't know what I said or did to make you so mad but I'm sorry, okay?"	
"What? I'm not perfect okay? I'm sorry but that's just the way I am."	
"I'm sorry but that's our policy. If you don't like it you'll need to take this up with my manager."	

Activity #3

Give each participant a blank sheet of paper. Ask them to make three columns and label them: minor offenses, serious injuries, and major violations. Have them indicate the dates, initials, first names, or even drawings or sketches of the time(s) they have hurt others. Have them ask themselves, "Am I willing to make amends to at least the people in the lesser categories?" Have them share what it was like to do this activity.

Have them underline people they might be willing to meet with, given some time for prayer. Encourage them to place a check beside at least one person they are planning to make amends to.¹

¹ Adapted from *The Journey to Wholeness: Guidebook Three* (Adventist Recovery Ministries resource based on the Twelve Steps of Recovery).



The Steps to Being Forgiven by Others

This is the Bible study included in the Participant's Guide. Additional notes in this Leader's Guide are italicized and are included to expand the study to make it more interesting and applicable to your group.

Justice is at the core of restitution. The definition of justice is “behaving according to what is morally right and fair.” Deeply ingrained in our humanness is the need for things to be fair. How many parents have heard their child respond to a perceived or real inequity, “That’s not fair!” We have a deep desire for people to right their wrongs. Of course, it doesn’t always happen, but it needs to be a part of our life as Christians.

When we come to Christ, our genuine repentance leads to the desire to make amends. Repentance without restitution is faith without works. It is not genuine faith, it’s dead faith. Forgiveness of sins doesn’t take away the need to make things right with others. Christ gives us the power to set right the things we have done to harm people. Praise God for His power and grace.

Justice is at the heart of God’s character. Revelation 17:3 says, “Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.” Put the following texts in your own words to describe God’s attitude toward justice and injustice. Hint: words like judgment and righteousness are synonymous with the word justice.

1. God loves justice.
 - Psalm 99:4
 - Psalm 101:1
2. God hates injustice.
 - Isaiah 61:8
 - Hebrews 1:9
3. God has compassion for those who suffer injustice.
 - Psalm 10:18
 - Psalm 36:6
4. God judges and condemns those who perpetrate injustice
 - Deuteronomy 27:19
5. God seeks active rescue of those who have suffered injustice.
 - Deuteronomy 10:18



Restitution in Scripture

What does scripture say about restitution?

Restitution for criminal damage—name the damage done and the restitution required.

- Exodus 21:18-19
- Exodus 22:16-17
- Leviticus 6:1-5

Restitution for unintentional and accidental damage—name the damage done and the restitution required.

- Exodus 21:33-34
- Exodus 22:5
- Exodus 22:6
- Exodus 22:10-12

What amount of restitution is assessed?

- Exodus 22:1
- Exodus 22:4
- Leviticus 6:5-7
- 2 Samuel 12:5-6

What happens when restitution can't be made to the person we harmed? Does that mean restitution is unnecessary?

- Number 5:8

Biblical Example of Restitution

One of the most beautiful stories about restitution in scripture is the account of Zacchaeus found in Luke 19:1-10.

The story of Zacchaeus is a pivot in the book of Luke. It ends Luke's account of Jesus' public ministry and begins his account of Jesus' last week.

Where does the story take place? Luke 19:1

Jericho was a very rich city in the tribe of Benjamin, less than 20 miles distance from Jerusalem. It was a rich and flourishing town. Jericho, under the Herods, had again become an important center of trade. It lay on the road from Persia to Judaea and Egypt, and had, of course, an important custom-house. The Balsam which came especially from the Gilead district was sent through there into all parts of the world. Zacchaeus was at the head of this customs department at Jericho. In such an appointment it was easy to commit even involuntary injustices. The temptations to such an official to enrich himself at the expense of others were sadly numerous.



Zacchaeus' position would have carried both importance and wealth. It was a place where a tax collector could become very rich.

What does Luke tell us about Zacchaeus? Luke 19:2-3

Notwithstanding his status, desire conquered honor and shame. Zacchaeus, it seems, was in Jericho when Jesus passed through, though his house was farther on the road to Jerusalem. This likely accounts for his running before the multitude on this occasion. His desire was to see Jesus. Those who sincerely desire a sight of Christ, like Zacchaeus, will break through opposition and take pains to see Him.

What happened just before the story of Zacchaeus? Luke 18:35-43

What were the blind men trying to do? What was Zacchaeus trying to do?

Jesus' compassionate response to Bartimaeus and his companion, miraculously granting them sight, may have been a significant factor in motivating Zacchaeus to want to see Jesus.

How does Zacchaeus solve his "short" problem? Luke 19:4

The Sycamore Fig tree grows to 60 feet tall with a dense round crown of wide-spreading branches and affords a delightful shade. Because of this it is frequently planted by the waysides. Its leaves are heart-shaped, downy on the underside, and fragrant. The branches of this evergreen were close to the ground.

Would this have been a dignified thing for a rich man to do? What does this say about Zacchaeus' awareness of his own need?

What does Jesus do that is so surprising? Luke 19:5

What is Zacchaeus' response to Jesus' invitation? Luke 19:6

What were the people's response to Jesus' invitation? What did they grumble about? Luke 19:7

To be guest with a man who is a sinner meant either that he was a heathen, or, though by birth a Jew, yet as bad as a heathen, because of his unholy and oppressive office. Another interesting point—the word for grumbling used here is the one used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to describe all the times Israel grumbled against the Lord and against Moses.

What does Zacchaeus declare to Jesus and the people that he will do? Luke 19:8

Zacchaeus makes two bold statements. First, he will give half of his assets to those in need. Second, anyone who was robbed by him will be paid back with the highest penalty the law allows, a fourfold rate. Normal restitution added 20 percent. The Mishna rarely applied the more severe 40 percent penalty.



What does this passage teach us about true repentance?

What does Jesus say in response to Zacchaeus' pronouncement? Luke 19:9-10

Zacchaeus is restored spiritually to his relationship with God; he is given the promise of salvation. Jesus also restores him socially to the family of the Israel. Jesus calls him a son of Abraham, connecting him to the great patriarch of faith. The people would have heard Jesus' pronouncement. This restored Zacchaeus in the eyes of the people.

Read a wonderful promise in Ezekiel 33:14-15. Rewrite it in your own words as a prayer.

Fundamental Belief of the Book (#10 The Experience of Salvation and/or #11 Growing in Christ)

#10 The Experience of Salvation

In infinite love and mercy God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God. Led by the Holy Spirit we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions, and exercise faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord, Substitute and Example. This saving faith comes through the divine power of the Word and is the gift of God's grace. Through Christ we are justified, adopted as God's sons and daughters, and delivered from the lordship of sin. Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God's law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life. Abiding in Him we become partakers of the divine nature and have the assurance of salvation now and in the judgment. (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 45:22; 53; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 33:11; 36:25-27; Hab. 2:4; Mark 9:23, 24; John 3:3-8, 16; 16:8; Rom. 3:21-26; 8:1-4, 14-17; 5:6-10; 10:17; 12:2; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Gal. 1:4; 3:13, 14, 26; 4:4-7; Eph. 2:4-10; Col. 1:13, 14; Titus 3:3-7; Heb. 8:7-12; 1 Peter 1:23; 2:21, 22; 2 Peter 1:3, 4; Rev. 13:8.)



Media Resources

◆ Books

The Five Languages of Apology: How to Experience Healing in All Your Relationships, e-book, paperback, hard cover, audio CD

Gary Chapman and Jennifer Thomas (*Northfield Publishing, 2006*)

Just as you have a different love language, you also hear and express the words and gestures of apology in a different language. New York Times best-selling author Gary Chapman teamed with counselor Jennifer Thomas on this groundbreaking study of the way we apologize, discovering that it's not just a matter of will--it's a matter of how. By helping people identify the languages of apology, this book clears the way toward healing and sustaining vital relationships. The authors detail proven techniques for giving and receiving effective apologies.

Let it Go: A Story of Forgiveness

Yvonne Rodney (*Review and Herald Publishing, 2009*)

It was a terrible secret. A secret she'd kept for a long time. Until the day she couldn't hold on to it any longer. Wonderful book for anyone who is having problems forgiving themselves for things they did in the past. This is a story of women overwhelmed with inconsolable grief and soul-consuming guilt—and their journey to redemption and healing. There's only one way, you know. Only one.

Didn't You Forgive Me? How to Be Restored After Being Forgiven (The Path of Forgiveness Book 3) e-book

Eric Watterson (*SON Enterprises, 2011*)

You've felt bad and have apologized for what you did; however, it just seems like the other person is still holding on to it. "Didn't You Forgive Me? How to Be Restored After Being Forgiven - The Path of Forgiveness Book 3" explains why forgiveness is the first step that must be taken after any hurt that has been done. However, restoration does not occur as easily. In this third, and final, installment of a three-book path toward complete and total forgiveness, explains that there are specific concepts and thoughts that you must understand if you are ever to be restored after a hurt. Asking for forgiveness is vital and the first step towards restoration. Don't forget to apply the other major concepts needed for total restoration. It can be done! We can show you how!



Web Links

With sample excerpts from the website

◆ Articles Online

“Exodus 21:23-24,” by Angel Manual Rodriguez. (*Adventist Biblical Research*, 1998)

Angel Manual Rodriguez discusses the meaning of the law that requires “life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand.”

“How to Live Guilt Free,” by Loren Seibold. (*Signs of the Times*, 2013)

Pastor Seibold, from the Ohio Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, writes, “Once guilt has served its purpose, though—once it has led us to see our need for forgiveness and correction—it needs to stop. Indeed, in order for us to live an emotionally healthy life, it must stop. It isn’t God’s desire that we suffer constantly over past sins. The question is, “How can a person get rid of guilt?””

“Five Ways to Deal with Guilt,” by Randy Maxwell. (*Signs of the Times*, June 2009)

Pastor Randy Maxwell, author, speaker, and the founder of IF MY PEOPLE PRAY MINISTRIES, writes, “Here’s how to tell if you’re experiencing true or false guilt. If you’ve actually done something wrong, you feel your relationship with God has suffered a blow, and you want to restore that relationship soon, that’s the Holy Spirit convicting you— showing you the truth. If, on the other hand, you feel too unworthy to come to Christ and that you might as well give up, that’s the Accuser using false guilt to bring condemnation. Christ brings conviction; Satan brings condemnation.

“The Philemon Principle,” by Delbert W. Baker. (*Adventist Review*, 2013)

Delbert W. Baker, vice-chancellor of the Adventist University of Africa, and a long-time pastor, editor, and administrator, writes, “Right relationships in life have two dimensions, the vertical and the horizontal. The vertical dimension focuses on maintaining a saving relationship with Christ that results in the forgiveness of sins and acceptance with God. The horizontal dimension has to do with how we relate to others. The horizontal and vertical are inextricably linked to each other in that we model the acceptance we have with God by exercising love and forgiveness toward others.”



◆ Audio Clips

“Ask Amy: An Apology Primer,” (36:02)

Amy Dickinson. Talk of the Nation from NPR (2007)

Public or private, apologies can be tough, and there have been some very public ones lately. “Ask Amy’s” Amy Dickinson discusses the art of the apology.

◆ Video Clips

The Five Apology Languages, by Pastor Mark Sheets

<https://vimeo.com/121052018> (35:14)

Genuinely repenting involves a desire to turn around, to change, to cease offending another in a certain way. Requesting forgiveness indicates that you admit you’ve done something wrong, that you want to see the relationship fully restored, and that you are willing to put the future of the relationship fully in the offended person’s hands.

Step Nine – Making Amends

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qXs-Nq71TU> (8:01)

Recovery video discussing the ninth step and how to make restitution.

Making Restitution, by Gene Getz, 2011

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEXltRiyPzY> (14:49)

When we have wronged someone, we should do all we can to make restitution.

How to Apologize

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3H_GgtE3Tc (5:20)

The ability to pluck up the courage to sincerely apologize is one of the most important skills you’ll learn in life—and it especially comes in handy with people you love. Of course, apologizing can be terrifying. It’s the kind of thing you build up into a huge deal, the kind of thing you lose sleep over and ... perhaps continue to put off. We all do. This week, we took a viewer suggestion from SpiloSpud. We’re going to walk you through that difficult, awkward, sweaty moment when you take a deep breath and say... “I’m sorry.”

Making an Apology, PBIS Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FxZNaZYioOI> (4:13)

Great video for children, but fun for adults as well. Great practical advice on making an apology. Simple, but profound.

Chapter Six

Living a Life of Forgiveness

Each participant is encouraged to read the chapter before coming together as a group. After a welcome and prayer, give a short overview to make sure everyone starts at the same place.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to say that forgiveness is a way of life? Do you know someone who lives that way? Describe him or her without naming the person.
2. Why was Jesus' understanding and practice of forgiveness so radical? What are the implications of that for you in your life?
3. In terms of forgiveness, what does it mean to start with a clean slate?
4. What does it mean to see things from an eternal perspective?
5. How is forgiveness a part of your daily life?
6. How could extending forgiveness heal a relationship? How might it heal the other person? How might it heal you?
7. Who can I lovingly encourage this week to forgive someone who hurt them?
8. What would a world without forgiveness look like?
9. "Forgiveness demands every mental, moral, and spiritual resource you have. Like love, it never stays the same, never ends, and deepens over the years. Forgiveness is hard, painful work that can take a lifetime." Do you think this statement is true? Why or why not?
10. "Forgiveness of one person helps you interact better with others." Is this statement true or false? Why?

SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP ACTIVITIES

Activity #1

Rewrite Colossians 3:12-13 by inserting your name in the first blank provided, and your offender's name in the remaining three blanks: "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved _____, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with _____, and forgiving _____, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you forgive _____."

Activity #2

Heart Versus Mind

Begin by asking the group to demonstrate, by show of hands, how many people think the Amish let their hearts prevail in thinking about forgiveness. Then how many let their minds prevail. Ask the group to talk about what they think the difference is between acting from the heart and acting from the mind. Invite them to consider how they approach forgiveness in their own lives.

Hand a sheet of paper to each person and ask everyone to make two columns: one titled "Heart" and the other "Mind." Now invite them to think about a situation where they need to forgive or be forgiven. (They do not need to share this situation.) Suggest that with that issue in mind, they fill in each column with what their heart says and what their mind says they should do. As a large group, invite participants to talk about how they approach forgiveness and what it would be like to let either the heart or mind prevail.

Close the conversation by going around the room and asking each participant to share something they learned or want to learn more about, allowing people to pass.

Activity #3

Qualities of a Forgiving Person

Ask each participant to pair up and talk about someone who they think is a forgiving person. They should describe the qualities or personality characteristics that person has. Tell participants this is an opportunity to practice focused listening. Each person gets two minutes to speak, uninterrupted. When the first speaker's time is up (as indicated by timer or facilitator), the partners pause in silence, and the first speaker becomes the listener for two minutes, repeating the exercise.

Invite participants to share some of the qualities that they described, and encourage discussion about how to cultivate those qualities.

Close the conversation by going around the room and asking each participant to share something they learned or want to learn more about. (Allow people to pass.)



Living a Life of Forgiveness

Colossians 3 has some wonderful counsel on how to live a life of forgiveness. It's called Rules for Holy Living in the NIV and Living the New Life in the NLT.

Read Colossians 3: 1-2

In terms of forgiveness, what do you think “set your hearts and minds on things above” means?

Read Colossians 3:3-10

These verses talk about death. From our study of forgiveness, which of these things we are to put to death and be rid of, related to forgiveness?

Read Colossians 3:11

This verse is about being equal at the foot of the cross. How does this relate to forgiveness?

Read Colossians 3:12

Give specific examples that illustrate clothing yourself in the characteristics in this text. Relate this to forgiveness.

Read Colossians 3:13

This verse captures the capstone of living a life of forgiveness. Put it in your own words and apply it to your life.

Read Colossians 3:14

What is at the heart of who God is and therefore is the center of forgiveness?

Biblical Example of Living a Life of Forgiveness

Joseph's Story—Genesis 37, 39-50



Read Genesis 37:2

How old was Joseph when this story took place?

Read Genesis 37:2-11

Why did Joseph's brothers hate him? How did they treat him? Was Joseph a tattletale or genuinely concerned for his brothers? What has been your experience of sibling rivalry or preferential treatment of one child over another?

Read Genesis 37:12-17

What did Jacob ask Joseph to do? How did he travel to find his brothers?

Jacob's wealthy family was settled at Hebron, a hilly country south of what would later become Jerusalem. Joseph journeyed 50 miles north to Shechem to find his brothers and then another twelve miles further north to Dothan.

Read Genesis 37:18-20

The brothers recognized Joseph from a distance. What did his brothers decide to do and what justification did they give for doing it?

Read Genesis 37:21-24

What did they do to Joseph when he arrived?

Read Genesis 37:25-28

What idea came to them while they were eating? What did they do?

Read Genesis 37:29-33

How did the brothers cover up what they had done to Joseph?

Read Genesis 37:34-35

What was Jacob's reaction to seeing Joseph's coat covered in blood?

**Read Genesis 37:36**

What happened to Joseph?

Put yourself in Joseph's place. Imagine being treated that way by your family. Can you identify with the strife in Joseph's family?

The road from Dothan was south to Egypt. He probably passed fairly near his father and home on his way to a foreign land. The Ishmaelite traders took Joseph 300 miles onto a different continent (from Asia to Africa), into a foreign country and a strange culture. He had to learn a new language, a new set of customs and expectations, a new way of thinking. He went from favored son to property of a slave owner.

Read Genesis 39-41

Joseph was sold into slavery to Potiphar. He became very successful. His master trusted him and placed everything into his hands. After a time of great favor, he was falsely accused of rape by Potiphar's wife and thrown into prison. Even there, God blessed him and the warden put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners. His sentence was probably indefinite; he may have expected to live out his life there. He was forgotten by the butler for a while, but eventually the butler spoke to Pharaoh about Joseph's ability to interpret dreams. Through God's help, Joseph gave Pharaoh the interpretation of his dream. At 30 years old, he went from the prison to the palace and became a ruler, second in command, of Egypt. After seven years of plenty, the whole country was struggling with famine, even Jacob's family in Canaan. Jacob learned there was grain in Egypt and sent his ten sons to buy grain.

Read Genesis 42:3

Who did not go with the brothers to Egypt? Why?

We can tell by Joseph's reaction to seeing his brothers that he had already forgiven them for the terrible injustice they had done to him. He had completed forgiving them, but now he wanted to see if reconciliation was possible or wise. Reconciliation would require their acknowledgment of guilt. Joseph wanted to test their repentance. He accused them of being spies, kept Simeon in Egypt, and told them they could not return without their younger brother.

Read Genesis 42:21-24

How did Joseph discover their feelings about having treated him so badly? What was Joseph's reaction?



When the nine brothers returned home, at first Jacob refused to let Benjamin go with them to Egypt. The famine was severe and when the food was almost gone, he finally relented and let Benjamin go with them. They brought double the silver and many gifts.

Read Genesis 43:29-31

What was Joseph's reaction to seeing Benjamin?

After a meal with Joseph, the brothers were sent on their way. Joseph had his men put his silver cup in Benjamin's sack. The brothers traveled a short distance and were overtaken by Joseph's men. They accused the brothers of stealing Joseph's silver cup. The brothers were very upset and declared they did not steal the cup and if any of them had taken the cup, that person would die, and the rest would become Joseph's slaves. The sacks were searched and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. The brothers tore their clothes.

Read Genesis 44:18-33

Judah speaks to protect Benjamin. How does his speech show evidence of a changed heart?

Read Genesis 45:1-15

Joseph makes himself known to his brothers.

Read Genesis 50:15-21

What do you make of the fear the brothers expressed? Was it justified? Why or why not?

If you were in Joseph's place, what might you be feeling? Do you think you could have forgiven your brothers for all they did?

What happened to Joseph was not fair! How do you deal with things that aren't fair?

Write about how Joseph exhibits each of the principles of living a life of forgiveness mentioned in this chapter:

- Begin with a Clean Slate
- Receive God's Gift of Eternal Vision
- Forgiveness is a Proactive Concrete Action
- Vengeance is Mine Says the Lord
- Implicit Trust in God



- Make Forgiveness Your Default Biblical Response
- Don't Make Mountains out of Molehills

Prayer

Lord, teach me to live a life of forgiveness. May I have Your eyes to see every experience in my life as You intend it for good to accomplish Your will for me and others. Make forgiveness my initial and always response through Your power. Amen.

Fundamental Belief #11 Growing in Christ

#11 The Experience of Salvation

By His death on the cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus' victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. Now the Holy Spirit dwells within us and empowers us. Continually committed to Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, we are set free from the burden of our past deeds. No longer do we live in the darkness, fear of evil powers, ignorance, and meaninglessness of our former way of life. In this new freedom in Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of His character, communing with Him daily in prayer, feeding on His Word, meditating on it and on His providence, singing His praises, gathering together for worship, and participating in the mission of the Church. We are also called to follow Christ's example by compassionately ministering to the physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual needs of humanity. As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to His salvation, His constant presence with us through the Spirit transforms every moment and every task into a spiritual experience. (1 Chron. 29:11; Ps. 1:1, 2; 23:4; 77:11, 12; Matt. 20:25-28; 25:31-46; Luke 10:17-20; John 20:21; Rom. 8:38, 39; 2 Cor. 3:17, 18; Gal. 5:22-25; Eph. 5:19, 20; 6:12-18; Phil. 3:7-14; Col. 1:13, 14; 2:6, 14, 15; 1 Thess. 5:16-18, 23; Heb. 10:25; James 1:27; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18; 1 John 4:4.)



Media Resources

◆ Books

The Forgiving Life

Robert Enright (*American Psychological Association, 2012*)

Noted forgiveness expert Robert D. Enright invites readers to learn the benefits of forgiveness and to embark on a path of forgiveness, leaving behind a legacy of love. Guided by thought-provoking questions, engaging dialogue, and Enright's kind encouragement, readers can chart their own journey through a new life of forgiveness.

The Amish Way: Patient Faith in a Perilous World

Donald B. Kraybill, Steven M. Nolt and David L. Weaver-Zercher (*Jossey-Bass, 2012*)

A sensitive and realistic look at the spiritual life and practices of the Amish. This second book by the authors of the award-winning *Amish Grace* sheds further light on the Amish, this time on their faith, spirituality, and spiritual practices.

Forgiven: The Amish School Shooting, a Mother's Love, and a Story of Remarkable Grace

Terri Roberts, Jeanette Windle and Beverly Lewis (*Bethany House Publishers, 2015*)

This is his mother's story. Not only did she lose her precious son through suicide, but she also lost her understanding of him as an honorable man. But this is, surprisingly, a story of hope and joy--of God revealing His grace in unexpected places. Today Terri lives in harmony with the Amish and has built lasting relationships that go beyond what anyone could have thought possible. From the grace that the Amish showed Terri's family from day one, to the visits and ongoing care Terri has given to the victims and their families, no one could have foreseen the love and community that have been forged from the fires of tragedy.

◆ Film

Amish Grace (88 min)

Gregg Champion, Director. (*20th Century Fox, 2010*)

What transpires takes the town by storm, as the media descend on the city and criticize its Amish leaders for their notion of unconditional forgiveness and their outreach of support to the gunman's widow. Through the eyes of a grieving mother, Ida Graber (Kimberly Williams-Paisley; *Father of the Bride* films, "According to Jim"), and other devastated families, the film explores the Amish community's astonishing reaction of compassion to the horrific events that shook their town and tested their faith.



Web Links

With sample excerpts from the website

◆ Online Articles

“The Amish Culture of Forgiveness,” by Donald Kraybill. (*NPR Opinion Page*. October 9, 2006)

In an op-ed in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Donald Kraybill writes that forgiveness is woven into the very life of the Amish; and is more than just a gesture.

“‘I forgive you’: Charleston church victims’ families confront suspect,” by Oliver Laughland and Paul Lewis. (*The Guardian*. June 19, 2015)

Relatives of the Emanuel church victims stood up one by one in the courtroom, offering forgiveness to the man accused of murdering their sons, mothers and grandfathers, in cold blood as a nation continued to call for justice.

“Beyond Forgiveness to Reconciliation,” by David Sedlacek. (*Adventist Review*, 2015)

David Sedlacek, a professor of family ministry and discipleship at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan, writes, “The problem with my fear-based religion was that in my self-righteousness I put myself as judge and jury above others. I looked down on others and condemned them because they weren’t doing everything I considered right. Because I was so judgmental, I missed seeing people; and I saw their differences as faults.”

“Amish Forgive School Shooter, Struggle with Grief,” by Joseph Shapiro (*NPR*, 2007)

Since the tragedy, people around the world have been inspired by the way the Amish expressed forgiveness toward the killer and his family. But while their acts of forgiveness were inspiring, they also caused a misperception that the Amish had quickly gotten over the tragedy.

“As We Also Have Forgiven our Debtors,” by Gordon Beitz (*Adventist Review*, 2002)

Gordon Beitz, president of Southern Adventist University, writes, “There is no quicker way to learn if I have received God’s forgiveness than to measure my forgiveness of others. In a sense my forgiveness of others is a thermometer of my understanding of grace—a scale of my connection with Jesus. Can we be any more like Christ than when we’re forgiving others?”



“Forgiveness: An essential in Christian life,” by Colin T. Richardson (*Ministry Magazine*, 2009)

Colin T. Richardson, pastor of Griffith, Narrandera, and Broken Hill churches in New South Wales Conference, Australia, writes, “If we try to keep a record of the times we have forgiven, we have not forgiven at all. When we continually keep a record of forgiving, we continually keep a record of the wrongs as well. This is contrary to the entire biblical concept of forgiveness: to let go, and to leave it in God’s hands.”

◆ **Video Clips**

Living a Life of Forgiveness, by Rabbi Erez Sherman (11:10)

<http://www.shomreitorahsynagogue.org/component/preachit/message/living-a-life-of-forgiveness.html?Itemid=0>

In a sermon, Rabbi Sherman shares the story of Officer Steven MacDonald and his courage to forgive the man who changed his life.

Learning Forgiveness, Ted Talk by Kimberley Yates. (17:53)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8TBAM4YVFyo>

After a life-changing head injury, Kimberly Yates realized that the path to forgiveness was not what it seemed to be. In describing what she learned after stepping outside of her comfort zone, Kimberly teaches us to take a long, hard look at how we forgive. Kimberly Yates is an actress and director.

Rwandan Tutsi Forgives

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKXHK74qLdg>

Prayer helped Immaculee Ilibaguza, a Tutsi and Rwandan genocide survivor, realize hate was not in her heart. Harry Smith talked to her about sharing her miraculous story of survival.

The Power of Forgiveness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2BITY-3Mp4>

A Minneapolis mother, whose son was murdered, now lives next door to - and is friends with - her son’s murderer. Steve Hartman reports on the power of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is Trainable (6:12)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uns5ik6qEeA>

Video series of a dialogue between Dr. Fred Luskin, who holds a Ph.D. in Counseling and Health Psychology from Stanford University where he served as director of the Stanford Forgiveness Project, and Rev. Lyndon Harris, a chaplain at St. Paul’s Chapel in lower Manhattan, next to Ground Zero. They discuss the definition of forgiveness and gratitude. In this segment Dr. Luskin explores the skills that can lead to a more forgiving disposition.

**Amish Forgiveness****<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=drLx40tKZpg> (1:49)**

Short clip from upcoming documentary film The Power of Forgiveness, Donald Kraybill is interviewed.

Mother of Amish School Shooter Granted Unexpected Forgiveness**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uptsIngNxCY> (3:03)**

In October 2006, Terri Roberts' son walked into an Amish school in Pennsylvania and shot 10 young girls before killing himself. Roberts believed she would have to move away, but the Amish told her they wanted her to stay. Roberts now shares their message of forgiveness with those who've experienced trauma.

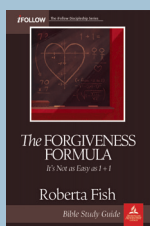


Forgiveness is at the center of our faith. We forgive because Jesus has forgiven us and says we should forgive others. But what does it mean to forgive? Is it to forget any wrongdoings, to accept an apology, to reconcile, to move on? What does it look like in real life? *The Forgiveness Formula* offers many insights on developing a spirit of forgiveness and putting it into practice.

This leader's guide includes all of the information you need to start and lead a small group through The Forgiveness Formula:

- ❖ Step-by-step instructions for getting started
- ❖ Detailed information on leading a group
- ❖ Tips for conducting meetings
- ❖ Discussion questions for each chapter
- ❖ Spiritual growth activities
- ❖ Web links and additional resources

This book takes an in-depth look at the blessings, challenges, and complexities one encounters on the road to forgiveness. It may not be an easy journey, but it's one that leads to peace, health, and wholeness.



Participant book
available at
adventsource.org

