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## *Appendix*

# **Forgiveness: Unleashing a Transformational Process Study Guide<sup>1</sup>**

I have developed this study guide to encourage and facilitate personal application of what I have presented in this book. It is organized in a series of eight sessions to be used in individual or group study. Each session tracks with certain sections of the book. The questions are not the simple open-book-look-up-the-answers type. Intended to be thought-provoking, the questions will help you incorporate and expand upon the teaching in this book. For group discussion, select only a few questions from those provided to ensure that your group will have time for in-depth discussion. Everyone should have a copy of the discussion questions.

This study guide will require you to examine your heart, mind, will, and emotions. Strive to be honest about what the Scriptures presented actually say and let them confront you with challenging truths. I hope that you will wrestle with the questions and that your thinking crystallizes answers through this process. Pace your discussion so you will not be rushed.

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Each session includes two sets of questions. The first set is for general group discussion. Because not everything personal can or should be shared in a group setting, I have provided a second set of more intimate questions for individual consideration. That way you may disclose your responses to others only if you desire to do so.

I suggest that each group participant read the appropriate sections of the book and answer the questions prior to each of the sessions. When each person allows sufficient time for reading and answering the questions prior to your meeting, the entire group will benefit. It might be helpful for each person to keep a notebook of thoughts about the readings and the responses to the study questions, which he or she can periodically review. This enables deeper engagement and provides a record of how their perspectives change through the study.

Your group facilitator might wish to summarize the contents of the reading before moving to the discussion questions. I suggest that you allow some time for each person to share about their Christian formation process. As you participate in the discussion, strive to implement the forgiving lifestyle with one another, which Jesus describes. Engage one another's thoughts and experiences of forgiveness and spiritual formation.

## **Week 1—Innovative Forgiveness**

*For this session, please read the Introduction and chapter 1, pages 1-23.*

### Group Discussion

1. In what ways is the thought about seeing how you fit into God's story (rather than fitting God into your story) new to you? Do you think this is an important perspective to have? Why or why not?
2. How might seeing your story through God's eyes or the eyes of another person help you better address a conflicted relationship?
3. Have you ever been the recipient of unconditional forgiveness from someone you harmed? If so, consider sharing with the group the impact this had upon you. How did the person's forgiveness help you to come to grips with your actions?
4. What conditions do you wish you could put upon other people in order to forgive them?
5. Have you ever encountered someone like Rick (pages 19-20)? What were the most challenging aspects of the relationship for you? What do you now wish you could have done differently?
6. What do you believe caused Pastor Jim's transformation (pages 20-21)? Why might this transformation have been difficult for him to experience?
7. What was the origin and process of the author's personal transformation (pages 7-11)?

8. What type of transformation through forgiveness would you like to experience?
9. Describe how your Christian community understands the process of receiving forgiveness from God. How does that process compare to what is presented in this chapter?
10. What is your understanding of the process of forgiving someone who has hurt you?

#### Private Deliberation

1. What examples of 'acceptable' retaliation have you engaged in toward people who have caused you pain?
2. List a few areas where you would like to experience transformation and learn something new about forgiveness.
3. Recall a previous experience when someone you loved caused you great personal pain by his or her actions.
  - a. What were your initial reactions?
4. Did your relationship recover from the trauma? Why or why not?
  - a. Pray to God that you might develop or increase your love toward that person.
  - b. When you are ready to do so, what actions of love might you initiate toward them?

## **Week 2—The Meaning of Forgiveness**

*For this session, please read chapter 2, pages 25-42.*

### Group Discussion

1. Catharine Dooley (page 25-26) makes a bold statement, “Forgiveness is a difficult process because it is unconditional.” What feelings and attitudes would you need to change to be able to imagine yourself always giving forgiveness to those who hurt you?
2. Edith Stauffer (page 27) states that forgiveness means canceling the mental and emotional demands that we have decided must be honored before we will give our love. What are some of the expectations a person would have to eliminate to become free to extend love to someone who hurts them?
3. Summarize the distinction C. S. Lewis (page 28-30) makes between presenting excuses and seeking forgiveness. Be prepared to restate his perspective in a few sentences. How might this perspective diminish our reluctance to forgive others?
4. Recall the trauma caused to Joseph (pages 30-32 and Gen 37-50) by his brothers. What was the agenda of the brothers? When his brothers came to Egypt for food, how did Joseph’s frame of reference form his responses?
5. Read John 14:6 and the discussion on page 36-38. What is your initial response to this? Explain in several sentences what you think Jesus is communicating. Do you believe that Jesus is the only way to God? Why or why not?

6. Review Ephesians 2:4-9 and Romans 5:8 (page 38-39). What is the basis on which we receive God's offer of forgiveness? When do you find it especially difficult to depend on this basis for forgiveness?

Private Deliberation

1. Identify a hurtful series of events inflicted on you by someone you loved (as happened to Joseph).
  - a. What did they do to you?
  - b. What was your perspective as the events unfolded?
  - c. How did you relate afterward to the events and those who caused them?
  - d. Use your imagination to write a paragraph about the situation from God's point of view.
  - e. What might God have you do differently?

## **Week 3—The Role and Characteristics of Forgiveness**

*For this session, please read chapters 3-4, pages 43-66.*

### Group Discussion

1. Review the third-century process for being accepted for baptism. (See pages 43-45.) How does this contrast with the practice today in your church? What are the potential benefits and dangers of the ancient way compared to your church's way?
2. When we pray the Lord's prayer (page 48-49), we ask for forgiveness and in the same breath, we declare that we have forgiven all who have hurt us. How does this reality affect your anticipation of forgiveness by God?
3. Consider the example of forgiveness that is given in Ephesians 4:32 (pages 51-52). What do you understand this verse to mean?
4. Review the parable of the unmerciful servant (pages 55-57 and Matthew 18:21-35). Why do you suppose the one who had been forgiven so much would not extend forgiveness to one who owed him so little? What point do you think Jesus was making in this parable?
5. What circumstances would move you to intervene with a Christian living in a way unbecoming to a believer? How would you know when to mind your own business? What actions on your part would be appropriate for your intervention? Inappropriate?
6. In John 17 (pages 65-66) Jesus prays that all who believe in him would love one another and be unified. What is the difference between unity and uniformity? What

does Jesus say are the consequences of Christian unity? Describe a time when you encountered this consequence of unity. How could a person in your situation take initiative to help increase Christian unity?

Personal Deliberation

1. Name any people you know who might have personal issues with you. How have you experienced distance in these relationships?
2. What does Scripture ask you to do, now that you have identified these restricted relationships? How can you take one step toward accomplishing this?
3. Read the parable of the unmerciful servant again (Matt 18:21-35, discussed on pages 55-57). What would you have to give up to live in a way that would conform to Jesus' teaching?



## **Week 4—Forgiveness as Worship and the Myths of Forgiveness**

*For this session, please read chapters 5-6, pages 67-79.*

### Group Discussion

1. List the different ways forgiveness is an act of worship (chapter 5). Which ones are new ideas for you? Do you have doubts or questions about anything on your list? Explain. If you could forgive someone you have yet to forgive, how do you imagine that could change your worship of God?
2. Both worship and forgiveness begin within the heart and then move to action. How have you experienced this? How would you encourage someone to begin, if he or she was struggling to forgive?
3. Of the thirteen fictional myths about forgiveness that I have presented in the book (pages 71-79), which ones brought you some relief and encouragement? In what way? Of the myths presented, are there any you believe are true? Why?
4. How does Myth #2 (page 72) reinforce what C. S. Lewis wrote about forgiveness (pages 28-29)?
5. If you would add any other fictional myths to the list, what would they be?

### Personal Deliberation

1. Have any of these thirteen myths immobilized your ability to receive forgiveness from someone? Which one(s)?

With whom? How might you be liberated from this stress?

2. Have any of these thirteen myths immobilized your ability to forgive someone? Which one(s)? With whom? Brainstorm ideas that would help you become liberated enough to make the first step toward forgiveness. Choose one idea to implement.
3. How can you change your worship practices to help you in your struggle with giving or receiving forgiveness?

## **Week 5—Confession**

*For this session, please read chapter 7, pages 81-97.*

### Group Discussion

1. The word ‘confession’, as used in the Scriptures, has two different meanings (see pages 82-86). What are they? How do they differ from one another? How do they intersect with one another?
2. Examine the ancient confessions presented on pages 86-92. What did you notice that was new or surprising?
3. The Nicene Creed was composed to specifically address a number of ‘innovative’ theologies that were creeping into Christian churches. Discuss ways this creed challenges the popular thinking within your Christian group. (Note, I am talking about how people really think, believe, and behave, not what the ‘party line’ is within your church.)
4. Most people understand lament to mean feeling sorry for yourself. Review Psalm 51 and discuss the possible end results of biblical lament.
5. What are ineffective ways to ask for forgiveness? What specific Scriptures can you think of that describe or imply effective ways of asking for forgiveness?
6. When you come to realize that someone has something against you but has not come to you to seek reconciliation, what is your role in the process? If they are unwilling to discuss it with you, what will you do?

Personal Deliberation

1. As you pray through the General Confession (pages 90-91), what does the Lord bring to mind for you to confess? Is there anything different from past moments of private prayer? Describe it.
2. Select an area of personal pain or unresolved sin and go through the biblical process of lament explained in pages 92-95. Afterwards, reflect on what God did in your heart. Consider sharing your experience with a trusted friend.
3. Is there anyone who has something against you? What do you think you need to do?

## **Week 6—Repentance**

*For this session, please read chapter 8, pages 99-121.*

### Group Discussion

1. Do you agree that outer change inevitably follows inner change? Why or why not?
2. Think of a time when you primarily focused on changing your behavior and hoped that your heart would follow. Was that process effective or not? Describe how and why.
3. What constructive steps can a person take to begin changing his or her heart and mind? How does this differ from striving to change one's behavior through discipline and accountability alone?
4. Review William Temple's explanation of John 15 (page 117). How does he describe the process of 'bearing fruit'? What might this new fruit look like in our lives?
5. In your experience, what are some significant consequences of repentance? Look again at Matthew 7:1-6 and pages 106-107. How does your idea square with these ideas?
6. Review Isaiah 1:14-20 (pages 110-111). The prophet Isaiah described what spiritual-looking activity from which God's people needed to repent?
7. Think of religious-like activity in which you have been engaged that does not accomplish Christian formation in you. What would it look like for you to repent from this counterfeit spirituality?

Personal Deliberation

1. Repentance is a change from one intention to a distinctively different intention.
  - a. Name one or two areas in the past, where you have repented.
  - b. If you had not ‘turned about’, what would have happened?
2. Summarize Calvin’s reframing of repentance (pages 114-115). In order for you to live the way of repentance, what do you need to change?
3. Think of one area of your life where you believe God would have you live differently (repent). What would you like to change? How could you begin the process of repentance within your heart?

## **Week 7—Reconciliation**

*For this session, please read chapter 9, pages 123-137.*

### Group Discussion

1. Review the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15, pages 126-129).
  - a. Describe the virtues that you see in the younger son. What kept him from returning home earlier? What needed to happen for him to return to his father?
  - b. Describe the virtues that you see in the loving father. What evidence is there that he was loving and forgiving?
  - c. Describe the perspectives of the older brother. What changes would he need to make to be reconciled to his father?
2. What is necessary for true reconciliation?
3. Review the image of the grapes and the grain found on pages 130-132. How does this relate to the concept of Christian community?
4. What works against becoming a connected part of a Christian community? Why is it easier to remain an onlooker from a guarded distance? How could your group eliminate one barrier that keeps people away?

Private Deliberation

1. What qualities of love and forgiveness draw others to you? In whom do you see the qualities of love and forgiveness? How might you gain insight from this person to maximize these qualities in your own life?
2. In what areas of your life have you taken on the role of the prodigal son?
3. In what ways have you been the older brother?
4. Where have you acted as the loving father?
5. Who could benefit if you were to behave as the loving father toward them?
6. Think of a person who would be encouraged if you initiated reconciliation with them. What is keeping you from taking that initiative now?
7. Identify a 'neighbor' that you do not know. What steps could you take to meet and serve this person, remembering your role as an 'ambassador of love'?



## **Week 8—Reclaiming Forgiveness**

*For this session, please read chapters 10-11, pages 139-162.*

### Group Discussion

1. What formulas have you encountered that people use to gain forgiveness? What portions of those formulas are partially correct? What important elements do you believe are missing from these formulas?
2. What fears keep people from initiating forgiveness? What steps could a person take to move through these fears?
3. From the discussion of Apollo 11 (pages 142-145) what new thoughts do you have about the process of forgiving others?
4. Review Matthew 22:36, page 153.
  - a. What passions motivated God to offer his Son in order that we might experience forgiveness?
  - b. What passion would motivate you to forgive someone?
5. Do you think forgiveness, confession, repentance, and reconciliation are unavoidably connected? Can one be separated from another? Why or why not?
6. As you review your notes about forgiveness, what have you learned that surprised you?

Private Deliberation

1. In what broken relationships do you see no hope of reconciliation, apart from an intervention by God? What do you believe is blocking reconciliation? Identify any action you can take, as an act of worship, which would communicate your willingness to be reconciled with that person?
2. What circumstances are in your life which you can now see from God's point of view (theocentric) which in the past you have primarily viewed from your own point of view (anthropocentric)? What are the circumstances you would like to see from God's point of view, instead of your own?
3. As you remember that true knowing is experienced in a person's heart and life, what dimensions of forgiveness do you desire to know in a deeper way?