

# The Forgiveness Workbook

A Mentor's Guide to Helping Someone  
Work through the Process of Forgiveness

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# Introduction

Forgiveness is the heart of God. He forgives because He delights in being merciful. “Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.” (Micah 7:18) The only way we can receive salvation is by receiving forgiveness from God through Christ, and forgiving others as Christ has forgiven us is fundamental to appreciating our own forgiveness in any meaningful way.

Forgiveness is both a choice and a process. The choice is simple: Ephesians 4:32 tells us to forgive one another as Christ has forgiven you. The process, however, is complex and requires a deeper look at the implications of forgiving. I know of three reasons for this:

1. The severity of sins against a person varies greatly and many questions can arise.
  - Does forgiveness look different for intentional versus unintentional sins?
  - Are there differences in forgiving abuse of the past versus ongoing abuse?
  - How does forgiveness affect the relationship you have with an unrepentant sinner versus a repentant sinner?
  - How do you know when you need to forgive an offense and when you are being too sensitive?
  - When do you need to forgive, and when do you need to persevere with someone?
  - How can forgiveness be a safe choice when the offender is not repentant and still able to harm you?

These questions and others arise when we are called to forgive.

2. Christians can have a shallow view of forgiveness
  - Bitterness can be defined by “feelings,” and so some think that the absence of negative feelings towards the person constitutes forgiveness. I often hear “I am not bitter; I don’t even think about the person anymore.” Biblical forgiveness is never just the absence of negative feelings; it always includes positive actions.
3. The process of forgiveness can be unclear.
  - The choice to forgive is simple and can take place in a moment, but often that is not the end but rather the beginning. What comes after that initial choice? What will the process look like? Does it only involve repeated choices to forgive?
  - Another reason for confusion is that we also tend to discuss forgiveness out of our own experience rather than the person’s experience we are trying to help so we can frustrate more than help.

## Introduction

In this workbook I give five steps to help you in your process. The steps are the same for any situation of forgiveness, but the emphasis of each step will differ according to the situation.

This workbook is a result of my own personal 45-year struggle with forgiveness. I have wrestled with the concerns that forgiveness is unjust, unsafe, and therefore unwise. God has patiently and firmly taught me that His way is good, well-pleasing and perfect. He has personally walked me through these steps multiple times throughout my life, and each time I discover His perfect justice, protection and wisdom. My prayer is that you will know this truth and that this truth will set you free as it did me.

### How to use this handbook

I have written this book for home church leaders, mentors and lay counselors as an aid in helping others work through forgiveness. This is not an exhaustive study on forgiveness but a workbook to offer exercises for each of the five steps. Therefore a degree of knowledge about forgiveness is helpful. I will give a short explanation of each step and trust you will add details from your situation.

People have commented that they often work these steps in a different order, and that is fine. The order of the first four steps is not important, but step five (which is the step where you engage an offender) should come after the steps in which you engage God and self.

Completing the exercises will not guarantee that all the work is done, but it will give someone a good start in each aspect of biblical forgiveness. I am convinced that some kind of exercise for each of the five steps is necessary to guarantee that one actually takes action rather than just thinking about forgiveness. If you have different ideas for exercises or biblical passages that you prefer over mine, by all means use them. God personalizes this work for each person, so allow the Spirit to lead.

How long each step takes will depend on who the offender is in relationship to the person forgiving and the severity of the sin. Allow the Spirit's leading in the timing as well.

Saturate each step with prayer, because true biblical forgiveness is impossible by our own power.

*Please do not expect immediate change of heart after each step. There might be change, but it might not happen until after the first three steps are worked. It often takes longer to forgive and to enjoy the experiential freedom of the work when the offense is a larger offense and the offender is a significant relationship for you.*

# The Forgiveness Workbook

## The Forgiveness Process

### Five Steps of Forgiveness

1. **Correct your misconceptions of forgiveness.** Forgiveness is difficult for several reasons, but having an incorrect understanding will make it more difficult.
2. **Agree with God's assessment about sin** (Both the sin committed against you and your own sin). Romans 1:18,32; Matthew 7:3,4
  - God determines what sin is; we submit to His assessment. This is an important step because sometimes we are tempted to excuse sin in others (e.g. "He/she had a rough childhood"), or to take responsibility for another's sin, or to minimize our sins in a conflict by blaming others. This is why we must agree with Romans 1:18-32 and do the work of Matthew 7.
3. **Take the offender off your hook and put them on God's hook.** Romans 12:19 states that God carries out vengeance and wrath on non-Christians and Hebrews 12:6, 8 tells us that he disciplines all Christians. This is God's work not ours.
  - When you work this step, you will discover that putting the offender on God's hook does not mean that you take a passive bystander's position. If the person is still alive, God will want you to be an active participant in His corrective work – whether through interaction or prayer only.
4. **Be open to God's redemption.** Genesis 50:20
  - Often people are willing to forgive a sin, but then want to move on and forget about the whole experience. But biblical forgiveness always includes redemption. If you are unwilling to allow God to bring good out of the situation, you are missing a key aspect of God's forgiveness – and it will be difficult to maintain forgiveness.
5. **Love the offender with God's love.** John 15:9-12, Luke 6:27-28, 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a
  - Remember that God's love is always both corrective and gracious.
  - God will have ways for you to love the offender whether he/she is in your life or not, whether he/she is alive or not.
  - God's love and presence restrain evil, so He will keep you safe in this endeavor.

Forgiveness is an interaction between you and God before it is an interaction between you and another person. This is why the first 4 steps of forgiveness are vertical rather than horizontal.

# Step 1- Correct Your Misconceptions of Forgiveness

## Mentor's Notes

### *Why is it difficult to forgive?*

Forgiveness is difficult for several reasons. Some sins seem too evil to forgive. Some temperaments find it more difficult to forgive. Other temperaments find it easier to deny hurt, so they ignore the need to forgive. Often the biggest obstacle is our misconceptions about forgiveness. Whatever the reason is that makes forgiveness difficult, as a Christian, it is a command of our good God to be obeyed. Forgiving others is necessary for your spiritual vitality. To begin to understand the forgiving work before you, it will be helpful to do the following exercises:

### **Identify the offenders that committed sin against you**

Pray and ask God to reveal who you need to forgive. Even God might be on this list because, though no one ever has to forgive God, some might need to resolve their resentment towards Him. Often people have to put themselves on the list as well. Prioritize according to who you are most bitter toward at this time. Choose one person to focus on throughout this process.

### **Identify the sin**

- Is the sin a one-time event or are there multiple offenses?
- Are the sins past, present or ongoing?
- Could the sins call for criminal charges?
- Are they moral violations or temperamental weaknesses? Examples: expressing hate (moral violation) vs. being hot tempered; (temperamental weakness); intentional rejection (moral violation) vs. conflict avoider (temperamental weakness)

If you are helping another person through this process, you need to be aware of who he/she needs to forgive and for what. This information is crucial to managing expectations of how difficult the process will be and how long it will take.

Read the following passages:

Matthew 6:12-15; Matthew 7:1-5; Matthew 18:21-35; Romans 12: 19; 1 Corinthians 13: 1-8; Ephesians 4:32; 1 John 2:9-12; 1 John 4:20-21

- What do you learn about forgiveness and biblical love from these passages?
- On what basis do we forgive?

## The Forgiveness Workbook

Write out the reasons it is difficult for you to forgive. What do you fear will be sacrificed if you forgive? (Usually the fear is that justice and safety will be compromised in some way.)

- What is your anger trying to attack?
- What is it trying to protect?
- Is your anger accomplishing your goals? James 1:19

Read the following passages:

Deuteronomy 32:35; Genesis 18:20-25: How do these passages answer your fears?

Read Psalm 73

- In what ways do you relate to the psalmist?
- What were the consequences of his bitterness?
- What was his solution to bitterness?
- How did his perspective and attitude change by his choice stated in verse 17?

To further ease your fears and motivate you to forgive, you need to understand what forgiveness is and what it is not.

Forgiveness is not...	Forgiveness is...
a one-time event	a choice and a process
excusing the sin or minimizing its effect on you	allowing yourself to experience God's righteous anger
the absence of negative feelings	an ongoing choice to love, which will result in positive feelings
trusting the offender where he/she is not trustworthy	allowing the offender to rebuild trust when appropriate
tolerating ongoing abuse or mistreatment	setting firm and redemptive boundaries to safeguard against further abuse
reconciliation on unrighteous terms	the desire for righteous reconciliation on God's terms
giving your forgiveness	extending the forgiveness that has been given to you through Christ
forgetting about the offense	cooperating with God's redemptive plan

Read the following passages that will remind you of Christ's forgiveness of you:

Psalm 103:12, Micah 7:18-20, Romans 3:23, 24, Ephesians 1:7-8a, Colossians 2:13, 14, 1 John 2:12

- Write a list of your sins that Christ has forgiven and thank Him again in the context of these passages.

Did you have wrong assumptions about forgiveness?

How has this work helped to correct your assumptions?

## Step 1 - Correct your misconceptions of forgiveness

Pray for God's help to believe His Word and turn away from your wrong beliefs.

- Write down and memorize the verses that most help you to forgive.

Proverbs 3:13-26 is a passage about the benefits of receiving God's wisdom. Apply this passage to help you forgive. 3:13 How blessed is the person who finds wisdom (in forgiving others,) and the person who gains understanding (of forgiveness).

- What is God's promise for those who find His wisdom in forgiving?
- Find the action steps God wants you to take.

Pray and tell God that you are willing or not willing to forgive at this time. (This is an important step. If you are not willing to forgive at this time, it is far better to be honest with God and yourself. He will be faithful to continue to work on your heart.)

For further reading and reflection read the section of Chapter 5 of Reclaiming Love below.

## The Forgiveness Workbook

Reclaiming Love by Ajith Fernando, Chapter 5, pages 58 & 59

“YOU JUST DON’T UNDERSTAND what I’ve been through.”

“It’s been ten years, and I am still suffering everyday from what he has done to me.”

“You want me to forgive him, just like that? That’s impossible!”

It is easy for us to say, “Love is patient,” but as we saw in the last chapter, extending forgiveness to those who have wronged us is not so easy because it seems so unfair or unjust. “How can God ignore the wrong done to me? It’s so unfair just to forgive someone.” Perhaps you have heard sentiments like that. You may have even felt this way yourself at times.

God is just, and because he is just, all sin must be punished. Paul says, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap” (Gal. 6:7). Edward John Carnal refers to this as “the moral cycle” a cycle of actions and corresponding consequences that actively reveal the justice of God, a cycle that we do not have a right to personally complete.’ Our sense of justice is a God-given instinct, a prompting we feel within us that says, “Sin should be punished.” We must avoid simplistic understandings of the gospel that trumpet showing mercy at the expense of justice. The Bible teaches us clearly that when God saved sinful humanity; he did not ignore the serious breach of justice that sin represented. God did not overcome justice with love or ignore the demands of his justice. No, he satisfied justice through the loving sacrifice of his Son.

It can bring us some relief to know that all sin will indeed be punished. In his journals, John Wesley, after describing how a person had been ill-treated, resulting in his premature death, wrote, “But still our comfort is, ‘There is a God that judgeth in the earth.’” When people ask the question, “How can he get away with such a crime?” we answer: “But he won’t get away. He will have to face the awesome judgment of God one day.” The doctrine of judgment is a powerful truth that can destroy the root of bitterness in our hearts, the sense that we are always a victim at the mercy of the sins of others.

Bitterness is often caused by a belief that the person who has hurt us will somehow escape from punishment. We wrongly assume that they have got away scot-free while we must live with the wounds they have inflicted. But the truth of God’s judgment reminds us that no one gets away with sin. Sin is always punished. In the end, there are only two ways that sin is paid for: we pay it at the cost of our own blood, or Jesus pays it at the cost of his.

## Step 1 - Correct your misconceptions of forgiveness

### Forgiver's Worksheet

#### Step 1- Correct Your Misconceptions of Forgiveness

##### *Why is it difficult to forgive?*

Forgiveness is difficult for several reasons. Some sins seem too evil to forgive. Some temperaments find it more difficult to forgive. Other temperaments find it easier to deny hurt, so they ignore the need to forgive. Often the biggest obstacle is our misconceptions about forgiveness. Whatever the reason is that makes forgiveness difficult, as a Christian, it is a command of our good God to be obeyed. Forgiving others is necessary for your spiritual vitality. To begin to understand the forgiving work before you, it will be helpful to do the following exercises:

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## The Forgiveness Workbook

Write out the reasons it is difficult for you to forgive.

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- Write a list of your sins that Christ has forgiven and thank Him again in the context of these passages.
- Did you have wrong assumptions about forgiveness?
- How has this work helped to correct your assumptions?

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## The Forgiveness Workbook

- Find the action steps God wants you to take.

Pray and tell God that you are **willing** or **not willing** to forgive at this time. (*This is an important step. If you are not willing to forgive at this time, it is far better to be honest with God and yourself. He will be faithful to continue to work on your heart.*)

# Step 2 – Agree with God’s Assessment of Sin

## Mentor’s Notes

*This step is one of the longest steps and should not be hurried through. It also needs much prayer because its success is dependent on the work of the Spirit to convict and the forgiver’s response to that conviction.*

This step requires understanding two important truths:

1. God is the One who declares what sin is; we must submit to His assessment of both the sin against us and our sinful response. There is often much confusion about what is sinful.
2. Before God extends forgiveness, He expresses His righteous anger and judgment. When we agree with God about what sin is, it is appropriate to experience His righteous anger as well.

These two truths are important to understand because

1. Sometimes people are tempted to excuse sin in others (e.g., “He has a disorder”), or take responsibility for another’s sin (e.g., “I was beaten as a child – but I was very difficult” or “He has outbursts of anger – but he works hard and I do a lot of stupid things”).
2. Sometimes people minimize their own sin or make excuses for it.
3. Time can lessen the hurt and angry “feelings,” so sometimes we think we no longer have a need to forgive. Suppressed anger is not forgiveness.

## Agreeing with God’s assessment of others’ sin against you

This step is necessary for both the people who suppress their anger and those who live in it. Those who suppress their anger need to admit and deal with it. Those who live in it need to repent of unrighteous anger and move into God’s righteous anger.

Examples of God’s assessment of sin: Matthew 5: 17-48; Romans 1:32, James 2:10 and Proverbs 6:16-19

## Righteous vs. Unrighteous Anger (Read and discuss the passages in this section)

**Righteous anger** is an expression of God’s holiness and His commitment to uphold justice. It is expressed when people misrepresented Him, when His people betray Him, and when people abuse or exploit the weak. It never refers to an impulsive emotional reaction motivated by a bruised ego and is always redemptive.

Biblical examples: John 2:14-17 & Matthew 23: 13-36

Characteristics of righteous anger: Exodus 34:6; Psalm 78:38; Jeremiah 23:20

## The Forgiveness Workbook

**Unrighteous anger** is an expression of a person's self-centeredness and his commitment to revenge. It is expressed when he or a loved one is mistreated. It is expressed as an impulsive explosive reaction or a cold calculated rejection. People often minimize the seriousness of sinful anger.

Read James 1:19

### THE EXERCISE

Make a list of the sins committed by the offender and the effects you suffered as a consequence.

- This list may include what the offender did or what he/she did not do or should have done.
- Share this list with an older believer to see if you are agreeing with God.

Sins Against Me	Effects of Sin (see note below)
abuse or neglect	fear, shame, anger, confusion, guilt
gossiped about me	fear of judgment, sense of betrayal
lied to me	shame, mistrust, anger

As you separate the actual sin from the effects of the sin you will discover that there is more involved with the effect than just the sin against you. Your temperament is one factor in how you are affected by sin. Another key component is if this offense reminds you of an unresolved hurt from your past. Your reaction will be more intense than is appropriate for the present offense. You will need to recognize this and begin to deal with this in the Matthew 7 work below.

If you need to forgive abuse or neglect and have never confronted the offender, the exercises below will help you to get in touch with God's anger: Choose one of the three options. (This work is a chance to verbalize your raw feelings so as to release them from suppression and begin to process them in the context of God's truth. You will not show it to the offender so do not be too concerned about what you write or how you write it)

1. Write a letter to the offender. Since you will not be sending this version to the offender, be honest and allow real feelings to surface.
2. Write a letter to the offender from God, using Scripture.
3. Rewrite Psalm 73 (or another Psalm of your choice), using examples from your own experience.

Share your letter with an older believer.

Sometimes this exercise helps the hurt and angry emotions to surface; sometimes it does not. If you do not have an emotional response, this is not a problem at this time. The important thing is that you agree in your mind and heart with God about a sin you suffered. Do not excuse the sin or take responsibility where you should not. God never excuses sin; He judges all sin and condemns every sinner. Every person will decide whether they will be condemned by God or receive Jesus' condemnation on their behalf. He never takes responsibility for people's free will choice, so neither should you.

## Step 2 – Agree with God’s Assessment of Sin

If this leads to the question, “Why did God allow these bad things to happen to me?” please fight that through with God. He will meet you in that hurt and speak to you gently and personally.

### Agreeing with God about your sin and sinful reaction in the situation that has you resentful

This section of the exercise is **especially important** if you are a sensitive person and are hurt by sins that everyone endures when sinners are relating to sinners. (e.g. being lied too, gossiped about, forgotten, yelled at, judged, teased, etc.) Often that sensitivity is a result of unresolved past offenses, and that needs to be addressed as well.

This section is also important in situations of abuse and neglect because this is what you can change. You cannot undo the past and you cannot change another person. The way to heal is to change what you can, i.e., the way you respond to the abuse or neglect.

Look at Matthew 7:3-5. In the log and speck analogy, Jesus is not comparing the severity of each sin. The key point is that the log—our sinful response to another’s sin—causes us to see incorrectly. We must be able to see correctly to deal with sin properly.

Pray through Psalm 139: 23 - 24, and make the distinction between the offender’s sin, the effect of their sin, and your sinful responses.

- For example, the sin: neglect from your parents; the imposed effect: wrestling with the belief that you are uncared for. The sinful response: rejecting or choosing to disbelieve God’s loving provisions, or expecting the same treatment from all people, whether they are guilty of being neglectful or not.

We all suffer minor offenses. Some people react to minor offenses as if they were big. One reason for this is the belief that how someone’s action affects us is an indication of their intent. (e.g., A roommate comes in late and loud one night and that is an indication of little respect or concern for you). Spiritual growth requires not only forgiving sin against us but also learning to depersonalize people’s actions.

This work has been one of the most freeing and empowering works I have done. Everyone needs to understand the differences between someone’s actions, their intent for that action and the impact it has on me. The ability to distinguish a person’s behavior (which you can see, so you know) and their intent (which you can’t see, so you don’t know) is critical. This is because the impact you experience is a result of the intent you assume rather than the behavior you observe.

When I learned to separate action from intent, report what I saw, and ask the person their intent (rather than assume I knew), I realized I had much less to forgive. This is fundamental to successful relationships. (e.g., someone doesn’t respond when you say hello; you will be hurt if you assume he is upset with you, offended if you assume he is snubbing you, and empathetic if you assume he is worried about a dying parent). For further insight read the attached article at end of this step.

## The Forgiveness Workbook

Now you will add to your list above the third column of your sinful response

Sins against me	Effects of the sin	Sinful responses
abuse or neglect	fear, shame, anger, confusion, guilt	self-protection
gossiped about me	fear of judgment, sense of betrayal	get revenge, withdrawal and refuse to resolve
lied to me	shame, mistrust, anger	refuse to give a second chance

With the above list, do the log and speck work of Matthew 7: 3-4

### The Log and the Speck: dealing with your sin in the matter

**Log:** Identify the lies you believe about how the offender's sin determines your response (examples "You make me...; I would not behave this way if you would not...", etc.). Are you blaming the offender for your sin?

**Log:** Did you provoke their sinful behavior? Example: Person A pushes Person B away, judges any attempt of initiation by assuming selfish motives, and has hidden and unrealistic expectations that the person can never meet. Finally Person B withdraws. Before God, Person B is still guilty of withdrawal (1 Corinthians 13: 7) – but Person A must repent of her sin that provoked Person B.

**Log:** Make the distinction between moral violations and temperamental weaknesses. Moral violations need to be forgiven; weaknesses primarily need patience and forbearance. For example, some temperaments are not careful with their words and tend to exaggerate (temperamental weakness) vs. lying and deception (moral violation).

**Log:** Is your hurt and anger due to an unrealistic expectation on your part? It is easy to have a double standard (e.g., you want patience and understanding in regard to your besetting sin, but because of how much someone else's sin hurts, you want quick elimination of her besetting sin).

**Log:** Are you hurt because it includes past unresolved hurt, and therefore you are having an overreaction? Example: you are rejected in romance and are totally crushed. You can't seem to recover and wrestle with a feeling of being totally unacceptable. It comes to light that you were bullied by classmates and ostracized in school. This experience of cruel rejection was never dealt with so a break-up resurfaces that old pain. The old part of the pain cannot be placed on the present offender; he is not responsible for that.

**Log:** Ask God to reveal any sin of revenge towards the offender (remember that your sin will hurt you more in the present and future than the offender's sin against you). This will take prayer, time and wise counsel.

**Log:** *This log work might be more appropriate for older believers who tend to be self-righteous.*

## Step 2 – Agree with God’s Assessment of Sin

Romans 2:1 states that you are without excuse, everyone who passes judgment, because you practice the same sin that you judge in another. Ask God to reveal how you are guilty of the same sin that you hold against your offender. (Sometimes you will need to look inside your heart for the answer.) Example: I pride myself in not being a man-pleaser but will hide sin to stay out of trouble. Before God this is the same sin because they both are forms of self-protection.

Summarize your “log.” Then receive God’s forgiveness for your sin. Ask Him if you need to ask forgiveness of the offender for anything in your “log.”

- Which logs can you identify with?
- How do these logs distort your thinking about the sin of the offender?
- Are you angry with the action or the assumed motive of the person? (Sometimes we are correct in our assumption but often we are not.)

Share this work with the older believer helping you through this.

For further reading and reflection:

Reclaiming Love by Ajith Fernando, chapter 14

Constructive use of Feelings, by John L. Wallen

## The Forgiveness Workbook

From *Reclaiming Love* chapter 14, page 132

### RIGHTEOUS AND UNRIGHTEOUS ANGER

The anger Paul condemns here should be distinguished from what some have called “righteous anger.” The expression “righteous anger” does not appear in the Bible, but the basic idea is present in statements like, “Be angry and do not sin” (Ephesians 4:26). In several places the Bible seems to suggest that there is a way to express anger that is not sinful. We see this righteous anger expressed in the life of Jesus as he thunders against the hypocrites and the people who had turned the temple, the house of God, into a marketplace for buying and selling. Anger can also be seen as an expression of love, as when we see a person we care deeply about ruining his or her life through foolish and/or unrighteous living and we confront them with the truth. Another example of righteous anger can be found in Paul’s letter to the Galatians, when he corrects them, using strong language after they were led astray by false teachers (Galatians 3:1–4).

Leon Morris points out: “It is a necessary part of moral character to abhor evil as well as to love good.” God is actively opposed to evil, and as Morris writes: “Hundreds of biblical passages refer to the divine wrath. God is ‘a God who expresses his wrath every day’ (Psalm 7:11); ‘our God is a consuming fire’ (Hebrews 12:29).”

Since humans are made in the image of God, we need to express wrath in our lives too. But for most of us, the only “anger” we have experienced has been sinful and hurtful outbursts from ourselves or other fallible human beings, so we find it difficult to associate God’s goodness with his wrath and anger. But we should remember that when the Bible speaks of God’s wrath burning against our sin (e.g., Exodus 22:24; 32:10), it is not referring to a passing emotion motivated by a bruised ego. God’s wrath is not an arbitrary response—it is his settled and just opposition to all that is wrong and evil in this world ... and the sin in our hearts. In fact, rather than speaking negatively of God’s anger, the Bible speaks approvingly about the anger of God as an expression of his holiness and his commitment to uphold justice.

## Step 2 – Agree with God’s Assessment of Sin

### Constructive Use of Feelings, Dr. John L Wallen

Now if we go back to this morning, I was saying that a person has an intention which is expressed through action which results in some effect. The effect is a feeling state. What I am now saying is that the effect is directly related to the intentions you attribute to the other person. A point has to be made with regard to this scheme. For some reason it seems that human beings attempt to balance out the two sides; intentions and effects, almost as if this were an equation. If the other person engages in some action, I don’t know what his intention is —that’s his information, that’s private. If he engages in some action that hurts me, and I feel humiliated, embarrassed, then I attribute a negative intention to him just as the effect experiences is negative. My feeling reveals that I attribute to him an intention to hurt me.

Likewise if the effect that he produces in me is actually positive, I feel really good, I feel delightful, then presume that that’s what he wanted me to feel and so I equate the effect in me with his intentions. As an example, a friend told me once about a situation he experienced. He wanted to give a gift to some people to express his thanks for being allowed to spend the weekend with them. So he asked his secretary, “Will you go down and buy a gift for these people?” So she bought a table cloth. They felt very good about —positive effect. They wrote him back a letter saying how thoughtful it was of him to remember that their silverware contained roses which he repeated on the table cloth.

In short, you see, they assumed that he had deliberately matched their tablecloth with their silverware pattern —positive intention. Thus they made a balance state. In actuality, it was just sheer accident, sheer contingency that the secretary happened to get that pattern. When they attributed this intention to him it made him feel uncomfortable because he was being given credit for some intentions which he didn’t possess. So when I say that feelings reveal what a situation means to you as a person, I am saying that the effect of the other person’s behavior shows up as the hypothesis about why he did what he did. It doesn’t show up spelled out as a logical hypothesis; it shows up as a feeling.

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*I came across this document many years ago while working in a conference center. It may have been in the 1980s. I have tried to contact Dr. Wallen, without success.*

# The Forgiveness Workbook

## Forgiver's Worksheet

### Step 2 — Agree with God 's Assessment of Sin

This step requires understanding two important truths:

1. God is the One who declares what sin is; we must submit to His assessment of both the sin against us and our sinful response. There is often much confusion about what is sinful.
2. Before God extends forgiveness, He expresses His righteous anger and judgment. When we agree with God about what sin is, it is appropriate to experience His righteous anger as well.

These two truths are important to understand because

1. Sometimes people are tempted to excuse sin in others (e.g., "He has a disorder"), or take responsibility for another's sin (e.g., "I was beaten as a child – but I was very difficult" or "He has outbursts of anger – but he works hard and I do a lot of stupid things").
2. Sometimes people minimize their own sin or make excuses for it.
3. Time can lessen the hurt and angry "feelings," so sometimes we think we no longer have a need to forgive. Suppressed anger is not forgiveness.

### Agreeing with God's assessment of others' sin against you

This step is necessary for both the people who suppress their anger and those who live in it. Those who suppress their anger need to admit and deal with it. Those who live in it need to repent of unrighteous anger and move into God's righteous anger.

Examples of God's assessment of sin: Matthew 5: 17-48; Romans 1:32, James 2:10 and Proverbs 6:16-19

### Righteous vs. Unrighteous Anger (Read and discuss the passages in this section)

**Righteous anger** is an expression of God's holiness and His commitment to uphold justice. It is expressed when people misrepresented Him, when His people betray Him, and when people abuse or exploit the weak. It never refers to an impulsive emotional reaction motivated by a bruised ego and is always redemptive.

Biblical examples: John 2:14-17 & Matthew 23: 13-36

Characteristics of righteous anger: Exodus 34:6; Psalm 78:38; Jeremiah 23:20

## Step 2 – Agree with God’s Assessment of Sin

**Unrighteous anger** is an expression of a person’s self-centeredness and his commitment to revenge. It is expressed when he or a loved one is mistreated. It is expressed as an impulsive explosive reaction or a cold calculated rejection. People often minimize the seriousness of sinful anger.

Read James 1:19

### The exercise

Make a list of the sins committed by the offender and the effects you suffered as a consequence.

- This list may include what the offender did or what he/she did not do or should have done.
- Share this list with an older believer to see if you are agreeing with God.

Sins Against Me	Effects of Sin (see note below)
abuse or neglect	fear, shame, anger, confusion, guilt
gossiped about me	fear of judgment, sense of betrayal
lied to me	shame, mistrust, anger

As you separate the actual sin from the effects of the sin you will discover that there is more involved with the effect than just the sin against you. Your temperament is one factor in how you are affected by sin. Another key component is if this offense reminds you of an unresolved hurt from your past. Your reaction will be more intense than is appropriate for the present offense. You will need to recognize this and begin to deal with this in the Matthew 7 work below.

If you need to forgive abuse or neglect and have never confronted the offender, the exercises below will help you to get in touch with God’s anger: Choose one of the three options. (This work is a chance to practice saying what should be said to the offender. You will not show it to the offender so do not be too concerned about what you write or how you write it)

1. Write a letter to the offender. Since you will not be sending this version to the offender, be honest and allow real feelings to surface.
2. Write a letter to the offender from God, using Scripture.
3. Rewrite Psalm 73 (or another Psalm of your choice), using examples from your own experience.

Share your letter with an older believer.

Sometimes this exercise helps the hurt and angry emotions to surface; sometimes it does not. If you do not have an emotional response, this is not a problem at this time. The important thing is that you agree in your mind and heart with God about a sin you suffered. Do not excuse the sin or take responsibility where you should not. God never excuses sin; He judges all sin and condemns every sinner. Every person will decide whether they will be condemned by God or receive Jesus’ condemnation on their behalf. He never takes responsibility for people’s free will choice, so neither should you.

## The Forgiveness Workbook

If this leads to the question, “Why did God allow these bad things to happen to me?” please fight that through with God. He will meet you in that hurt and speak to you gently and personally.

### Agreeing with God about your sin and sinful reaction in the situation that has you resentful

This section of the exercise is **especially important** if you are a sensitive person and are hurt by sins that everyone endures when sinners are relating to sinners. (e.g. being lied too, gossiped about, forgotten, yelled at, judged, teased, etc.) Often that sensitivity is a result of unresolved past offenses, and that needs to be addressed as well.

This section is also important in situations of abuse and neglect because this is what you can change. You cannot undo the past and you cannot change another person. The way to heal is to change what you can, i.e., the way you respond to the abuse or neglect.

Look at Matthew 7:3-5. In the log and speck analogy, Jesus is not comparing the severity of each sin. The key point is that the log—our sinful response to another’s sin—causes us to see incorrectly. We must be able to see correctly to deal with sin properly.

Pray through Psalm 139:23-24, and make the distinction between the offender’s sin, the effect of their sin, and your sinful responses.

- For example, the sin: neglect from your parents; the imposed effect: wrestling with the belief that you are uncared for. The sinful response: rejecting or choosing to disbelieve God’s loving provisions, or expecting the same treatment from all people, whether they are guilty of being neglectful or not.

We all suffer minor offenses. Some people react to minor offenses as if they were big. One reason for this is the belief that how someone’s action affects us is an indication of their intent (e.g., a roommate comes in late and loud one night and that is an indication of little respect or concern for you). Spiritual growth requires not only forgiving sin against us but also learning to depersonalize people’s actions.

This work has been one of the most freeing and empowering works I have done. Everyone needs to understand the differences between someone’s actions, their intent for that action, and the impact it has on me. The ability to distinguish a person’s behavior (which you can see, so you know) and their intent (which you can’t see, so you don’t know) is critical. This is because the impact you experience is a result of the intent you assume rather than the behavior you observe.

When I learned to separate action from intent, report what I saw, and ask the person their intent (rather than assume I knew), I realized I had much less to forgive. This is fundamental to successful relationships. (e.g., someone doesn’t respond when you say hello; you will be hurt if you assume he is upset with you, offended if you assume he is snubbing you, and empathetic if you assume he is worried about a dying parent). For further insight read the attached article at end of this step.

## Step 2 – Agree with God’s Assessment of Sin

Now you will add to your list above the third column of your sinful response

Sins against me	Effects of the sin	Sinful responses
abuse or neglect	fear, shame, anger, confusion, guilt	self-protection
gossiped about me	fear of judgment, sense of betrayal	get revenge, withdrawal and refuse to resolve
lied to me	shame, mistrust, anger	refuse to give a second chance

With the above list, do the log and speck work of Matthew 7: 3-4

### The Log and the Speck: dealing with your sin in the matter

**Log:** Identify the lies you believe about how the offender’s sin determines your response (examples “You make me...; I would not behave this way if you would not...”, etc.). Are you blaming the offender for your sin?

**Log:** Did you provoke their sinful behavior? Example: Person A pushes Person B away, judges any attempt of initiation by assuming selfish motives, and has hidden and unrealistic expectations that the person can never meet. Finally Person B withdraws. Before God, Person B is still guilty of withdrawal (1 Corinthians 13: 7) – but Person A must repent of her sin that provoked Person B.

**Log:** Make the distinction between moral violations and temperamental weaknesses. Moral violations need to be forgiven; weaknesses primarily need patience and forbearance. Forgiveness could become necessary under certain circumstances. For example, some temperaments are not careful with their words and tend to exaggerate (temperamental weakness) vs. lying and deception (moral violation).

## The Forgiveness Workbook

**Log:** Is your hurt and anger due to an unrealistic expectation on your part? It is easy to have a double standard (e.g., you want patience and understanding in regard to your besetting sin, but because of how much someone else's sin hurts, you want quick elimination of her besetting sin).

**Log:** Are you hurt because it includes past unresolved hurt, and therefore you are having an overreaction? Example: you are rejected in romance and are totally crushed. You can't seem to recover and wrestle with a feeling of being totally unacceptable. It comes to light that you were bullied by classmates and ostracized in school. This experience of cruel rejection was never dealt with so a break-up resurfaces that old pain. The old part of the pain cannot be placed on the present offender; he is not responsible for that.

**Log:** Ask God to reveal any sin of revenge towards the offender (remember that your sin will hurt you more in the present and future than the offender's sin against you). This will take prayer, time and wise counsel.

**Log:** Romans 2:1 states that you are without excuse, everyone who passes judgment, because you practice the same sin that you judge in another. Ask God to reveal how you are guilty of the same sin that you hold against your offender. (Sometimes you will need to look inside your heart for the answer.) Example: I pride myself in not being a man-pleaser but will hide sin to stay out of trouble. Before God this is the same sin because they both are forms of self-protection.

Summarize your "log." Then receive God's forgiveness for your sin. Ask Him if you need to ask forgiveness of the offender for anything in your "log."

- Which logs can you identify with?
- How do these logs distort your thinking about the sin of the offender?
- Are you angry with the action or the assumed motive of the person? (Sometimes we are correct in our assumption but often we are not.)

Share this work with the older believer helping you through this.

For further reading and reflection:  
Reclaiming Love by Ajith Fernando, chapter 14

# Step 3 - God is the Only Just Judge

## Mentor's Notes

**A**s we discovered in Step 1, it is difficult to forgive because we have a sense of justice that says the person does not deserve forgiveness and should not get by with sin. The truth is that no one gets by with sin. Each person will either pay eternally for every violation of God's Law, or they will come to a deep realization and conviction of their sin and receive Christ's free gift of forgiveness.

In this step, you will become aware of and acknowledge how you have decided to do God's work of vengeance or discipline in the offender's life, and how to relinquish that work back to God.

Romans 12:19 states that God carries out vengeance and wrath on non Christians, and Hebrews 12:6 and 8 states that He disciplines all Christians. This is God's work and He is committed to it. It is tempting to try to do His corrective work in others in our own way.

You will discover that allowing God to do this work does not mean you take a passive position. If the person is still alive God will want you to be an active participant in His corrective work whether through direct interaction or prayer.

## THE EXERCISE

Discuss Romans 12: 19- 21 and answer the following questions with an older believer.

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Answer the following questions in regard to this passage

- Verse 19 tells you to never take your own revenge but instead do what?
- How would your revenge interfere with the wrath of God?
- After reading this verse do you accept that your sin of resentment is first and foremost a sin against God in that you are trying to do His corrective work?
- Think of some reasons why God would insist on vengeance being His work and His alone.
- The tone of this command appears to be a warning and a plea more than a rebuke. Give some evidence that would support that assumption. (vss. 19 & 21)
- What are some of the ways you have been overcome by evil in your unwillingness to forgive?

## The Forgiveness Workbook

- Have you experienced God's protection through forgiving an offender? If so, how? If not, think of ways forgiveness could protect you? (Mentor's note: give a personal example if possible)
- Do you believe that God's judgment, discipline and protection are superior to your revenge and self-protection?

Verse 20 tells you that you are an active participant in God's vengeance.

- Since food and drink are needs and not wants, do you see a significant insight into giving offenders what they need rather than what they want?
- What does God want to accomplish through these acts of service? (What is meant when it says you will heap burning coals upon their head?)
- How could kindness ever bring about conviction? (Romans 2:4)
- How is this kindness different than being co-dependent and giving the offender what they want?
- What are the personal benefits when you overcome evil with good?

Sometimes the offender is a believer and you may think that since they are forgiven by Christ they will never fully appreciate the pain they inflicted on you. It is important to remember that God is committed to disciplining and correcting His children.

Discuss Hebrews 12: 6 and 8 and answer the following questions with an older believer.

- Do you believe that God is disciplining your offender even if he or she is a believer?
- Do you believe that His discipline is superior to yours?
- What would be necessary for you to cooperate in God's discipline vs. trying to discipline the offender in your own way?

Take time to pray and relinquish God's work of discipline and vengeance back to Him.

- Repent to God; ask God to forgive you for taking on His work of conviction and justice in the offender's life. Agree to give this work back to Him, tell Him you are willing to cooperate with Him and give up your attempts to get justice.
- You will learn more about how to cooperate with God in step 5. At this point the decision to stop doing God's work and actually agreeing to give it back to God is the goal.

You will discover that cooperating with God's judgment and discipline is a very empowering and safe place to be. God's will is that which is good, pleasing and perfect for all involved.

### FOR FURTHER READING AND REFLECTION

*Sitting with Job* by David McKenna, Chapter 31, pp. 398-403

Read section of Chapter 14 of *Reclaiming Love*, by Ajith Fernando pp. 132-134

### Step 3 - God is the Only Just Judge

*Sitting with Job* by David McKenna, Chapter 31, p. 398-403

Three exceptions to the moral order of the universe, which God created and controls, are presented to Job as “critical incidents.” To begin, God asks Job to change roles and assume that he has in his hands the power of God. Now, as the new executor of the universe, Job must make decisions on three “critical incidents”:

Would you crush the wicked? (vv. 8-14) Would you create the useless? (vv. 15-24) Would you control the hostile? (41:1-34)

In each case, power is the issue and justice is the principle with which Job must deal.

#### Would You Crush the Wicked?

Job has complained about the apparent inconsistency of God letting him suffer while the wicked prosper. Indirectly, God admits that this is a problem with which He also struggles. Strict justice, not unlike the king in which Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar believed, dictated swift punishment for the wicked and abundant prosperity for the righteous. Certainly, such action is within His power. Why then, does He not crush the wicked to prove that He is just? Job, who has questioned God’s justice, is asked what he would do if God’s power were in his hands. God imagines that Job would

Disperse the rage of your wrath; Look on everyone who is proud, and humble him.  
Tread down the wicked in their place. Hide them in the dust together,  
Bind their faces in  
hidden darkness. (40:11-13)

If Job would do this, God agrees to bow before him, confess his greatness, and acknowledge his power to save himself (v. 14). In other words, Job would prove to be the omnipotent God of justice, but something would still be missing. He would not be the God of grace who delays his judgment in order to save the wicked. Later on, this attribute of grace will become flesh and blood in the person of Jesus Christ. As an intimation of that time, God is showing Job his grace in a situation where justice rules and when he owes the wicked nothing but punishment. Yet, he does not destroy them as Job might wish because of his genuine love for his creation.

Whenever human beings have the power to play God and use that power to punish the wicked, evil triumphs. The Spanish Inquisition and the Holy Wars are horror stories in human history. Prompted by the motive to punish evil in the name of Christ, they concocted greater evil than the sins they sought to punish. In the Garden of Gethsemane, when the Roman guard came to arrest him, Jesus rebuked Peter for brandishing the sword and cutting off the Roman servant’s ear, “Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matt. 26:52).

Job is quick to understand the point. If he exercised swift and certain justice upon the wicked, he too would die because he has acknowledged that he is not without sinful nature. What appears to be God’s injustice, then, is in reality the patience of redeeming grace.

#### Would You Create the Useless?

God illustrates this question with a graphic portrayal of the behemoth, perhaps the animal better known to us as the hippopotamus. At best, the monstrous animal is a riddle of creation. He eats grass like an ox, but is not an ox; he has strength in his hips, his stomach, and his thighs, and yet he is useless for work. He is blessed with a tail like a tree, bones like bronze, and ribs like iron (vv. 17-18).

## The Forgiveness Workbook

But for what purpose? The hippopotamus has no place among the birds and beasts of earlier listing because it has no unique function or special quality that sets it apart in the animal kingdom. The hippopotamus is ugly and useless.

Humor is a part of God's grace. The hippopotamus is a ludicrous creature who fouls up a neat and orderly universe in which everything makes sense and everything makes a contribution. Not the hippo. It is a maverick beast known for crashing through the jungle, upsetting the harmony of nature, or sinking up to its bulbous eyeballs in a muddy riverbed. If the hippopotamus has a reason for being, it is to keep us laughing at the ludicrous in ourselves as well as in the universe.

God has another view of the hippopotamus. Is his tongue in his cheek when he tells Job how much he prizes the hippopotamus?

I made [him] along with you. (v. 15) He is the first of the ways of God. (v. 19)

God is not kidding. The big, dumb, ugly, useless animal called the hippopotamus is a special object of God's care. Whether feeding on the mountains, playing in the fields, lying under a lotus tree, or letting the river gush into his eyes, nose, and mouth, the beast is a tranquil picture of playful trust.

Beauty and function are not the conditions of God's grace. Among the contingencies of His creation are ugly and useless creatures or circumstances for which the purpose seems unknown.

Among the frequent cries that surround the suffering of the innocent souls are "What a waste!" and "How senseless!" Very legitimately, Job feels the same way about his suffering. But then, God gives him the opportunity to assume the power and answer the questions, "Would you create the ugly and useless?" and "Would you do away with all creatures or circumstances for which there is no obvious purpose?" Some suffering would disappear if the useless were erased from the earth, but what would be lost? Learning the lesson from the hippopotamus, there would be no need for the humor of God's grace, and because each of us has some of the ugly and the useless in us, there would be no need to trust God.

To judge the value of persons or events on their utilitarian merits is another dangerous doctrine that must be avoided at all costs. One of the first stirrings of moral decadence in a civilization is to devalue or destroy persons who are not deemed useful to the culture. Girl babies who could not contribute to the "macho" image of Rome were tossed out in the street after one look by the father. Eskimo and Indian societies sent their elderly into the wilderness to die when they could no longer fight, work, or move with the tribe. Our society may be on the borderline of such decadence. The premium upon utilitarian values is so high that uselessness may be among the motives behind abortion without cause. A baby who restricts freedom, requires unselfish attention, costs \$200,000—\$300,000 to raise, and offers nothing useful in return may be an unwanted child.

If this attitude persists as a characteristic of our culture, a major moral crisis may be in the making. People over the age of sixty-five are the fastest-growing segment of our population, and, of that category, people over one hundred years old are the fastest-growing segment of all. To this time, however, we have failed to utilize effectively the skills and experience of the aged. If utility is equated with worth, we will have to find a meaningful function for the elderly or face the dilemma of living wills, negotiated deaths, suicide pacts, and varied forms of euthanasia.

On another level, a society that is dominated by utilitarian values has little appreciation for the creative arts or recreative play. A sculpture or a symphony may have value only in themselves, but they are the "grace notes" that are prized by great societies and devalued by declining civilizations.

Learning from a hippopotamus may seem to be a bizarre way to appreciate what appears to be ugly and useless in the realm of God's creation. But without the hippopotamus, we would lose another example of God's loving grace for an undeserving creature. With Job, we learn to laugh and cry when we realize that there is some of the ugly and the useless in each of us. Never again can we see water gushing up to the bulgy eyes, over the pointy ears, and out

### Step 3 - God is the Only Just Judge

of the snubby snout of a hippopotamus resting on a riverbed without seeing a prized creature of God's creation and a precious example of God's grace.

#### Would You Control the Hostile?

At the other extreme of creation is the leviathan, an amphibious monster of land and sea, which may be the animal we know as the crocodile. In contrast with the playful trust of the useless hippopotamus, the crocodile is a creature of violent hostility. God uses the crocodile to symbolize the forces of evil that exist for one persistent and malicious purpose in the universe—to oppose the will of God. In the most vivid and complete portrait of any of the animals, God details every incorrigible characteristic of the crocodile in a chapter that might be entitled, "Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Crocodiles but Were Afraid to Ask." The horny, hostile monster is described as uncatchable, unfeeling, untrustworthy, unmanageable, unplayful, undesirable, unhospitable, and unethical (41:1-6).

Attempts to capture or control the crocodile are vain. Furthermore, wisdom suggests that it is foolish to aggravate the crocodile because of all the beasts of the earth, he is the most ferocious of all. What is the difference between a crocodile and an alligator? According to an attendant at a zoological park, the crocodile will attack people without provocation while the alligator will strike only as provoked.

It takes God to subdue the crocodile. Where human beings fail, He can control:

Who then is able to stand against Me?  
Who has preceded Me,  
that I should pay him?  
Everything under heaven is Mine. (vv.10-11\*)

No doubt remains. All of the forces of evil, no matter how fierce, are not outside of God's command. Why, then, doesn't God wipe evil from the face of the earth? This is the question that is posed to Job. God asks, "If you had the power to subdue evil, would you do it?" Sin would end, suffering would cease, and God's justice would be vindicated. But what would be lost? Once again, the answer is human freedom and divine grace. Job might have been relieved of suffering, but he could not have been redeemed from sin. In the symbol of the crocodile, God makes a choice. He prefers a loving relationship with his creation more than a perfect world. Thus, he permits evil to exist until he has fulfilled his redemptive purpose. Saints as well as sinners will be victims of evil, but out of suffering, God will work his good purpose.

God has more to say about evil. With descriptive overkill, he introduces Job to the biological details of the crocodile:

limbs that are mighty and graceful (v. 12);  
skins that cannot be removed and a ferocity that will not respond to a double bridle (v. 13);  
jaws that cannot be opened and teeth that cannot be counted; (v. 14); scales that are like a coat of armor (v. 15);  
sneezings that flash with light and eyelids that lift like the dawn; (v. 18); breath that resembles fire (v. 19);  
strength that centers in the neck (v. 22);  
flesh that defies penetration (v. 23); and  
a heart that is as hard as stone (v. 24)  
All of the human weapons that are arrayed against the crocodile will fail:  
sword, spear, dart and javelin bounce off him (vv. 26-27);

## The Forgiveness Workbook

iron is as straw and bronze is as rotting wood (v. 27);  
arrows do not faze him and slingstones are like stubble against him (v. 28); and  
darts are like straw and javelins are a laugh to him (v. 29).  
Once the crocodile is aggravated, however, he  
slashes the mire with pointed marks (v. 30);  
makes the deep boil like a pot and turns the sea into seething ointment (v. 31); and  
leaves a shining wake behind him (v. 32).

Nothing on earth is like him—fearless, ferocious, and formidable. Symbolizing Satan, the crocodile “is king over all the children of pride” (v. 34). Among God’s creatures, he is the epitome of evil.

God has brought Job full cycle to the issue of evil in the universe. He permits evil in order to reveal His grace, but He will not provoke evil by exercising his power. Contrary to the opinion of Rabbi Harold Kushner that God is limited in his power to heal, Job is taught that God in His wisdom will not always act to subdue evil if a greater evil is the result or if his redemptive purpose is sacrificed. Only an administrator of justice can understand the dilemma of making moral decisions in which the choice is for the lesser evil as well as the greater good.

Elton Trueblood, one of my mentors in philosophy and faith, shook me up the first time that I met him. He accepted the invitation to be our commencement speaker at Spring Arbor College when I was president. When we met for breakfast prior to the commencement service, Trueblood said that he had to miss an important Monday morning class to give the commencement address. “I had to choose,” he said, “between lesser evils. Would my students missing the class suffer more than the audience not hearing me speak?” At the time, I reacted against this negative outlook because I wanted every decision to be made in the context of the greater good, not the lesser evil. Later, I learned that Trueblood’s realism put a perspective on decision-making that I had missed. Our decisions for the greater good can result in the greater evil. To impose Christian values on a sinful society, for instance, may be consistent with the greater good, but, more often than not, the long-term consequence is a greater evil. Furthermore, in practical decision-making as an administrator, another of my mentors in the university presidency, Dr. Charles Odegaard, often said, “Whenever I make an executive decision, I must ask who it is that I will alienate.” Through the symbol of the crocodile, God is teaching Job that He does not always act to punish short-term evil because the long-term consequences may be a greater evil.

God has introduced Job to the most profound and perplexing problem of the universe. Without direct references, He has invited him into the inner sanctum of heaven’s council, where He accepted the challenge of Satan to test the faith of His servant Job. Evil is the ultimate contingency of the universe which God permits in order to show His grace, and He will not provoke long-term evil for a short-term good. No higher compliment could be given by God to Job than to unveil this truth with the confidence that His servant will understand. A ferocious creature as incorrigible as the crocodile is God’s way of explaining the existence of evil as an opportunity for His grace.

The God of the orderly creation and the God of the disorderly contingency has now introduced Himself to Job. He does not answer the plaintiff’s question why, but He does address the ultimate question who. When it comes down to the rub of our fears, we are afraid that some corner of creation is out of God’s control. No conundrum is greater than the suffering of the innocent. This is why God addresses Himself to Job’s fear rather than answering His questions of fact. Unless we have all of the facts of the omniscient mind—back to the origins, systems, and distinctions of creation—our fears will remain. If, however, we are confident that there is no contingency or creature outside the command of the God who cares, we can bear the pain of suffering and live with mystery. Unencumbered trust is God’s goal for His servant Job.

### Step 3 - God is the Only Just Judge

*Reclaiming Love* by Ajith Fernando, Chapter 14, pp. 132-134

When the Bible speaks about human expressions of anger, however, it is more disapproving. The vast majority of instances of anger we see among humans can be categorized as sinful. They are not motivated by love for the person, nor are they rooted in authentic zeal for the glory of God. This is why refraining from responding to an offense out of anger can be so powerful. It's entirely unexpected in a world where retaliation is the norm.

In June 2011, Leonard Fernando (not a relative) succeeded me as the National Director of Youth for Christ (YFC) in Sri Lanka. About thirteen years prior, Leonard had moved to a predominantly non-Christian town to pioneer the ministry of YFC in that place. He erected a sign outside his house that announced that his home was now an office of YFC (a decision he later regretted and reversed). The sign was seen as offensive to many of the people who lived in the neighborhood, a challenge to other faiths.

Sometime around midnight, two weeks after moving to the village, a heavily intoxicated person began screaming obscenities outside Leonard's home. Making unfounded allegations, he threatened to set fire to the house unless the YFC sign was removed. Hearing the commotion, a crowd soon gathered outside his home. It was a terrifying experience for Leonard's young family. Thankfully, after continuing to shout and scream for some time, the man eventually left and the crowd dispersed.

The next morning Leonard decided that he would visit this man at his home. When Leonard arrived at the man's house, the man's wife was very happy to see him and she ran inside to announce his arrival to her husband. The man came out of his house and told Leonard that he had been unable to sleep that night. He shared that he had been deeply troubled by Leonard's response—or rather, Leonard's lack of a response. Even though the man had hurled obscenities, accusations, and threats at Leonard and his family, Leonard had kept a pleasant smile throughout the ordeal. Now, the man just could not get that smile out of his mind! It had troubled him so much that he could not fall asleep.

Leonard and the man continued to meet and talk in the days and weeks that followed, and they soon became good friends. When it came time, several years later, for Leonard to move to another house, his friend helped him find a place to live. There is power in choosing not to retaliate. By refusing to respond in anger, neither asserting his rights nor defending his honor Leonard left a distinct impression on the man. By God's grace, his enemy became one of his friends. That's the power of the gospel.

If refusing to respond in anger is such a powerful witness to the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ, why is it that some people, even devout Christians, fly into a rage?

## The Forgiveness Workbook

### Forgiver's Worksheet

**A**s we discovered in Step 1, it is difficult to forgive because we have a sense of justice that says the person does not deserve forgiveness and should not get by with sin. The truth is that no one gets by with sin. Each person will either pay eternally for every violation of God's Law, or they will come to a deep realization and conviction of their sin and receive Christ's free gift of forgiveness.

In this step, you will become aware of and acknowledge how you have decided to do God's work of vengeance or discipline in the offender's life, and how to relinquish that work back to God.

Romans 12:19 states that God carries out vengeance and wrath on non Christians, and Hebrews 12:6 and 8 states that He disciplines all Christians. This is God's work and He is committed to it. It is tempting to try to do His corrective work in others in our own way.

You will discover that allowing God to do this work does not mean you take a passive position. If the person is still alive God will want you to be an active participant in His corrective work whether through direct interaction or prayer.

### THE EXERCISE

Discuss Romans 12: 19- 21 and answer the following questions with an older believer.

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Answer the following questions in regard to this passage

- Verse 19 tells you to never take your own revenge but instead do what?
- How would your revenge interfere with the wrath of God?
- After reading this verse do you accept that your sin of resentment is first and foremost a sin against God in that you are trying to do His corrective work?

### Step 3 - God is the Only Just Judge

- Think of some reasons why God would insist on vengeance being His work and His alone.
- The tone of this command appears to be a warning and a plea more than a rebuke. Give some evidence that would support that assumption. (vss. 19 & 21)
- What are some of the ways you have been overcome by evil in your unwillingness to forgive?
- Have you experienced God's protection through forgiving an offender? If so, how? If not, think of ways forgiveness could protect you?
- Do you believe that God's judgment, discipline and protection are superior to your revenge and self-protection?

Verse 20 tells you that you are an active participant in God's vengeance.

- Since food and drink are needs and not wants, do you see a significant insight into giving offenders what they need rather than what they want?
- What does God want to accomplish through these acts of service? (What is meant when it says you will heap burning coals upon their head?)

## The Forgiveness Workbook

- How could kindness ever bring about conviction? (Romans 2:4)
- How is this kindness different than being co-dependent and giving the offender what they want?
- What are the personal benefits when you overcome evil with good?

Sometimes the offender is a believer and you may think that since they are forgiven by Christ they will never fully appreciate the pain they inflicted on you. It is important to remember that God is committed to disciplining and correcting His children.

Discuss Hebrews 12: 6 and 8 and answer the following questions with an older believer.

- Do you believe that God is disciplining your offender even if he or she is a believer?
- Do you believe that His discipline is superior to yours?
- What would be necessary for you to cooperate in God's discipline vs. trying to discipline the offender in your own way?

Take time to pray and relinquish God's work of discipline and vengeance back to Him.

- Repent to God; ask God to forgive you for taking on His work of conviction and justice in the offender's life. Agree to give this work back to Him, tell Him you are willing to cooperate with Him and give up your attempts to get justice.
- You will learn more about how to cooperate with God in step 5. At this point the decision to stop doing God's work and actually agreeing to give it back to God is the goal.

You will discover that cooperating with God's judgment and discipline is a very empowering and safe place to be. God's will is that which is good, pleasing and perfect for all involved.

### FOR FURTHER READING AND REFLECTION

*Sitting with Job* by David McKenna, Chapter 31, pp. 398-403

Read section of Chapter 14 of *Reclaiming Love*, by Ajith Fernando pp. 132-134

# Step 4 - Be open to God's redemption

## Mentor's Notes

“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.” (Genesis 50:20)

*This step has less work to do, but remember that is important and you will want the forgiver to have a true conviction before God to allow Him to redeem.*

Often people are willing to forgive a sin, but then want to move on and forget about the whole experience. This is often the case when someone has been abused or severely hurt. Biblical forgiveness always includes redemption. God does not prevent bad things from happening to us, but He promises to cause all things to work together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. If we are not open to how God wants to bring good out a bad situation, we miss out on a key aspect of biblical forgiveness. It will be difficult to maintain forgiveness without experiencing God's redemptive grace.

God's redemption will positively impact you and others who observe your response to being wronged. It will also positively impact the offender if that person is open.

## The Exercise

Read Genesis 37 & 39-50 and answer the following questions.

- List the ways Joseph was sinned against (e.g., rejected by family) (See Genesis 37, 39, 40). What was the key to Joseph prospering through all the suffering rather than being crushed? (Genesis 39:2, 3: 21; 41:51-52)
- How has the Lord revealed His presence and kindness to you in your suffering? If you do not know, ask God to reveal this.
- Go back to the chart on what forgiveness is not. How does Joseph's reaction to his brothers illustrate what forgiveness is not? (Genesis 42:7; 43:30; 45:1)
- Genesis 42:18-22, 44:16 and 45:10-11 are examples of Joseph testing repentance rather than getting revenge. What did Joseph accomplish through this test? How did this promote reconciliation between the brothers?

## The Forgiveness Workbook

- Who was impacted by God's redemption through this situation and how? (Genesis 45:5-8; 50:18-20)
- In your time of prayer ask God to show you how He has redeemed your suffering, and ask Him to continue to open your eyes to all the ways He wants to redeem it.

For further reading and reflection:

*Reclaiming Love* by Ajith Fernando, Chapter 4 pp. 52-54

## Step 4 - Be open to God's redemption

### Forgiver's Notes

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## The Forgiveness Workbook

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## Step 4 - Be open to God's redemption

Reclaiming Love by Ajith Fernando Chapter 4 pp. 52-54

### TWO POWERFUL TRUTHS

#### GOD'S LOVE IS GREATER THAN WICKEDNESS

There are two powerful truths that give us the strength to forgive and love those who have wronged us. The first truth is that we have strength to love because God's love is greater than all the wrongdoing in the world. Earlier, we referred to Romans 5:5: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." We said that this verse indicates that God's love is an inexhaustible resource coming from his eternal reservoir. This divine love is greater than all the wickedness and unkindness a human could face.

Corrie ten Boom, whom we read about in the introduction, struggled with bitterness when she was in the concentration camp. She writes, "Sometimes bitterness and hatred tried to enter my heart when people were so cruel to my sister and me. Then, she went on to say, "I learned this prayer, a 'thank you' for ,Romans 5:5.)This was her prayer: "Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you have brought into my heart the love of God through the Holy Spirit, who is given to me. Thank you, Father, that your love in me is victorious over the bitterness in me and the cruelty around me." Corrie writes that after she prayed this prayer, "I experienced the miracle that there was no room for bitterness in my heart anymore."

Corrie ten Boom shares of another time when her sister Betsie was too sick and weak to do the work of shoveling dirt that the guards were forcing them to do. Corrie remembers one of the guards poking fun at how little dirt there was in her sister's shovel. As a result, many of the guards and even some of the prisoners laughed along as they teased Betsie. When Betsie tried to explain that she was too weak to lift more, that this small amount was all that she could carry, her response enraged the guard and she hit Betsie across her chest and neck with a belt. Corrie felt herself begin to move toward the guard in anger, but Betsie stopped her before anyone noticed and asked her to keep working. Corrie soon saw a red stain appear in Betsie's collar and noticed a lump beginning to swell on her neck. When she noticed Corrie looking at her wound, Betsie covered her neck and said, "Don't look at it, Corrie. Look at Jesus only."

Despite her suffering, the love of Jesus sustained Betsie through her ordeal. Her health deteriorated until she was put in the prison hospital. One of the last things her sister told Corrie before her death was, "I pray every day that I will be allowed to [make a home for needy people, especially among their enemies, and care for them]. To show them that love is greater. Betsie was sustained by the love of God, even in the midst of her suffering, and she was given the strength to love those who had hurt her.

Affirmations of God's love to us also help us experience healing from our pain and to overcome the terrible effects of rejection. Jesus tells us that he is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. He contrasts his care and love for us with that of a hired hand who runs away when he sees a wolf coming (John 10:11 -13). In our "throwaway" culture, many people are not willing to stay committed to others when they sense trouble or difficulty —when they see a wolf coming. The result is disposable relationships and wounded hearts. Yet healing can come to those who have experienced the love of the Good Shepherd. In contrast to those "hired hands" who have disappointed us, he demonstrated his commitment to us by dying on our behalf.

#### GOD WILL TURN OUR PAIN INTO SOMETHING GOOD

In addition to knowing that God's love is greater than the evil in this world, there is a second great truth for us to remember, a truth that gives us strength to love those who hurt us: God will turn our hurt and pain into something good. Paul writes in Romans 8:28: And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good." Not only is God's love greater than the wickedness and the evils committed by those who hurt us, but his power

## The Forgiveness Workbook

is also greater than their power. When we allow our emotions and our thoughts to be dominated and controlled by the wrongs that people have done to us, we give them an honor they do not deserve. We affirm that their influence on us is stronger than that of God. The good news that God can accomplish something greater—something good—despite the pain we are experiencing is an antidote to the injustice and hurt we feel.

The truth of God's sovereignty over the evil done to us is well illustrated in the story of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph's brothers were jealous of their brother, and they turned against him, selling him into slavery in Egypt. Over the years, God miraculously and sovereignly raised Joseph to become the second most powerful person in the land of Egypt. Subsequently he was reunited with his family. But after his father died, Joseph's brothers feared that he would use his power to take revenge on them (see Gen. 50:17-20). They "came and fell down before him and said, 'Behold, we are your servants.'" The Bible tells us that "Joseph wept when they spoke to him" — one of eight times recorded that Joseph wept.

Joseph had certainly experienced great pain, yet the love of God had softened his heart, moving him to cry when relating to his brothers. He told them not to worry: "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it (-about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." Though Joseph had suffered for many years because of the sin of his brothers' jealousy, he was able to look at his suffering with eyes of faith in God's; sovereignty.

## Step 5 - Love the offender with God's love

John 15: 9-12, Luke 6: 27-28, 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8a

*This step in the process should be done after the other steps are completed. If the offense was severe and if you are prone to "take care of" an offender then you should spend longer time you on the other steps before moving into this step.*

**T**his step does not end as long as we are alive. Christ commands us to love one another (including our enemies) as He has loved us. This was the most difficult step for me personally. I felt it would be dangerous to love my offenders. It took a long time to really grasp the wisdom and sweetness of God's command to love as He has loved us. Even though my offenders never fully repented and therefore remained unsafe, I discovered the safest place to be is in the will of God to love them.

This command seemed offensive to me, because like many, I believed the command meant I was supposed to be nice and tolerant of ongoing offenses. To love as Christ loves is very different than co-dependent love. Christ's love gives the offender what is morally good and what he needs and co-dependent love gives what the offender wants to get back what you want from him (acceptance, approval, etc.). God's love gives sacrificially for the offender's good. As we learned in the chart "What forgiveness is not," God does not expect forgiveness to cause us to tolerate ongoing abuse, disrespect, deception, etc. What I learned was that God's love exposes and restrains sin as much as forgives it. You can learn as I did that your actions of love will do the same.

The following truths were helpful for me to initiate God's love to my offenders.

- God's love is morally good, so it is always corrective as well as gracious.
- God's love and presence restrains evil, so He will keep you safe in this endeavor. 2 Thessalonians 2:6, 7
- You do not have to reconcile with the offender to love him/her. You can and should love even in cases where you cannot reconcile. You will discover ways to love without interacting with the offender. Reconciliation is only right when it is done on God's righteous terms. If the offender wants reconciliation on sinful terms, you should not permit this. (e.g., a person cannot reconcile with someone who insists on continuing to abuse them).
- God will have ways for you to love the offender whether he/she is in your life or not, whether he/she is alive or not.
- This step is ongoing – God will call you to love the offender in thought, word, deed and prayer for as long as you live
- The joy Christ promises in John 15:11 is the result of being able to respond to Christ' love and view of you rather than reacting to the offender's sin. This is freedom and spiritual maturity.

## The Forgiveness Workbook

The goal of this exercise is for you to allow God to transform your heart to want to give His love to your offender. He changes our heart by showing us the personal benefit of loving and He shows that giving love comes from a position of strength and safety, not from weakness.

### The Exercise

#### The Motivation

Read John 15:9-12, Luke 6:35-38, 1 John 4:7-21, Romans 12:21

List the personal benefits that are promised and the warnings given in these passages.

- Do they motivate you? How? If not what is the resistance? (Discuss this with an older believer)
- Read a gospel and look for examples of how Jesus' commitment to love the Pharisees kept him strong and in control. John 8:1-11 is a great example.
- Pray and ask God that Jesus' example will motivate you and will continue to do so through these promises.

#### How to love

Read Luke 6:27-38 – “Love your enemies”

- 6:27,28 – What are some ways you could do good, bless and pray for offenders who are not in your life at this time? (Hint: Think about the way you think and talk about the offender). The Greek word for good is kalos. It means that which is beautiful, excellent, righteous and pure as defined by God's standard.
- Give some examples of how you could change your thoughts and speech when talking about this person.
  
- 6:27, 28 - What are some ways you could do good, bless and pray for offenders who are in your life?
- You need to allow God to define good and loving – not the offender, the offender often wants you to tolerate, excuse her sin. Remember, God wants you to expose and limit the impact of their sin by having a righteous response. This is the point of Romans 12:20 - 21

Therefore “doing good” may include the following acts of love

- Have you ever confronted the offender about the offense? If the offense was a moral violation it might be very important for your healing as well as the offender's to confront the sin.
- If it was a crime against you have you ever asked for reparations or notified the police?  
In what ways would confrontation or reporting be good for you?  
In what ways would this be good for the offender?  
What would you need to do to prepare for this confrontation?

(Often people are afraid of the response they will get. Get help in identifying the fear and learning what God says about dealing with our fears is important)

## Step 5 - Love the offender with God's love

- 6:29 For these commands to be good rather than exhibit weakness they will include God's truth and boundaries, which often means an unrepented offender becomes angrier.

Ask God to reveal any co-dependent motivation for wanting to turn the other cheek, and ask Him to help you correct your motivation

Make a plan that includes speaking the truth in love, good boundaries, and consequences if those boundaries are disrespected. Also make sure you have support from other Christians when necessary.

### Becoming a Christlike lover

God does not want us to just practice acts of love; He wants us to be transformed into His likeness, and therefore He wants our acts of love to flow from our transformed nature.

### 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a – Characteristics of Love

- 16 characteristics are mentioned.  
Would you like these characteristics to be a description of your character? Why? Why not?  
How do we obtain these characteristics? (Refer to 1 John 4:7-20).  
Write out some practical ways to practice these qualities toward your offender.

For further reading and reflection:

*Bold Love*, by Dr. Dan B. Allender, Chapter 7

*The Blessing*, by Gary Smalley (This is helpful if you are forgiving parents)

*Reclaiming Love* by Ajith Fernando