

The Forgiveness Step



Leader's Note: Before class begins, be sure to make copies of the Participant Handout for the session. Begin by welcoming the ladies and open the class in prayer. Before you watch the video, introduce the topic by spending approximately five minutes going over the definition and Session Opening. After you watch the video, open the floor for discussion and move into your selected group exercise(s).

The group exercises are designed to generate meaningful discussion. Depending on how much time you have, you may not have time to discuss all of the exercises. Before class begins, select the exercise(s) you want to focus your session on. Remember, the goal is not to “get through” all of the exercises, but to create an atmosphere where revelation comes through group dialogue that creates “aha moments”. When women bond through shared experiences and increased knowledge of God’s word, healing comes and creates an opportunity where safe and solid relationships can be built that can last well beyond the group study.

Definition of Forgiveness:



The forgiveness step is the habit of ridding the soul of **toxic waste** by choosing to walk in forgiveness.

Session Opening:



Have you forgiven *and* forgotten?

As the facilitator, take a few moments to open the session by sharing your heart as it relates to forgiveness. Remember how important it is to be vulnerable. Your own transparency sets the stage for others to feel like the group is a safe place to open up and share. You may choose to share your struggles with forgiveness or your victories and how God brought you through, or you might share insight you received from the chapters on the forgiveness step. Then review the following truths.



Video & Discussion Time: Watch the video for Session 4. Afterward, discuss the video before you transition into the group exercises. Pitch out a question or two to the group. Here is one to get you started:

? Christy mentioned several ways you can tell if you’ve forgiven and forgotten. Let’s talk about those. (Have the ladies turn to page 110. Go around the room and take turns reading the bulleted items and encourage group members to make comments as the list is reviewed.)

- The “tapes” are erased. You no longer replay mental conversations.

- You can pray for the person who offended you.
- You don't feel anxious when you see them. The "sting" is gone.
- When you hear of problems they suffer you don't secretly rejoice.
- You can feel compassion for them.
- You can be genuinely friendly when you see them.
- You have peace when you think of them.
- You have no more expectations of the person who offended you.
- You understand expectations are a down payment on resentment.



Group Exercises

Group Exercise A

Go around the room and have the participants take turns reading the bulleted items from their handout. Encourage group members to share and make comments after each item is read.

When your ability to forgive is compromised, you may:

- Have issues in your life you've not surrendered to Christ
- Have bitterness
- Have traces of shame
- Have emotional and physical health issues caused by stress or bitterness
- Carry a grudge for a long time
- Have weak boundaries
- Be angry at God
- Believe that forgiveness has to be earned
- Have anger management issues and poor conflict resolution skills
- Have trouble admitting you are wrong
- Have unforgiveness toward yourself

Group Exercise B

Go around the room and have the participants take turns reading the scriptures and questions from their handout. Encourage group members to share and each person reads.

Forgiveness Scriptures

📖 See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. Hebrews 12:15 (NIV)

📖 A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense. Proverbs 19:11

📖 He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends. Proverbs 17:9

❓ After being sold into human trafficking by his jealous brothers, falsely accused of rape and being thrown in prison, Joseph had every reason to be angry and bitter. In a gripping encounter with his brothers 13 years later, Joseph said this to the brothers who sold him into slavery: “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” Genesis 50:20 (NIV) **How do you think Joseph came to this point of forgiveness? Do you think he would have been used by God to save the world from famine if he remained in bitterness?**

📖 In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Ephesians 4:26 (NIV)

📖 For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin. Acts 8:23 (NIV)

📖 Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:25-26 (NIV)

❓ **Why is it so important to let go of bitterness before we go to bed?**

❓ **How can bitterness grow and hold us captive to sin?**

📖 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9 (NIV)

📖 He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy. Proverbs 28:13 (NIV)

❓ **How does confessing our sins give us freedom?**

❓ **Have you personally experienced liberty after a season of trying to hide your struggles? What happened?**


📖 Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the LORD our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison. Deuteronomy 29:18 (NIV)


📖 Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways, and get yourself ensnared. Proverbs 22:24-25 (NIV)

❓ **Like a small root that grows into a great tree, bitterness springs up in our hearts and overshadows even our deepest Christian relationships. A bitter root comes**

when we allow disappointment to grow into resentment or when we nurse grudges over past hurts. What other unhealthy emotions usually accompany bitterness?

- ? How do you know if someone has issues with anger?**
- ? Is bitterness contagious? Have you seen a group of people plagued by the bitterness of one person? Have you experienced the bitterness of others? How did you deal with the situation?**

 "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." Matthew 18:35 (NIV)

 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. Mark 11:25 (NIV)

- ? Forgiveness often feels like something we *do* for the person who offended us, but harboring bitterness blocks *our* ability to receive forgiveness. Why is God more concerned about our freedom than defending our cause and proving us right? Have you ever experienced a dramatic release after a long period of holding onto bitterness?**

Group Exercise C

The following action points are discussed in Love Junkies beginning on page 114. Read each action point. Participants can either follow along in their books or fill in the blanks on their handouts. After you read each bullet point, encourage group members to comment, giving their own insight or sharing their own experiences.

If you struggle with bitterness, try these action points:

- ❖ Manage your **expectations**; expectations are a setup for disappointment and bitterness.
- ❖ Guard your **heart**.
- ❖ Get your mind off of the **offense**.
- ❖ Pray for God to **bless** the person or situation you are angry with.
- ❖ Pick an attribute you **admire** about the person you are bitter toward and choose to reflect on that.
- ❖ Make a **gratitude** list.
- ❖ **Overlook** an offense.
- ❖ Change your **meditations**. Stop the self-talk.
- ❖ Vent and seek the **counsel** of a trusted friend.
- ❖ Pray that God would give you **revelation** about the root of your bitterness.

For Additional Reflection

SMART Goals

If you struggle with forgiveness, look over the above list of action points. Pick one or two and write out a measurable SMART goal. A smart goal means that your goal is specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound.

S	Specific
M	Measurable
A	Achievable
R	Realistic
T	Time Bound

For example:

I will focus on strengthening my forgiveness by spending five minutes per day for the next two weeks meditating on Proverbs 19:11 to guard my heart.

Your Turn:

I will focus on my habit of forgiveness by _____

Index Prayers

Read Matthew 18:21 – 35

Write down the name(s) of the person/persons who have hurt you in the past on a card. Use a separate card for each person. On each card, write a prayer for that person. As you are faithful to pray, watch God change your heart toward those who have offended you.

Bless those who persecute you (Romans 12:14).

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Reading Assignment for Next Week: Imagination

Chapters 12-14