

FORGIVENESS:
Many
OPPORTUNITIES
TO MAKE *One* **DECISION**
WORKBOOK



Rhonda Miller

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TO MAKE *One* **DECISION**

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Published by Vervante
Springville, UT

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ON A PERSONAL NOTE

Unforgiveness has been a source of burden and struggle in my life for many years. After finally understanding more about who Jesus was and accepting God's gift of forgiveness, I decided to accept the opportunity to forgive others. I forgave others for offenses, hurts, personal and physical violations, not keeping commitments, and much more.

As I learned to forgive others, I realized I needed forgiveness too. I've offended people too. My actions brought a burden on and struggle for them, so I appreciate the love and forgiveness they have shown me. Our great God made provisions for me to accept and give forgiveness – abundantly. The power of love in forgiveness has continued to release me from the heavy load of carrying offenses. The release of those offenses has made all the difference in my ability to continue my life in the plan and promises of God.

This book is not a comprehensive study on forgiveness. Please allow this book to be a stepping stone in your own personal journey. There are many books by outstanding authors that delve into forgiveness in more detail and depth.

These are lessons about forgiveness I learned from my personal studies during my journey to forgiveness. This workbook was born out of my thoughts, feelings and lessons that I learned. Actually, I wrote this book for me. I'd like to share it with you.

INTRODUCTION

“There is no way I will ever, ever forgive him!”

“She does not deserve my forgiveness. I will never have anything more to do with her. She is dead to me.”

“No, I will not forgive you. You have made a fool out of me. I’ll get you back. You better watch yourself.”

“I’ll forgive, but I’ll never forget.”

“I cannot forgive myself for what I did. I deserve to be punished.”

“I am so ashamed of myself for what I did. My life will never be the same.”

“He really didn’t mean it. I’ll just let it go.”

These thoughts and statements come from places in our hearts and minds that are full of disappointment, rejection, trauma, grief, and more. Then there are the questions: What is forgiveness? Where does forgiveness come from? Do I have to forgive? How do I do it? What will it do for me? Does it really matter if I forgive or not? What if I don’t feel like forgiving? So many times, forgiveness is so difficult to offer to the one who damaged us, but God wants us to know that forgiveness is not based on our abilities. Forgiveness is based on His love; His love empowers us to forgive.

HOW THIS WORKBOOK IS SET UP

There are many books, other pieces of literature and videos about forgiveness from a variety of philosophies and viewpoints. This workbook is based on forgiveness from the Bible—what God did through His Son, Jesus Christ. It will provide us with education, insight, wisdom, and encouragement from the true and living God through Jesus Christ.

At the end of each chapter there is a worksheet to complete. The purpose of the worksheets is to deepen your understanding and build your encouragement to forgive. The worksheets consist of basic questions about each chapter. There is also a Personal Reflections section, where I ask you a question to inspire you to apply the lesson to yourself.

You may decide that you would rather think through your answers to the worksheet questions instead of writing them down. Or, you may use a journal to write the answers, insights, and thoughts that you have. Do what works for you. The important thing is that you learn the loving power of God's forgiveness and share that forgiveness with others.

The Guide to Forgiveness worksheet consists of steps that allow you to experience what we actually do when we forgive in the same manner that Jesus forgives us.

Scripture references are included in the content of each chapter. At the bottom of each page, footnotes contain information I obtained from a book or a website. The notes section on pages 69 and 70 also lists the sources I used.

As you become more familiar with The Guide to Forgiveness, you may not need to use it as much or at all. Personally, the more emotion I feel (e. g., anger, grief, sadness), the more I use the guide because it helps me stay focused on my decision to forgive. It also helps me remember to accept this opportunity to be like Jesus.

Forgiveness:
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THE FOUNDATION

How It All Began

This is a summary of the series of events that took place with Adam and Even in the Garden of Eden. These events initiated our need for God's forgiveness. The summary is adapted from Genesis, chapters 1-3.

In the beginning, God created the heavens, the earth and everything in it. God created the Garden of Eden, which had all kinds of beautiful trees and delicious fruits. God also created Adam, the first man, and gave him the responsibility to care for the Garden of Eden. God specifically instructed Adam not to eat from one particular tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:15-17).

Then God created a woman, an ideal mate and companion for Adam. God put Adam in a deep sleep, took one of his ribs and created a woman from this rib. When Adam awakened from his deep sleep and met the woman, he was extremely happy with God's creation, and he called her "woman." Adam, being responsible, told the woman about the garden and the one tree that was off limits (Genesis 2:19-25; 3:2).

Satan came along, disguised as a serpent, to speak to the woman. He approached her while she was alone and asked her: "Is it true that you cannot eat any of the trees in the garden?" The woman told the serpent they could eat from any of the trees except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. She further explained they would die if they touched or ate from it. The shrewd serpent told the woman that she would not actually die. He said, "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:2-4).

The woman looked more closely at the tree. She gazed at it. It was gorgeous. It was lovely. Perhaps she even walked around the tree slowly, gazing at the mouth-watering fruit hanging from it. So, she ate the fruit and shared with Adam, who also ate some of it. He completely disregarded what God had told him before he met the woman. As soon as they both ate the fruit, they realized they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together to hide their nakedness from each other and from God (Genesis 3:6-7).

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me

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some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (Genesis 3:8-13).

God promised that through the Seed (i.e., descendant) of a woman (Eve) would come one who would crush the head of Satan (Genesis 3:15). This is the first promise of a Savior and the first great act of God’s grace after their tragic act of rebellion.¹

God told the woman, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you” (Genesis 3: 16).

God told Adam “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return” (Genesis 3:17-19).

Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.

Adam and Eve’s lives changed drastically after they chose to disobey God. Their fellowship with God in the way they had known was over. They were no longer in the original relationship God had created with them. God told Adam and Eve to leave the Garden of Eden.

After Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden, their lives radically transformed from living a refreshing life taking care of the beautiful garden to living in struggle to provide food, clothing, and shelter for themselves and their family.

That sin – disobedience – disrupted not only Adam and Eve’s relationship with God, but that of their descendants as well. One man’s sin caused generations of people to be separated from God through death. That means you and me too. Everything and everyone were affected by Adam and Eve’s sin. The penalty for sin was death.

Here it is in a nutshell: Just as one person did it wrong and got us in trouble with sin and death, another person did it right and got us out of it. More than just getting us out of trouble, he also got us into life! One man said NO to God and put many people in the wrong; one man said YES to God and put many in the right (Romans 5: 18-19 MSG).

God did not leave us in a state of unforgiveness with no possible relationship with Him ever again. He decided to save us. He established a plan. He made a way, and that way was His

¹Ham, S. (2010, July 29) Where is the First Promise of the Savior? Retrieved June 24, 2018 from <https://answersingenesis.org/answers/biblical-authority/devotional/where-is-the-first-promise-of-the-savior>

Son, Jesus Christ. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

God kept His Word. Just like He promised, Jesus arrived in a simply divine way to save us from the sin of Adam and Eve that we inherited.

Jesus was born out of a human body and lived an ordinary life. His entrance as a baby into this earth seems insignificant, having been born to earthly parents in a stable with dark and dirty surroundings (Mark 2:4-7). Because of the ordinariness surrounding his birth and life He was able to relate to the humanity of all people.

However, while He lived here on earth, He operated in the supernatural power of His Heavenly Father. He healed many people (Mark 1:29-34). He started a ministry with 12 followers (Mark 3:13-19). He fed thousands of people (Mark 6:30-44). He taught his disciples about serving others (Mark 10:35-45). He silenced a storm (Mark 4:35-41). In addition to the wonderful miracles He performed, He came with a mission to save us from sin. He came to free us from the punishment of the death penalty that we inherited from Adam and Eve.

Even though Jesus was an excellent son, brother, and leader, the religious leaders did not accept Jesus as the Son of God. They accused him of crimes he did not commit. He knew He would be killed.

When God's plan for Jesus to die for us was several hours away from completion, Jesus took three of His disciples, Peter, James, and John with him to the beautiful garden of Gethsemane to pray. He told the disciples to wait for him while He prayed (Mark 14:32).

As he prayed, Jesus felt the grief and anguish so deeply, it was overwhelming. He lay face down on the ground and prayed, his sweat falling like drops of blood (Luke 22:44). He struggled between what God wanted Him to do and what He didn't want to do in that moment (Mark 14:33-35). If there ever was a time for Jesus to stop the plan because of His feelings, this was the time. He had an opportunity to change His mind. He had the opportunity to say, "These people don't even like me. I came to save them, and they want to kill me." His love for us was so much bigger and stronger than His feelings. He decided to follow through with the plan of love to pay the penalty and die for our sins. He asked God to help Him go through with His decision despite his emotions. He prayed to God, "Let your will be done rather than mine" (Mark 14:36 GW). His decision was final.

God, His Father could have said, "I cannot stand to see my Son suffer like this. He's innocent. He doesn't deserve to be treated like this. He needs me. I've got to stop this now." Instead, God kept His promise. He loved the world this much – He gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life (John 3:16 GW).

Judas, one of His disciples, arrived with soldiers to capture Jesus. Judas showed the soldiers which man to arrest by kissing Him; a sign that signified He was the man they wanted to arrest. Then, Peter cut a man's ear off with his sword while trying to defend Jesus, but Jesus,

being who He is, put the man's ear back in place. Eventually, his remaining disciples ran off and abandoned Him, and later, Peter denied Jesus on three different occasions, just as Jesus had earlier predicted he would. In spite of all that was going on, Jesus continued with the plan (Mark 14:43-50).

Jesus was arrested even though He was innocent. (Mark 14:53-57) After the trial, he was whipped, and a crown of thorns was placed on his head. The people mocked him, slapped his face, spit on him and screamed out "Hail, king of the Jews!" Shortly after, He was crucified on the cross by the Roman soldiers, and the pain was excruciating (Mark 15:1-39).

While Jesus hung on the cross, still alive in excruciating pain, this was yet another opportunity for Him to change His mind. He could have decided we did not deserve the magnitude of love that He had for us. The truth is, we don't deserve it, but He loves us anyway.

The gospel group, Anthony Brown and Group TherAPy, sing these words to Jesus,

"You thought I was worth saving
So you came and changed my life
You thought I was worth keeping
So you cleaned me up inside
You thought I was to die for
So you sacrificed your life
So I could be free"²

Note: The capitalized AP, in TherAPy, is not a misprint. The capitalized "AP" references Anthony Brown's former group, Answered Prayers. See Wikipedia.org

²Brown, A. (2015) Worth. On Everyday Jesus [CD] Indianapolis: Tyscot Records. Track 4

WORKSHEET
THE FOUNDATION
How It All Began

1. God told Adam and Eve not to eat from a specific tree. What choices did they have?

2. What was their punishment?

3. What were the consequences that Adam and Eve experienced because of the sin they committed?

4. How did Satan outsmart Adam and Eve?

5. What did God decide to do to make a way for us, Adam and Eve's descendants, to be restored to Him?

6. Name one characteristic of forgiveness.

WHAT IS FORGIVENESS? According to the Bible

Simply put, this is what happened –

1. God created Adam and Eve.
2. God instructed Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
3. Adam and Eve ate from the tree anyway. They sinned against God by disobeying Him.
4. Because they sinned, they deserved punishment. Because we are their descendants, we deserved punishment too. We owed God our lives. The punishment for sin was death.
5. God sent His Son to accept what we owed Him – our lives. Jesus paid the debt and took our punishment which was death. Jesus died on a cross.
6. John 3:16 says God loves us so much that He gave His one and only Son for us. Whoever believes in Jesus will not die. Instead of death, that person will have eternal life.
7. God does not demand payment from us if we choose to believe in God's Son. Jesus took the punishment for us and God let us go.
8. When we accept Jesus, God's Son, we accept God's forgiveness. We receive pardon and we are not punished for the sin of Adam and Eve. Therefore, God does not demand payment from us. Instead of eternal death, we receive life.

The Greek word for “forgiveness”, when translated, literally means “to let go” and not to demand payment for a debt.¹ With reference to the Bible, forgiveness is not granted because a person deserves to be released from paying a debt. Instead, it is an act of love.

Simply put, forgiveness means to release someone from paying a debt that he owes you because of God's love. Forgiveness is the act of pardoning an offender. Jesus taught us to pray this way “Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is in debt to us” (Luke 11:4).

We forgive others when we let go of any claim to be compensated for the hurt or loss we have suffered. Unselfish love – like the love that God has for us - is the basis for true forgiveness. Love “does not keep account of the injury” (1 Corinthians 13:4-5).

¹Forgive- Aphiemi (Greek Word Study). Retrieved June 23, 2018 from <http://www.preceptaustin.org/forgive-aphiemi-greek-word-study>.

THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT

An Illustration of Forgiveness

Jesus used parables to make a point about the Kingdom of God. A parable is an illustration in the form of a story that teaches a biblical reality. One of His parables recorded in Matthew 18:23-25 is entitled “The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant.”

“The kingdom of God is like a king who decided to square accounts with his servants. As he got under way, one servant was brought before him who had run up a debt of a hundred thousand dollars. He couldn’t pay up, so the king ordered the man, along with his wife, children, and goods, to be auctioned off at the slave market. The poor wretch threw himself at the king’s feet and begged, ‘Give me a chance and I’ll pay it all back.’ Touched by his plea, the king let him off, erasing the debt. “The servant was no sooner out of the room when he came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him ten dollars. He seized him by the throat and demanded, ‘Pay up. Now!’ The poor wretch threw himself down and begged, ‘Give me a chance and I’ll pay it all back.’ But he wouldn’t do it. He had him arrested and put in jail until the debt was paid. When the other servants saw this going on, they were outraged and brought a detailed report to the king. The king summoned the man and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave your entire debt when you begged me for mercy. Shouldn’t you be compelled to be merciful to your fellow servant who asked for mercy?’ The king was furious and put the screws to the man until he paid back his entire debt. And that’s exactly what my Father in heaven is going to do to each one of you who doesn’t forgive unconditionally anyone who asks for mercy” (Matthew 18:23-35 MSG).

In the parable, the king represents God. God is powerful, righteous, loving and kind. He created us and this entire universe (Genesis 1:1-25, Job 38:4-7).

The first servant represents us, God’s creation. According to Hebrews 2:7, God created us “a little lower than the angels.” He gave us the opportunity to have relationship with him. We can talk with him and he hears us (Hebrews 4:16).

The money the first servant owed represents the sin debt that we inherited from Adam. According to Bible Tools. Org, *Barnes’ Notes*, written in the late 1800s, estimates the value at \$15.8 million! Christ’s point is that no one could ever repay this huge amount. Spiritually, we owe Him far more than we could ever repay.”¹ No amount of punishment, laws, rules and ceremonies that God instituted allowed us to pay what we owed Him. God saw our extreme distress and had abundant compassion on us. So, God did what the law could not

¹Reid, John O. (December 1996). Retrieved October 13, 2018 from <https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/856/Parable-of-Unforgiving-Servant-htm>

do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins (Romans 8:3 NLT).

The second servant represents other people in our lives. Just like us, other people in our lives are also His creation. The money the second servant owed represents offenses such as betrayal, assault, deceitful acts, murder, rape, and more that others commit against us. According to Bible Tools.org, the second servant owed him 100 denarii or about \$15 in today's currency.²

There are some poor attitudes that the first servant demonstrated towards the second servant. Although the second servant made the same exact request to him that he made to the king, he did not share the compassion and forgiveness that he was given. Instead, he was uncaring and ruthless.

The first servant did not appreciate what the king did for him. He got what he needed and that was all that mattered.

He was prideful and power hungry. Now that his debt was paid off, he had the opportunity to look down on someone in dire need and send him to jail – just like what could have happened to him

His lack of appreciation, pride, and power-hungry attitude led him to physically assault someone who needed his help. He choked that man and then sent him and his family to prison.

Instead of behaving like the ungrateful servant, we have the opportunity to share the love of God that He gave us with others. Be thankful for salvation through Jesus Christ. Learn to be humble. God did not have to save us. He was not obligated to forgive us. We don't deserve salvation, forgiveness or any of God's goodness. He just loves us like that. His love is pure, perfect and generous with no strings attached.

Colossians 3:13 says "Bear with each other and forgive any complaint you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." Since God has forgiven all of our sins, we should not refuse to offer forgiveness to anyone. When we don't forgive others, we are being selfish. God gave us what we did not deserve – forgiveness - and we have the ability to offer forgiveness to others who don't deserve it either. The debt that others owe us is a much smaller debt than we owe Him. God expects us to have mercy on one another like He has mercy on us (Matthew 7:2).

²Reid, John O. (December 1996). Retrieved October 13, 2018 from <https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/856/Parable-of-Unforgiving-Servant-htm>

WORKSHEET
THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT
An Illustration of Forgiveness

1. The first servant did not share the forgiveness he received with his fellow servant. Why?

2. What did the first servant experience because of unforgiveness toward his fellow servant?

3. Think of a person who has sinned against you. If that person was in your presence at this very moment and you had the opportunity to do anything you wanted to do to that person, what would you do? Would you choke him? Would you slash her tires? Would you post the situation on Facebook, Twitter, and/or Instagram? Would you forgive the person?

Personal Reflections

1. In the parable, unforgiveness led to physical assault. What else can unforgiveness lead to?

2. What can you do with the lessons learned from “The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant?” What changes can you make in your attitude, thoughts, and actions about forgiveness?

SHARING FORGIVENESS

Joseph Forgives His Brothers

This is a summary of Joseph's life of betrayal, abandonment, false accusation, and forgiveness that is recorded in the book of Genesis in chapters 37 through 50.

Joseph was the second youngest of twelve brothers. His father, Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other sons because he had been born to him in his old age. Because he loved Joseph so much, he made an elaborate and colorful robe for him. When his brothers saw their father loved Joseph more than he did them, they were filled with jealousy and hatred for him. Joseph had two special dreams he told his brothers about. In the dreams, Joseph said his brothers would serve him. This fired up his brothers' anger with resentment and bitterness.

One day, Joseph, wearing his elaborate and colorful robe went to check on his brothers while they were watching their sheep. When his brothers saw him coming, they set up a plan to hurt him. They threw him in an empty well, then later sold him as a slave to the Midianites. They put animal blood on his robe, took the robe back home to their father, and told the old man that wild animals killed Joseph.

In the meantime, Joseph was taken to Egypt and sold to the captain of the guard, Potiphar, as a household slave. Potiphar's wife regularly tried to encourage Joseph to have sex with her. When Joseph refused, she falsely accused him of trying to rape her, and her husband imprisoned Joseph for attempted rape. While in prison, Joseph precisely interpreted the dreams of two of Pharaoh's servants, who were also incarcerated. When the first servant was released from prison, Joseph asked him to speak kindly about him to Pharaoh, but the servant forgot all about him for two full years.

Later, Pharaoh had a disturbing dream no one could interpret. One of the servants Joseph helped informed Pharaoh that Joseph could interpret the dream. As a result, Pharaoh summoned Joseph from prison. He interpreted Pharaoh's dream so precisely that he was appointed second-in-command over Egypt.

Joseph had told Pharaoh that his dream meant Egypt would experience seven years of famine, so when the famine started, Joseph's older brothers went to Egypt to buy food. They did not recognize Joseph, who was now twenty years older. At first, Joseph treated them harshly and pretended that he thought they were spies. He kept one brother in prison until the others brought their youngest brother, Benjamin, back to

Egypt to prove they were not spies. After a series of events that included his brothers bowing before him—in fulfillment of Joseph's dream of long ago—Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. They were shocked and glad to be reunited. He then sent word for the entire family to join them in Egypt until after the famine.

Later, when their father died, Joseph's brothers were terrified he would take revenge against them. They begged Joseph to forgive them, and Joseph cried when he heard their appeal.

At this point, Joseph had a decision to make. He could take this opportunity to either forgive or get even with his brothers. Everything that happened to him was a direct result of them selling him into slavery. His whole life had changed that fateful day.

For years, Joseph lived with the painful memories of his brothers throwing him into a pit and selling him into slavery. He served time in prison because Potiphar's wife accused him of attempted rape. He missed out on growing older with his brothers and spending time with his father. He missed the nurturing love of his mother, Rachel. He never saw his mother again; she died while giving birth to his younger brother, Benjamin. Because of his brothers, Joseph lost so much. They owed him so much. When they begged for forgiveness, Joseph did not remind them of the traumatic events they put him through. Instead, Joseph said, “. . . Do not be afraid. Am I in the place of God? As for you, what you intended against me for evil, God intended for good, in order to accomplish a day like this— to preserve the lives of many people. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them (Genesis 50:19- 21).

Joseph did not allow what his brothers did to rule his life. His freedom, happiness, and prosperity did not depend on them. Joseph looked far beyond what his brothers did against him and saw God's plan for him instead.

WORKSHEET
SHARING FORGIVENESS
Joseph Forgives His Brothers

1. List the offenses Joseph's brothers did against him.

2. List the consequences Joseph suffered because of his brothers.

3. Did Joseph forgive his brothers? Explain your answer.

Personal Reflections: What can you do in your life with the lessons you learned from Joseph and his brothers?

THE WORST OF SINNERS

Paul

This is a summary of Paul, a man whose mission was to destroy Christianity by murdering Christians. His intentions and efforts were sincere. His life changing events are recorded in Acts 9:1-22. He was a good Pharisee. He believed that Christians were dangerous to the Jewish religion. As a result, he started to destroy the church. He dragged off men and women who believed Jesus Christ was the Savior and Son of God and put them in prison. Before Paul met Jesus, his name was Saul.

On the Road to Damascus, a bright light struck Saul and his companions. He heard a voice say, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" When Saul asked who was speaking, the voice replied: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." Since the light blinded Saul, his companions led him into Damascus to a man named Judas. For three days Saul was blind and didn't eat or drink.

Meanwhile, Jesus appeared in a vision to a disciple in Damascus named Ananias and told him to go to Saul. Ananias was afraid of Saul because of his reputation as a merciless murderer.

Jesus informed Ananias that Saul was his chosen instrument to deliver the gospel to the Gentiles, their kings, and the people of Israel. So, Ananias found Saul at Judas' house, praying for help. Ananias prayed for Saul and told him Jesus had sent him to restore his sight and that Saul would be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He stood up and was baptized. He ate, regained his strength, and stayed with the disciples in Damascus for three days. Then, Saul changed his name to Paul.

In this one transformational event, Paul's life completely changed. He accepted Jesus as God's Son. He stopped killing Christians. Instead, he went on many missionary trips to teach people about Jesus. He established churches everywhere he went, and all through his lifetime, thousands of people came to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior. Paul's letters to the churches that he and others established make up most of the New Testament.

Paul expressed his gratitude for the gift of forgiveness from Jesus Christ. In 1 Timothy 1:15-16, he wrote: "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in

ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.”

Paul’s testimony is recorded in Acts 7:58 – 28:31 and throughout his New Testament letters.

In this one transformational event,
Paul’s life completely changed.
He accepted Jesus as God’s Son.
He stopped killing Christians.
Instead, he went on many missionary
trips to teach people about Jesus.

WORKSHEET
THE WORST OF SINNERS
The Apostle Paul

1. What were the offenses Paul caused? Who were they against?

2. What were the consequences of Paul's offenses?

3. How did Paul describe himself?

Personal Reflections: What does 1 Timothy 1:15-16 say to you about the extent of God's forgiveness for you?

FORGIVENESS AFTER FAILURE

Peter

This is a summary of the relationship between Jesus and Simon Peter. Jesus chose Peter to be one of his disciples. It's recorded in the book of Matthew, chapters 4, 14, and 26.

Peter's occupation was a fisherman. When Jesus met Peter, he told him to leave his job and follow Him, and Peter did it at once (Matthew 4:18-22). For three years, Peter spent a lot of time with Jesus. Peter was present when Jesus fed thousands of people (Matthew 14: 13-21). He listened to His parables (Matthew 13). He asked Him questions (Matthew 18:21). Peter listened to his bold interactions with religious leaders (Matthew 23). He saw Jesus cast out demons (Matthew 8:24-34). Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law of a fever (Matthew 8:14-15). Peter and Jesus knew each other well.

During their last meal together, Jesus told the disciples that they would abandon him that night. Peter told Jesus "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." "Truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same (Matthew 26:33-36).

After this conversation, Jesus went to a place called Gethsemane. He took Peter and two more disciples with him. He told them "my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (Matthew 26: 38). After he finished praying, Judas and a large crowd of people armed with swords and clubs arrested Jesus (Matthew 26: 47-56).

After Jesus was arrested, Peter was sitting in the courtyard. A servant girl came to him and said, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said. But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there: "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth." He denied it again with an oath: "I don't know the man!" After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them, your accent gives you away." Then he began to call down curses and swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. And he went outside and wept bitterly. According to the commentary in the Life Application Study Bible, "that Peter denied that he knew Jesus, using an oath and calling down curses, does not mean he used foul language. This was the kind of swearing a person does in a court of law. Peter was swearing that he did not know Jesus and was invoking a curse on himself if his words were untrue. In effect he was saying, "May God strike me dead if I am lying."¹ After Peter denied knowing Jesus the third time, "he went outside and wept bitterly" (Matthew 26:69-75). A bitter cry is physically felt in your body. There are no words to express the grief, humiliation and deep disappointment of a bitter cry. Jesus's prediction had come true. Perhaps Peter thought, "How could I say I don't know Him?"

He changed my life – what have I done? My life will never be the same.” Peter had failed. He had lied. He had not kept his word.

In the account documented by Mark 16:7, three days after Jesus was crucified and buried, He rose from the dead. Two women brought spices to anoint Jesus’ body. The angel said to the women “Go, tell his disciples, and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’” According to the commentary in the Life Application Study Bible, after Jesus was resurrected, the angel made special mention of Peter to show that, despite Peter’s denials, Jesus had not disowned and deserted him. Jesus had great responsibilities for Peter to fulfill in the church that was not yet born.²

Jesus had a right to disown Peter because Peter had disowned Him. He owed Jesus an apology and the truth, yet Jesus released Peter from that debt. Jesus forgave Peter because He loved him, not because he deserved it. Peter decided to accept forgiveness and experience God’s grace and mercy.

After Peter accepted forgiveness, he went on to preach salvation through Jesus Christ to large crowds with confidence and power in the freedom of forgiveness from Jesus Christ. Through God’s power, he healed a man crippled from birth. The religious leaders put him in jail for proclaiming that Jesus had risen from the dead. He wrote two books of the New Testament. Peter’s failure did not stop him from receiving forgiveness from God. Nor did his failure prevent him from living out the plan and promises of God. Forgiveness empowered him to say, “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

Peter’s testimony is recorded in the four (4) Gospels. Peter’s life after failure is documented throughout the book of Acts in Chapters 1-5, 8-12, and 15.

¹Life Application Bible: New International Version. (1991) Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House. Print.

²Life Application Bible: New International Version. (1991) Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House. Print.

WORKSHEET
FORGIVENESS AFTER FAILURE
Peter

1. Why did Peter say, three different times, that he did not know Jesus?

2. What was the offense Peter committed against Jesus?

3. What did Peter owe Jesus?

4. Did Jesus forgive Peter? How do you know?

Personal Reflections: Have you cried the “bitter cry” because you sinned, didn’t keep your word, or abandoned someone? Compare your experience to Peter. What happened?

THE BURDEN

Judas

This is a summary of the account of Judas Iscariot, the disciple who betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. This summary is adapted from Matthew chapters 26 and 27.

Jesus chose Judas to be one of his disciples. For three years, Judas was up close and personal with Jesus. He listened to Jesus teach about love and forgiveness. He actually saw him heal sick people. Judas was present, just like Peter, when Jesus fed thousands of people. He listened to His parables. Judas observed His bold interactions with the Pharisees. He saw Jesus have compassion on the people.

During the last supper with the disciples, Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?" Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?" Jesus answered, "You have said so" (Matthew 26:21-25).

Prior to the last supper that Jesus had with the disciples, Judas arranged to have Jesus arrested. He went to the chief priests and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" So, they counted out thirty silver coins for him. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over (Matthew 26:14-16). According to Wikipedia, 30 "pieces of silver" would be worth between \$185 and \$216 in today's currency.¹

Judas was on the watch for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to the chief priests, and he found it when Jesus went to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane. When Jesus finished praying, he returned to the disciples – the third time - and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come. I will be delivered into the hands of sinners. Here comes my betrayer!" Then, Judas arrived with a large crowd of people armed with swords and clubs. These people were sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Judas had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him." Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. Jesus replied, "Do what you came for, friend." Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him (Matthew 26:43-50).

¹Thirty Pieces of Silver. Retrieved June 24, 2018 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirty_pieces_of_silver

When Judas saw that Jesus was arrested and that he would be killed, he was overwhelmed with remorse. He returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. He told them, "I have sinned because I have betrayed innocent blood." The chiefs and elders said, "What is that to us?" That's your responsibility." Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself (Matthew 27: 3-5).

Judas experienced overwhelming remorse when he betrayed Jesus. Remorse is a gnawing distress arising from a sense of guilt for past wrongs.² When Judas saw Jesus was condemned, he condemned himself. After three years of personal contact with Jesus, Judas did not consider the parable of the unforgiving servant that Jesus taught him. Nor did he reflect on the love, healing and compassion Jesus showed so many people that was also available to him. He committed suicide instead of taking the opportunity and making the decision to accept forgiveness. After three years of up close and personal contact with Jesus, Judas did not choose the opportunity to accept forgiveness.

Judas did not remember
the love, healing and
compassion that Jesus
showed so many people
that was also
available to him.

²Remorse. Retrieved June 23, 2018 from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/remorse>

WORKSHEET
THE BURDEN
Judas

1. Judas and Peter sinned against Jesus. What is the difference in the way they handled their sin?

2. What were the consequences of Judas' sin?

Personal Reflections: What lessons have you learned for yourself from Judas about forgiveness?

A DESTRUCTIVE POWER Unforgiveness

This is a summary of 2 Samuel chapters 13-19. This situation shows us how unforgiveness destroyed King David's family recorded in 2 Samuel chapters 13-19. The situation involves King David, his two sons Amnon and Absalom, his daughter Tamar, and his nephew, Jonadab. Jonadab was the son of King David's brother whose name was Shimeah. Amnon's mother was Ahinoam. Absalom and his sister Tamar had the same mother, Maacah.

In the course of time, Amnon son of David fell in love with Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom son of David. Jonadab was a very shrewd man. He asked Amnon, "Why do you, the king's son, look so haggard morning after morning? Amnon said "I'm in love with Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister." Jonadab told Amnon to "Go to bed and pretend to be ill," When your father comes to see you, tell him you want Tamar to come and give you something to eat. Let her prepare the food in front of you so you can watch her and then eat it from her hand" (2 Samuel 13:1-5).

Unmarried daughters were kept away from the company of men, even their own brothers. They were not permitted to see them without the presence of witnesses. However, Amnon must have seen Tamar because he developed a violent, lustful passion for her which was not allowed by the law.¹

So Amnon followed his cousin's plot and pretended to be ill. His father, King David fell for the wicked scheme. He sent instructions to Tamar to go to her brother Amnon's home and prepare some food for him. Tamar went to Amnon's house and found him lying down when she got there. She took some dough, kneaded it, made the bread in his sight and baked it. Then she served him the bread, but he refused to eat. Amnon told his servant, "Send everyone out of here." So, everyone left him. Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food here into my bedroom so I may eat from your hand." Tamar took the bread she prepared and brought it to her brother Amnon in his bedroom. But when she took it to him to eat, he grabbed her and said, "Come to bed with me, my sister." Tamar begged him not to force himself on her. But he refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she was, he raped her. He then told his personal servant to "Get this woman out of my sight and bolt the door after her." His servant did as he was told (2 Samuel 13:6-11). Tamar put ashes on her head, because

¹(n.d.) 2 Samuel 13:19. Retrieved August 4, 2018 from https://biblehub.com/commentaries/jfb/2_Samuel/13.html

of her sorrow and grief. She tore off the beautifully ornamented robe she was wearing signifying that her virginity was rent from her in a forcible manner.² She covered her face and head and cried loudly as she ran away. When Tamar admitted to her brother Absalom their half-brother had raped her, he became enraged with Amnon. Absalom told Tamar to not talk about it and took her in to live with him. Tamar lived in her brother's house as an abandoned, isolated and depressed woman. Read 2 Samuel, chapter 13 for the full account.

As a side note, Absalom did have three sons and one daughter. He named his daughter, Tamar after his sister. She became a beautiful woman (2 Samuel 14:27).

When King David heard what happened, he was furious. However, he did not deal with his son Amnon for raping his half-sister Tamar. For two years Absalom kept silent about Amnon raping his sister Tamar. Absalom's rage turned to bitterness and hate. He silently plotted revenge against Amnon and his father, King David. For two years, he had nothing to say, one way or the other to Amnon (2 Samuel 13:21-22).

Two years later, Absalom invited all the king's sons to a sheep-shearing festival. Absalom instructed his servants to "Keep an eye on Amnon. When he gets a little drunk from the wine and is feeling relaxed, I'll give the signal. Then kill him! I've commanded you to do it, so don't be afraid. Be strong and brave." After the murder of Amnon, Absalom escaped to his grandfather's house in Geshur. He hid there for three years. 2 Samuel 13:37 records that David "mourned for his son day after day." Finally, David allowed him to come back to Jerusalem.

When Absalom returned, he gradually began to undermine his father's authority and speak against him to the people. After four years, he declared himself king in rebellion against his father, King David. Absalom planned to fight a battle against him. When King David learned of the rebellion, he and his followers escaped to Jerusalem. Read 2 Samuel, chapter 15 for the full account.

Before the battle, David ordered his troops not to harm Absalom. The two armies fought each other at Ephraim, a large oak forest, and King David's army defeated Absalom's army. As Absalom was riding his mule under a tree, his hair got entangled in the branches. The mule ran off and left Absalom hanging helplessly in the air. Joab, one of David's generals, took three javelins and stabbed them into Absalom's heart. Then ten of Joab's armor-bearers circled Absalom and killed him. (Read 2 Samuel, chapter 18 for the full account. David was heartbroken over the death of his son (2 Samuel 19:1). This family tragedy is full of deception, rape, bitterness, revenge, hatred, and murder that was created from unforgiveness.

²(n.d.) 2 Samuel 13:19. Retrieved August 5, 2018 from <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/2-samuel-13-19.html>

WORKSHEET
A DESTRUCTIVE POWER
Unforgiveness

1. What did unforgiveness lead to in the lives of King David's children?

Amnon

Tamar

Absalom

2. What was King David's role in unforgiveness in the lives of his children?

Personal Reflections: What have you learned from this family about unforgiveness that will help you in your family?

SATAN'S SCHEME Condemnation

According to Merriam-Webster, a scheme is a plan or program of action; especially a crafty or secret one.¹ When someone usually refers to a plan as being a scheme, it's because the plan looks good and acceptable on the surface, but its purpose is dangerous. Schemes are also referred to as tricks, ploys, conspiracies, and deceptions.

The people that usually develop or carry out schemes are considered con-artists. Con artists are people who trick unsuspecting, innocent people out of money, property, and services. Con artists outsmart people from what rightfully belongs to them. The con artist appears to be honest and tells the innocent one that they "deserve" or "should have" whatever the trickster is selling.

When someone sins against us, we might think we should get revenge. We should not let that person treat us that way. We deserve better treatment. So, we need to do something - withhold greetings, damage property, cause physical harm, or defame the character of the person on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Unforgiveness is a scheme straight from the devil that only leads to trouble, depression, rage, murder, and more evil acts. These are the "selling points" that Satan uses to scheme us out of forgiving others.

In 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 Paul confronted the congregation at Corinth for tolerating an incestuous relationship that a man was having with his stepmother. Paul sternly rebukes them as he tells them they must remove the man from their fellowship. In 2 Corinthians chapter 2, the Corinthians followed Paul's advice. But now they were going to the other extreme. In the beginning, when the man sinned they overlooked it, but now they did not want to forgive him.

In 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthian church about the situation:

"If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent-- not to put it too severely. The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven-- if there was anything to forgive-- I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes."

¹Scheme. Retrieved June 24, 2018 from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/scheme>

Paul emphasized the importance of forgiving and comforting the man, so he will be restored, not become depressed and feel condemned. When we feel depressed and condemned for our sins, we believe there is no hope. We have learned that unforgiveness can lead to physical assault, shame, stubbornness, condemnation, and more. Believing there is no hope, like Judas did, can lead to suicide. Paul did not want the Corinthian church to give in to one of Satan's strategies – unforgiveness.

Unforgiveness
is a scheme straight from
the devil that only leads to
trouble, depression, rage,
murder, and more evil acts.

FORGIVENESS Compared to Unforgiveness

Forgiveness is honest about what the person did against us.

Forgiveness is not making excuses or justifying what the person did against us.

Forgiveness is a decision to release someone who offended us from the debt owed.

Forgiveness is not based on our feelings.

Forgiveness is a decision to treat someone who offended us the way God treats us.

Forgiveness is not based on what someone deserves.

Forgiveness is merciful and gracious.

Forgiveness is not fair; it does not give the person who offended what is deserved.

Forgiveness is a specific instruction from God that is clearly described in the bible.

Forgiveness is not based on my way, my definition, or my understanding.

Forgiveness is strength.

Forgiveness is not weakness.

Forgiveness is constructive. It builds.

Forgiveness is not destructive. It heals.

Forgiveness is awareness that someone has wronged us.

Forgiveness is not ignorant or stupid.

Forgiveness is offered whether the person who offended asks for it or not.

Forgiveness is not dependent on an apology or acknowledgement of the wrong.

Forgiveness is humility.

Forgiveness is not demanding.

Forgiveness is trusting God to repay and restore.

Forgiveness is not revenge.

Forgiveness is a decision.

Forgiveness is not a feeling.

FORGIVENESS DECLARES

1. My freedom, healing, and happiness do not depend on you. I am free, healed and happy because I choose to forgive you (a) whether you apologize or (b) whether you acknowledge what you did. I forgive you.
2. I cancel the apology and everything else you owe me. God will restore to me all that you owe me.
3. You messed me up because of what you did to me, but I will not allow what you did to rule or ruin my life. God will restore me. He is responsible for vengeance, not me. I forgive you.
4. I've been so ashamed about what I did. I do not deserve to be forgiven. Yet God forgave me anyway because I asked Him, and because He loves me. I refuse to live in shame and condemnation. I choose to accept His forgiveness.

UNFORGIVENESS DECLARES

1. I will remain a victim of the poor treatment and the hurt you did to me. You abandoned me. You neglected me. You cheated on me. My freedom depends on you. I can't be free, healed and happy until you give me what you owe me. I will never forgive you.
2. You need to make up for what you did to me. You need to pay! I cannot be alright until you suffer, own up, admit, and apologize for what you did to me. I will never forgive you.
3. You messed me up because of what you did to me. I cannot be okay until I know that you understand how much you damaged me. I will not forgive you until you prove to me that you are sorry for hurting me.
4. I am so ashamed of myself for what I did. My life is not worth living. There is no hope for me. There is no way for me to get rid of the shame. There is no way God can forgive me because what I did was so bad. I do not deserve to be forgiven.

ACCEPTANCE Come as You Are

When Jesus was hanging on the cross, taking our punishment, two thieves were also crucified beside Him. Both began their time on the cross by mocking him, just like many of the spectators did. One of the thieves stopped mocking Jesus and said . . . "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:42-43). Jesus accepted him just as he was.

Notice what Jesus did not say – "So now, you want to come with me! If you apologize to me for all those mean things you said, then I just might think about letting you come with me." Instead, Jesus accepted him just as he was, because he asked.

Jesus accepted:

1. the woman who was accused of adultery. He told her to "go and sin no more" (John 8:11 NLT).
2. the woman who wiped his feet with her hair and tears. Jesus said to the disciples... "Her many sins are forgiven, so she showed great love. But the person who is forgiven only a little will love only a little" (Luke 7:47 NCV).
3. Paul, who murdered Christians (Acts 22:4).

Jesus did not tell anyone to "get yourself together first, then come back to me when you're done so that I can save you." Jesus accepted us the way we are when we accepted Him into our lives as the Son of God and our Savior. We did not have to change our personalities, lifestyles, hairstyles, take a shower, or do any pre-forgiveness work. We do not need to clean ourselves up and straighten ourselves out. The apostle Paul said, "And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns" (Philippians 1:6). He will do the work. We accept the work that He started.

Jesus accepts us as we are. He will do the cleaning up and straightening out if we submit to Him. When we come to God, we come with habits, lifestyles, and attitudes that are not like Him. But God accepted us, knowing that all of that is there. But God will never leave us that way. He loves us.

RECONCILIATION

Jacob and Esau

This is a synopsis of the relationship between two brothers.¹ Their relationship involved deception and manipulation that caused a division so intense that one brother threatened to kill the other. This summary spans several chapters in the book of Genesis, chapters 25-33.

Isaac and Rebekah were a wealthy couple. Their sons were twins named Jacob and Esau. One day, Esau came in hungry from the fields and demanded some of the stew that his twin brother, Jacob, was cooking. Jacob told Esau that he would give him some stew if he would give up his birthright.

The birthright entitled Esau to a double portion of his father's inheritance. The birthright was considered a precious gift from God. The son who has the birthright was also considered the head of the family. So, Esau agreed to give up his birthright for the stew. He gave up all that his father set aside just for him. He gave up all that God had given him as the firstborn son.

Even though Esau lost the birthright, Isaac, their father, could still give him the fatherly blessing before he died. Isaac was determined to do that. But Rebekah, their mother, helped Jacob deceive his elderly father into giving him the birthright blessing intended for Esau.

This deception devastated the family. Esau vowed to kill Jacob as soon as their father died (Genesis 27:14). Jacob left home to escape the wrath of Esau. Jacob never saw his mother alive again.

The brothers finally met again, twenty years later, because Jacob asked his brother to forgive him. Jacob also offered Esau a generous peace offering, which consisted of goats, rams, camels, cows, and bulls to show his sincerity. Esau forgave Jacob and accepted the peace offering. The two brothers were reconciled. One brother humbly requested forgiveness; the other humbly forgave him. Forgiveness and reconciliation happened despite the vicious scheme that caused the separation.

There are times when the relationship may not be restored to the way it was before the violence, repeated betrayals, and other dangerous situations happened. The relationship may need to be restructured with different ways of being together and communicating. The person who forgave will need to set boundaries. Boundaries provide safety. They will also teach the one who offended what they can and cannot do.

¹Adapted from Jacob and Esau Forgive Each Other; Lesson 9 (n.d.). [pdf] Loveland: Group Publishing, Inc., p 1. Retrieved August 6, 2018 from <http://storage.cloversites.com>

Forgive and set boundaries: God expects forgiven people to forgive. Reconciliation with a person, who is violent, steals, or has anger management problems, may not be safe. After a physically or emotionally damaging offense has been done, personal boundaries and other safeguards that were not previously needed must be put in place. Forgiveness does not mean that you enable a person to physically assault, and bully. Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. (Matthew 10:16) A hot-tempered person must pay the penalty; rescue them, and you will have to do it again. (Proverbs 19:19, NASB) Enduringword.com states: “To rescue them once isn’t enough, because the problem is more *in them* than in the circumstances that they blame for their anger. It is better for them to face the consequences of their action and hope they learn something from it.”²

Forgive and be safe. When there is domestic violence, molestation, rape, and other crimes committed, safety and lawful boundaries need to be set. If someone raped you or your child, the laws of the land need to be used. Say, “I forgive you and you will not be allowed to be around me or my child because you are not a safe person to be with.”

Forgive and get help for you and your family. The authorities are in place to help people who need safety and protection. The scriptures say, “Do you want to be on good terms with the government? Be a responsible citizen and you’ll get on just fine, the government working to your advantage. But if you’re breaking the rules right and left, watch out. The police aren’t there just to be admired in their uniforms. God also has an interest in keeping order, and he uses them to do it. That’s why you must live responsibly—not just to avoid punishment but also because it’s the right way to live” (Romans 13:2-4, MSG).

Forgive and be responsible with your money, time, car, home, and all that God has blessed you with. God expects us to be good stewards of our possessions. According to Thesaurus.com, a steward is the “guardian” or “supervisor” of responsibilities, property, money, etc.³ When someone does not repay you the money you loaned, forgive that person. Release them from the debt they owe. Let them go! Forgiveness does not mean you keep giving that person money that God blessed you with. Forgive and take care of your money, time, and other blessings. Instead of continuously giving them money, consider showing them how to manage what they have.

Jesus said to the disciples “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16). According to Thesaurus.com, shrewd means sensible, intelligent and clever.⁴ In other words, “I forgive you and I will not loan you money anymore because you used it to buy drugs instead of pay your car note.” “I forgive you and I will not allow you to come into my home anymore because you stole from my family and me.” That’s being a shrewd steward.

²Guzik, D. (2017). “Proverbs 19 - Fools and Family Life.” Enduringword.com. Retrieved from enduringword.com/bible-commentary/proverbs-19

³Steward. 2018. Thesaurus.com. Retrieved June 8, 2018 from <https://www.thesaurus.com/>

⁴Shrewd. 2018. Thesaurus.com. Retrieved June 8, 2018 from <https://www.thesaurus.com/thesaurus/shrewd>

**WORKSHEET
RECONCILIATION**
Jacob and Esau

Fill in the blank with the correct answer.

1. God expects forgiven people to _____.

2. Reconciliation with a person, who is violent, steals, or has anger management problems, may not be:

a.

b.

c.

3. Jane has borrowed money from you for the last two years. She has not paid you back. She has said many times that she will pay you when she gets her next pay check from her steady job. How does forgiveness work in this situation?

Personal Reflections: In what way does the chapter on “Forgiveness and Reconciliation” apply to you?

Forgiveness Prevails God Continues to Forgive

God forgave us through His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus took the punishment that we deserved. God gave Jesus His only son to die for our sins and raised him from the dead so that we would be made acceptable to Him (Romans 4:25 CEV). When we believe this truth – that God gave Jesus to die for our sins – an exchange happens. We give Jesus our sins, and He gives us His righteousness and forgiveness. There is absolutely nothing we can do to earn forgiveness and salvation. He just loves us like that! After we accept God’s forgiveness through His Son, there is more good news. He continues to forgive us.

After we experience the great exchange and receive His righteousness, God’s forgiveness prevails in our lives. John said “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not just for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1). According to Dictionary.com, an advocate is “a person who pleads for or on behalf of another; an intercessor.¹ An intercessor is a “go-between.” He is our mediator because his death satisfied the wrath of God against sin and paid the death penalty for our sin. When we go to the Father to ask forgiveness, Jesus, the One who speaks for us, steps in between us and God. Jesus says to the Father, “She is your daughter. I died for her sins and You resurrected me for her. There is no condemnation for her.” John also said, “Christ himself is the means by which our sins are forgiven, and not our sins only, but also the sins of everyone” (I John 2:2, GNT). There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:1). Forgiveness prevails!

¹Advocate. (2018). Dictionary.com Retrieved June 23, 2018, from <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/advocate/s=ts>

WORKSHEET
FORGIVENESS PREVAILS
God Continues to Forgive

Fill in the blank spaces.

1. After we _____ God's forgiveness through His son, there is even more forgiveness available to us.
2. Jesus remains our _____ if we sin again after we have received salvation.
3. What is the "great exchange" referred to in the lesson "Forgiveness Prevails?"

Define these words.

1. Advocate

2. Intercessor

Personal Reflections: In your personal life, what does it mean to you that "forgiveness prevails?" Write an example.

I ADMIT IT – I WAS WRONG
But He Won't Forgive Me

Jesus said, "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24).

So, what do you do when you ask forgiveness and the person you offended will not forgive you? What if the person you hurt does not want to have anything more to do with you? You were the one responsible for the hurt and the consequences that resulted.

What can I do?

"Do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody." (Romans 12:18 GNT)

1. Take ownership of what you did; tell the person what you did that was offensive.
2. Ask the person what you need to do to repair the damage.
3. Pray for the person. Ask "the God of all comfort" to heal and comfort their hearts through all their troubles. 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 says: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. At this point, the person may feel so hurt, angry, bitter or weak, to forgive you. Perhaps he is dealing with the consequences of your offensive actions.
4. Learn the lesson. Don't do that offense again. Jesus told "the woman caught in adultery" to go and sin no more (John 8:11).
5. Accept their refusal to forgive you as a consequence for your wrongdoing. He may still be angry, saddened or dealing with the results of whatever you did to offend him.

At this point, you have done everything you can do. That's what's important to God. The person who will not forgive you is accountable to God, not you. "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:14-15).

You can't force someone to forgive you. Forgiveness is a choice. The person who will not forgive you does not damage your relationship with God. God never leaves our salvation or our relationship with Him at the mercy of another human being. When someone's heart is hard towards us, we are completely powerless to change this. People have no power over other people's hearts. Only God can change, soften and heal the hearts of people. There is no condemnation for you from God. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:1-2).

A DECISION NOT A FEELING

In summary, forgiveness isn't easy, especially when:¹

- The other person doesn't appreciate your efforts (the unforgiving servant)
- the other person doesn't deserve it (Joseph's brothers)
- the other person does not acknowledge that they did offend you (Amnon)
- you have to deal with the consequences of what someone did to you (Tamar)
- the pain has penetrated too deep (Tamar and Absalom)
- resentments have taken root (Absalom)

Even though all these reasons may be true, Jesus wants us to forgive others the way He forgave us. Colossians 3:13 says, "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray before He was crucified to death. He made the decision to die for the sins of the world. He told Peter and two more disciples that He felt overwhelmed with agony and sorrow about the decision He made to die for the sins of the world. He knew He would feel extreme physical pain and emotional torture. Jesus' strength to obey came from His relationship with God, His father. Three times He told His Father, "My Father, if there is no other way, and I must suffer, I will still do what you want" (Luke 22:42 CEV).

When Jesus felt overwhelmed with agony, he prayed to God His Father. God gave Him the strength He needed to follow through with His decision of love. Forgiveness is not a feeling. It is a decision that we will have many opportunities to make with the strength of God.

Think about going to work. We go to work because we love ourselves and our families who depend on us to provide income. However, many times, we don't want to go to work. But we do it anyway. Remember that day you woke up, sat on the edge of the bed and said, "I don't feel like going to work." But you got up, stumbled to the bathroom, and prepared to go to work. In the shower, you said, again, "I sure don't feel like going to work." But you kept preparing to go to work. As you drove to work, you said, to yourself, one more time, "I sure don't feel like going to work today." But you kept driving and made it to your workplace. You did it anyway. You felt tired, lazy, sleepy, and unmotivated, but you went to work and did your job. It was important for you to go to work. You had a project or meeting to attend. Your clients or customers or students needed your help. And you needed the money to take care of your family, eat food everyday, pay your mortgage and the rest of your bills. The decision to go to work is so important that you did not allow your feelings to make you stay home in bed under the covers. Going to work is not a feeling. It is a decision. In the same manner, forgiveness is not a feeling. It's a decision.

¹Adapted from Hunt, J. (2008), *Counseling Through Your Bible Handbook*, Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers. p. 177

GUIDE TO FORGIVENESS
How Do I Actually Forgive?

1. **Decide to forgive.** God decided to send His Son. Decide to follow God’s example. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).
2. **Set aside time** in a quiet place where you will not be interrupted. Jesus would often go to some place where he could be alone and pray (Luke 5:16 CEV).
3. **Name the person** you have decided to forgive.

4. **Make a list** of the offenses the person has done against you. It may be hurtful comments, abandonment, neglect, trauma, mistreatments, irresponsible behavior, unpaid loans, and more. If it hurts you, it matters. Take the time to remember the incident (s). Allow yourself to feel the disappointment, anger, grief, etc. “And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins” (Mark 11:25).

5. **Make a list** of what the person owes you. If your parent neglected you, your parent owes you time, attention, food, shelter, etc. If your spouse cheated on you, they owe you an apology, faithfulness, loyalty, and love. If your friend did not pay you the money she borrowed from you, she owes you money and an apology.

- 6. Forgive.** Say, "Because God forgave me, I forgive this person for what they did to me. I release this person from everything they owe me. They are no longer accountable to me. They are accountable to God." Matthew 6:12, Colossians 3:13-14, Romans 12:19
- 7. Acknowledge and receive God's provision for you.** God will provide you with what that person owes you. Say, "I trust God to meet the needs that I have now that are as a result of what this person did to me. In the place of the hurt, anger, disappointment and other feelings that I have because of what this person did, I accept God's grace, mercy, strength and healing." Isaiah 61:3 says, "To all who mourn in Israel, he will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair. In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks that the LORD has planted for his own glory." (NLT) Additional scripture references: Philippians 4:19, Romans 12:19
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- 8. Be thankful** for the opportunity to forgive. Pray, "God, thank you for forgiving me for sin passed on to me from Adam and every other sin that I have done. I thank you Father for using this person to conform me to the image of your Son, Jesus Christ. I thank You for using this person as a weapon against Satan who tried to outsmart me. Thank you for the good plans that you have to prosper me and to give me hope and a future." Scripture References: Jeremiah 29:11, John 3:16, Matthew 6:12, Romans 8:28-30, Ephesians 5:1, 2 Corinthians 2:5-11
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- 9. Pray for the person you forgave.** Use Ephesians 3:16-19 as a guide. "Father, please strengthen this person with power from your glorious riches so that Christ may dwell in their heart through faith. I pray that this person will become rooted and established in love to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. Please help them to know that your love surpasses our knowledge and understanding of love."

**You are far too precious
for God
to let the offense
done to you
become a useless waste.**

I FORGAVE AND ...**I Still Hurt**

Your decision to forgive is an act of your will based on God's Word, not your emotions. Hurt and angry feelings do not invalidate the forgiveness you have given to another person. If you forgave someone who broke your arm, accidentally or not, your arm hurts and you need medical treatment. Just because your arm still hurts does not negate that you forgave the one who hurt your arm.

In the same way, you may still feel the same hurt, anger and consequences when you forgive someone who:

1. stole money from you – your rent and car note still need to be paid.
2. killed your family member – you still grieve the loss and miss that person.
3. told lies about you in your community or at your workplace – you experience the damage to your reputation.

You are far too precious for God to let the offense done to you become a useless waste. Romans 8:28 says He will make everything that happens in your life work out for your benefit. (Romans 8:28) For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you. God is just; He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you. (2 Thessalonians 1:6 NASB)

What Can I Do?

Be grateful for your decision to forgive. You accepted the opportunity to follow his plan and forgive. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3). Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Pray for wisdom. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you (James 1:5).

Remember that you forgave the person "as Christ forgave you" (Colossians 3:13). Your character and behavior are more like Jesus when you forgive. Remember that you made one of the best decisions you have ever made. Remember that the person is no longer accountable to you; that person is accountable to God. Since you forgave that person, God will repay you and provide justice on your behalf. Remember how Joseph forgave, healed and prospered in Genesis 45:8.

Don't sin. It's OK to be angry, but don't sin (Ephesians 4:26). Acknowledge your emotions. Talk, cry, scream into your pillow, but don't fight, slash tires, or spread lies on Facebook. Instead, read the next point.

Get godly counsel. There are godly and skilled professional counselors that have the ability and compassion to help you work through your hurt and angry feelings. Meeting with a counselor is confidential. You will have the opportunity to explore your feelings about yourself as well as receive guidance to develop healthy plans and solutions.

Confide in and spend time with friends who will support you and listen to you. There are people you know that may have experienced a similar situation as you. Someone is willing to share his/her testimony to encourage you. They can share how they handled their emotions that will help you. As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend (Proverbs 27:17 NLV).

Worship God. To worship God means to adore, focus, and respect Him. Worship means to acknowledge the authority and power of God. He is able to do exceedingly, abundantly above what you have asked him to do – heal your hurt. See Ephesians 3:20. He always keeps His promises. He is trustworthy. Read Psalm 118 and Psalm 139.

Listen to worship music to help you sing and meditate on God's love, authority, and compassion for you. Suggestions:

- Anthony Brown and Group TherAPy's "Worth"
- Chris Tomlin's "Good, Good Father"
- Steve Green's "He Who Began A Good Work in You".

Go to church. When you surround yourself with good bible teaching and other Christians, you will be encouraged and learn something powerful from the pastor's teaching to help you.

Take care of yourself. Be kind to yourself. Go for a walk. Dance. Watch a funny movie. Take a bubble bath.

Read about well-known people who have publicly shared their testimony to encourage you. One example is Joyce Meyer. She forgave her father for sexually abusing her for years. She forgave her mother for not helping her. Visit this website to read more:

<https://www.charismamag.com/site-archives/134-peopleevents/people-events/613-joyce-meyer-leads-her-father-to-faith>.

Listen to people that have shared their testimonies about forgiveness on YouTube videos such as Tina and Teddy Campbell's *10 Minutes with Teddy and Tina* (Ep 113 - "Forgiveness"), and *How to Forgive when It Hurts*, a 4-minute video by Allen Parr.

Listen to sermons that teach about God's forgiveness and salvation such as *Biblical Reasons Why You Cannot Lose Your Salvation*, a sermon by Pastor Bill Purvis. Go to <https://cascadehills.com/watch/>. Go to "Watch Recent Messages." Then go to "Foundations of Faith," then look for "Biblical Reasons Why You Cannot Lose Your Faith."

Write about your feelings in a journal. Writing out thoughts and feelings is another way to express and release hurt, anger, and other emotions.

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

How Can I Be Saved?

If you are wondering how to be saved, you are asking a wonderful question. In the New Testament, a jailer at Philippi also asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). Paul and Silas answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

What does it mean to believe in the Lord Jesus? First, it means being saved comes through faith, not by the behaviors or good deeds you do. Ephesians 2:8-9 teaches, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." Salvation is a gift available by God's grace through faith. To believe, you must accept Jesus as God's Son who died for our sins, and three days later rose from the dead. When you do, your sins are forgiven, and you receive eternal life.

What does it mean to say Jesus is Lord? Believing in Jesus as Lord means accepting Jesus as more than a good example or even a prophet—it is accepting His claim to be God's Son, the Messiah.

What will you be saved from? The Bible says that every person has sinned (Romans 3:23). These sins separate us from God and deserve spiritual death (Romans 6:23). Those who die apart from Christ receive eternal separation from God in hell (Matthew 25:46). The difference between being saved and not being saved is the difference between eternity with the Lord in heaven and eternity apart from Him in hell. As a result, every person stands in desperate need of salvation.

The basic message about salvation is in Romans 10:9: "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." It involves accepting Jesus as God's Son and faith that Jesus has been resurrected from the dead.

If you are willing to place your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior and receive this gift of eternal life, follow through with your decision right now. There are no special ceremonies, rituals, or letters to write. Just pray. Use this prayer as a guide to accept Jesus as your Savior:

"Dear God, I realize I am a sinner and could never reach heaven by my own good deeds. I place my faith in Jesus Christ as God's Son who died for my sins and rose from the dead to give me eternal life. Please forgive me of my sins and help me to live for you. Thank you for accepting me and giving me eternal life."

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Please invite me!

I would love to meet you and share God's Word with you in your group, women's retreat, seminar, or bible study.

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Ms. Rhonda

Forgiveness: Many Opportunities to Make One Decision WORKBOOK

What is forgiveness? Where does forgiveness come from? Do I have to forgive? How do I do it? What will it do for me? Does it really matter if I forgive or not? What if I don't feel like forgiving? So many times, forgiveness is so difficult to offer to the one who damaged us. But God wants us to know that forgiveness is not based on our abilities. Forgiveness is based on His love. His love empowers us to forgive.

There are many books, other pieces of literature, and videos about forgiveness from a variety of philosophies and viewpoints. This workbook is based on forgiveness from the Bible—what God did through His Son, Jesus Christ. It will provide us with education, insight, wisdom, and encouragement from the true and living God through Jesus Christ.

The biblical truths in this workbook have the power to pull us out of the bondage of unforgiveness. The next time that someone offends you, steals from you, or betrays you, will you accept the opportunity to forgive?

Rhonda Miller is a Licensed Professional Counselor. She provides individual counseling to women and men who have experienced trauma. She also conducts support groups to family and friends of survivors of sexual assault. Ms. Rhonda utilizes Christ centered truths and therapeutic strategies to help people learn to heal, grow and change.

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