

Leading Others Through Forgiveness

The purpose of this worksheet is to provide some guidelines to those who want to lead others through the process of forgiving as outlined on the worksheet "Forgiving Step by Step". Essentially your role is to walk the other person through the five steps so that they can completely forgive. See the worksheet "The Role of the Helper" for more details.

Before you proceed

We assume that you're familiar with "Forgiving Step by Step". Make sure you have taken time to do the practice part at the end and asked God the question "God, who do I need to forgive?"

Make sure you have clarified everything before you start leading others through the forgiveness process. Otherwise your own pain will reduce your ability to listen carefully to God and to the other person, especially if they are dealing with similar situations. You may end up not being able to lead the other person through the process or even hurting them. Talk with your trainer: In his eyes, how ready are you to lead others? What are the next steps you should take?

Leading through steps 1, 2 and 3

Listen carefully as they go through these steps. If you feel like they're missing an important aspect, help them by asking good clarifying questions. For example, often people miss out on their feelings (step 2): They might name something (e.g. "I felt ignored. I felt misunderstood."), but these are not the underlying feelings yet. In that case, you can ask them specifically how they felt. You may help them by naming a possible range of feelings ("Did you feel rather angry or was it sadness?")

After each step, ask whether the step is finished or if there is anything to add before moving on. It's a good idea to summarize and repeat what they've already said when you're finished with the first three steps. Make sure not to interpret or judge but rather use the terms they used ("mirroring").

Leading through steps 4 and 5

When it comes to step four, it's often a good idea if you start the prayer. (For example: "God, we come to you as the judge. Thank you that we can bring all these charges to you. Jesus, please help ___ in this process.") Then hand it over to them to now start bringing the charges to God. You may often need a "repeat after me style" to help lead people if they're inexperienced with this.

When they're finished with bringing the charges, let them ask: "Holy Spirit, what else do I need to add to the list of charges?" Often God shows them more aspects that belong to the hurt. Let them add these charges and ask again until they feel that there is nothing more and "everything is really on the table now".

Example of a common mistake and how to deal with it

The person has brought all the charges and continues praying "God, bless the other person and help me to forgive. Amen." Now you ask "Are you ready to make now the decision and speak out 'I forgive ___'?" If they're ready you can let them repeat after you "God, I now hand the whole case over into your hands. I forgive ___."

Hints for special situations

Forgiving parents: In some cultures it is considered inappropriate to say something bad about your parents (or other people in authority). Some people may struggle with the step of naming the sin. Ideas how to help them:

- Explain that nobody is sinless and that this is also true for the parents. They may have been great parents, but the fact is that they still weren't perfect.
- Let the person start with honouring their parents and speak out good things before going to the negative parts and bringing the charges.

Many hurts over a longer period: When it comes to long-term relationships, there is often a whole list of hurtful experiences. It may be a good idea to let people prepare the prayer time by writing down the individual situations and hurts. Then when you meet, they can bring all these charges of injustice to God one by one in step four.

There may also be many recurring hurts of the same pattern. If they're all of the same kind, it's not necessary to go through all of them individually. It is sufficient to find the first situation ("God, what was the first situation of this kind?") and lead them through forgiving this. Then the hurt of all following incidents should be gone.

Forgiving God: Sometimes people are not aware that they're actually angry at God because they think it's not appropriate to think that way. Or they don't dare to speak these things out loud. As first steps, we can clarify with them:

- We won't solve this issue by ignoring or repressing it, instead we need to be honest.
- God knows the thoughts in their hearts and their accusations against Him anyway.
- God desires that the broken and weary come to Him, and He is strong and perfect enough to handle our accusations against Him.

Then you can go through all the five steps. In step four they speak out the accusations they have against God and in step five they decide to let go of all these things and hand them back into God's hands. They can also pray out "I forgive you, God".

Forgiving myself: Essentially you guide them through the process the same way as with "normal hurts". It's just that the person they need to forgive happens to be themselves, and they need to repent for where they sinned and for where they accused themselves. After going through steps 1-3 let them continue with repenting: They speak out what they did wrong (confessing) and ask God for forgiveness. Ask them: "Are you sure that God has forgiven you now?"

If they're unsure, you first need to resolve the problem (could involve going through the gospel again until they understand it completely; reading 1 John 1:9; maybe they omitted some aspects of their sin etc). When they're sure that God has forgiven them, lead them through step 5 where they speak out that they forgive themselves now (by saying to themselves "I forgive you").

How to continue after step five

They should now feel differently because forgiveness is not just some theory, but real things have happened in their heart and now they have just gained freedom in these areas. But more often than not, we're not done yet because carrying these accusations has made some marks on their soul:

- People potentially started to believe lies about God, themselves, or others.
- They likely may have sinned because they treated others badly (intentionally or unintentionally).

Let them ask "God, what lie did I learn about you through this?" You may lead them more specifically into asking about lies about Father God (especially after they forgave their father), about Jesus (especially after they forgave siblings or friends) or about the Holy Spirit (especially after they forgave their mother). After they have identified the lie:

- have them repent from partnering with it and believing it,
- let them give the lie back to God, and
- ask Him "God, what is the truth instead?"

Let them ask "God, what lie did I learn about myself through this?" and continue as above.

Often it's also a good idea to let people bless the person they forgave in the next weeks.

Knowing your limits – a warning

Helping someone to forgive is a privilege and an honor, but it requires wisdom.

- Do you feel ready and are you ready to lead the person through forgiving? If not, look for an alternative (another time; the help of a second person beside you; someone more experienced ...)
- Is this the right time and the right place to do it? Is there enough time? Does everyone feel comfortable going into the process now? If unsure, you and/or the person can ask "God, is it the right time to go into that topic now?"
- If it's about potential traumatic experiences like abuse, be very careful and know what you're doing before you proceed. These memories may be encapsulated in their soul and are not accessible at first (an indication: they have no memories of what exactly happened). If that's the case, knowing about forgiveness is not enough to lead them into freedom! Find someone experienced in integrating inner persons (parts of the soul). Going into traumatic experiences but then not being able to handle everything will most likely leave the person in a worse place than before.

Leading people through forgiveness is a strong expression of the Kingdom of God. Satan will lose ground and this means it's always a spiritual battle. You should be aware of this, and know who you are. Always find out what God wants you to do and what not to do.

Appendix A: The reconciliation process

Forgiving is independent from the person who caused the pain. However, it is also possible to go through the process of forgiveness together with the guilty person. For this, he/she needs to agree to join and acknowledge his sin and be prepared to ask for forgiveness. If this is the case, it is good to do it together because both parties will become more healed and the relationship can be restored. But if the guilty person doesn't seem to be willing to ask for forgiveness and fully listen throughout the steps, he/she shouldn't be present at all – it would just lead to more hurt.

The steps of forgiveness when together with the guilty person

- It is very important to have a helper in this process. Otherwise, even when both sides want to reconcile, often they're not able to do so on their own without hurting each other again.
- In many cases it is more recommendable to first lead the person alone through forgiveness and later help in the reconciliation process, which will then be easier because the hurt is already gone.

The process is essentially the same, the difference is just that after each of the first three steps the guilty person repeats the things heard and later asks for forgiveness. Step four is usually not necessary.

The person who was hurt	The guilty person
1) What happened?	1) What happened.
2) What hurt me? How did I feel?	2) Repeat how the other felt until he understands: I see it and realize how hurtful it was.
3) Name the sin	3) Name the sin
	I am sorry. Do you forgive me?
5) I forgive you.	