

Leading Others Through Forgiveness

The purpose of this worksheet is to provide guidelines for those wanting to lead others through the process of forgiveness as outlined in the worksheet “Forgiving Step by Step”. Your role is to walk the other person through the five steps so that they can completely forgive. See the worksheet “The Role of a Helper in Prayer” for more details.

Before you proceed

We assume that you are familiar with “Forgiving Step by Step”. Make sure you have taken time to do the practice section for yourself and worked through any areas of forgiveness that the Holy Spirit revealed to you before you start leading others through the forgiveness process.

Otherwise your own pain can reduce your ability to listen carefully to God and to others, especially if they are dealing with similar situations. You may end up being unable to lead the other person through forgiveness or you may even cause them more hurt. Talk with your trainer: In his/her 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 the person goes through these steps. Ask good clarifying questions if you feel like they’re missing an important aspect. For example, people often miss out on their true feelings (step 2): They might name something such as; “I felt ignored” or “I felt misunderstood”, but these are not the underlying feelings yet. In this case you can ask specifically how they felt. It may be helpful to name a possible range of feelings. (“Did you feel angry? Or was it sadness?”)

Ask whether each step is finished, or if there is anything to add before moving on. It’s a good idea to summarize and repeat what the person has said when you are finished with the first three steps. Make sure not to interpret or judge, but just use the terms they used (“mirroring”: “You said you felt ___ – is that correct?”).

Leading through steps 4 and 5

It is 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 the person to start bringing the charges to God. You may need to use a “repeat after me style” to help lead people, especially if they are inexperienced with this process. When they’re finished bringing the charges, let them ask: “Holy Spirit, what else do I need to add to the list of charges?” Often God will show them more aspects related to the hurt. Let the person add these charges and continue asking until they feel that there is nothing more, and everything is really “on the table now”.

Common mistake: someone not making the choice to forgive

The person has brought all the charges but continues praying “God, please help me to forgive. Amen.” Ask, “Are you ready to make the decision now and say ‘I forgive ___’?” If they are 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/leaders: In some cultures it is considered inappropriate to say something negative about your parents (or other people in authority). Here is a way to help if people struggle to “name the sin”:

- Explain that no one is sinless and that this is also true for parents. They may have been great parents, but the fact is that they still weren’t perfect.
- Let the person begin by honoring their parents and speaking out good things before bringing any 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 before the prayer time by writing down 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. In this case it is not necessary to go through each of them individually. It is sufficient to find the first situation (“God, what was the first situation of this kind?”) and lead the person through forgiveness for this. This often cleans hurts from all of the following instances as well.

“Forgiving” God: Sometimes people are not aware that they are actually angry at God. Even though they may not be right in accusing Him, you can help them by clarifying:

- We won’t solve this issue by ignoring or repressing it, instead we need to be honest.
- God knows their feelings and accusations against Him anyway. He wants us to come to Him honestly, express our hurts, and then get healed by encountering His love.

In step four you can let them ask: “God, please show me my heart: What accusations am I holding against You?” Now they speak these accusations out. They can check if there are more areas of hurt by again asking “God, are there more accusations I am holding against You?”

In step five they can pray like this: “God, I decide to let go of all these accusations against you. Please forgive me for blaming You.”

Forgiving myself: After going through steps 1-3 let the person continue with repenting: They speak out what they have done wrong (confessing) and ask God for forgiveness. Ask them: “Are you sure that God has forgiven you now?”

If they’re unsure, you need to resolve this problem first (This might 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 are sure that God has forgiven them, and they’ve received His forgiveness, then lead them through step 5. In this step they speak out that they forgive themselves now (by saying “I forgive myself”).

How to continue after step five

The person should now feel differently. Forgiveness is not just a theory, but real things have happened in their heart. They have just gained freedom in these areas – rejoice! But often we’re not done yet because carrying these accusations has made some marks on their soul:

- People have potentially started to believe lies about God, themselves, or others.
- They likely have sinned (intentionally or unintentionally) by acting from their own hurts and the lies that they believed.

Let them ask “God, what lie did I learn about you through this?” You may ask more specific questions about lies about Father God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. After they have identified any lies:

- have them repent from partnering with, and believing the lie,
- have them reject the lie, and
- ask Him, “God, what is the truth instead?”

Let them ask “God, what lies did I learn about myself through this?” and continue as above.

It may be a good idea to let people bless the person they forgave in the coming weeks.

After forgiving, the pain of the memory should be gone. Usually, remaining pain indicates that the forgiveness is not complete yet. However, if someone did experience a significant loss, it is healthy and normal to feel grief. They may need support in their process of grieving.

Knowing your limits – a warning

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

- Are you ready to lead this person through the steps of forgiveness? If not, look for an alternative (take a break; meet another time; use the help of a second person beside you, find someone more experienced)
- Is this the right time and the right place to do it? Is there enough time? Does everyone feel comfortable going through the process right now? If unsure, you and/or the person can ask “God, is this the right time to go into that topic?”
- If the issue is about traumatic experiences such as abuse, be very careful and know what you are doing before you proceed. These memories may be encapsulated in their soul and are not accessible at first (an indication of this is that the person has no memories of what exactly happened). If that is the case, knowing about forgiveness is not enough to lead the person into freedom! Find someone experienced in integrating inner persons (parts of the soul). Going into traumatic experiences without 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 is 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.	