

## HEALING CONVERSATIONS

This week's module introduces the concept of forgiveness. While this is a heavy topic, it's a very necessary part of any emotionally healthy and practicing Christian. Although it can be very hard to do, we know you can do it, so let's dive in!

You may not even know what forgiveness really is. Many families have never modeled how to move on from pain, hurt, and injustice. There was never "I'm sorry," or "please forgive me," in a family culture of care.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, forgiveness means "to cease to feel resentment against an offender." That's it. We make such a big deal out of something that, in words, is so simple. It's a big deal because emotionally, it is difficult.

Sometimes it can be helpful to replace the word "forgiveness" with another word or concept. This can shift the negative power with the concept itself. We can use the word "release" rather than "forgiveness." You choose to release the resentment caused by another's choices and behaviors, not allowing the pain to further cause you personal, negative impact. You are giving yourself a gift. Forgiveness can also mean that you decide to allow and trust God to determine the exact outcome of what needs to happen to an offender, that God is the ultimate judge and jury and in control of justice. You simply decide that you are tapping out from the situation, allowing God to take over because He has your back. Finding a storyline that allows the impact of the negative emotion to be released is very important.

### So Why Forgive? Is it that important? YES!

**1. We forgive because God asks us to!** If the one who created us says in His manual that we operate best if we do this, let's believe Him. *"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."* Colossians 3:13

It doesn't have anything to do with the offender. Forgiveness is a spiritual discipline that has everything to do with you and God. When we store up unforgiveness in our hearts, it gets in the way of our spiritual connection with God. He desires you to follow His lead. If He has been willing to forgive you, then He desires you to do the same towards his other children as well. Unforgiveness causes and will cause a distancing in your walk with God: not feeling His presence, and not hearing His still small voice. *"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."* Ephesians 4:31-32.

**2. Your unforgiveness only harms YOU!** Most of the time, the offender doesn't even realize that you are still harboring thoughts about the event or circumstance. You aren't even hurting them anyway. If you do use unforgiveness to fuel any vindictive behavior, it ultimately only makes you look and feel bad, watering down the offense they did to you. You become the perpetrator yourself. *"Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many."* Hebrews 12:14-15

**3. Hurt people, hurt people.** Have you heard this? When people have been hurt and unforgiveness sets in, they become somewhat toxic to the people around them, spewing anger and self-protection to those that, much of the time, have nothing to do with the offense. Unforgiveness negatively impacts innocent parties and relationships. In fact, it could be the very thing the offender hurt you with in the first place. Generationally, this can stop with you! *"A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory to overlook an offense."* Proverbs 19:11

**4. Offering forgiveness.** Offering forgiveness to those who have hurt you, allows you to be more like Jesus than at any other time in your walk. It provides spiritual growth. It can even be a testimony to your offender should they actually see and understand the gift given to them. Forgiveness requires emotional and mental strength, not weakness. *Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."* Luke 23:34a

**5. Forgiveness is most often a process, not a one-time event.** It can take time, so please be patient with yourself. Just because you achieve a level of release one day, doesn't mean it won't come rushing back with fury when triggered another day, especially if the offender does an offense again. The scripture verse, "*Jesus answered, I tell you not seven times (we are supposed to forgive), but seventy times seven.*" Matthew 18:22 is confusing. Does this mean that as Christians we are supposed to be a doormat that just allows people a continual opportunity to walk on us and take advantage of us, while we extend forgiveness up to 490 times? How do I keep a record of when this is done? I don't think Jesus necessarily was saying that is how many offenses we should allow. I think in his compassion to us He knew that sometimes the offense is so painful that we have to choose to forgive one offense this many times. **It takes time. Just being willing is the first step.** If it is God's request, then He won't let us do it alone. He will be walking with us through it.

**6. Forgiveness of the offense, releasing the offender, does not mean that there is always a need to restore or make yourself come close to the offender again.**

**7. Forgiveness is the steps we take vertically towards God.** Restoration or reconciliation is the steps we take horizontally toward the offender.

## STEPS TO FORGIVENESS:

**1. Recall the hurt.** That's right, do the opposite of what you have been trying to do, actually allow yourself to feel the hurt. Don't avoid or press it down. Don't quickly and superficially forgive and move on without truly understanding the impact of the pain. Don't focus on the person, just the pain. Feeling your way through is possible. Your emotions do shift.

**2. Try to play out their perspective from their shoes.** Our court system is built on eyewitness accounts to provide the truth. Even greater is having two eyewitness accounts. An investigating detective will interview and include into their report both accounts, knowing that collectively there is a greater degree of the whole truth. Can you put yourself on their side of the crime scene and try to see the scene from that angle? If you need to ask curious questions for understanding and clarity of others, or even the offender, this may be helpful. Be careful, though; if you have been traumatized and the offender is not a healthy person, you may not want them to be the person you interview.

**3. Now assign an emotion to that perspective.** What emotion would that person have been feeling? Have you felt that same emotion before? Maybe having experienced the same type of event before is causing these emotions? Being able to share the same emotion but maybe in differing events can allow you to find some type of compassion, understanding, or even empathy.

**4. Offer an altruistic gift of forgiveness in that we realize we are like the person who hurt us.** We have hurt others just like this person has hurt you. We may have even been forgiven of these offenses ourselves. The gratitude that we have for having been forgiven is the motivation we can extend to our offender as well.

**5. Bring forgiveness into the present, tangible world in some kind of concrete way.** Tell someone or announce publicly your intent to extend forgiveness. Ask a prayer partner to pray with you about a heart change on this offense. Write a letter of forgiveness to this person. You might never mail this letter. If the person is aware of the offense and has asked for forgiveness, yet you were not able or willing at the time, you may consider mailing it, reading it to them, etc. Otherwise, if the person is unaware or unapologetic of the offense, offering a letter of forgiveness may not be the appropriate thing to do.

**6. Sometimes, doing an act of kindness or making/buying a meaningful gift for this person can be helpful to shift our negative emotions to a more service-oriented or altruistic emotional place.** Being the person we want them to be first, can help our very fickle emotions eventually line up with our intentions. Knowing that God sees us allows us to not need the recognition of another. We act for and audience of One, so this may be anonymous. If not, seeing the gracious and thankful response of the person can help as well. The feeling we get of taking the "high road" with God's help and the growth it enables in our life will make the desire to hold onto unforgiveness pale in comparison. We always feel better in our own bodies when we are giving and not unforgiving.

**ACTION STEPS WEEK SEVEN:**

**STEP ONE:**

Find the list of past hurts in your marriage that still affect you (that you wrote down during the Week Seven video). Ask the Lord if there are more that need to be added to the list.

**STEP TWO:**

Now, write down them down again, one by one, doing your best to walk through each of the above steps of forgiveness. Use the back of this sheet if you need more space.

OFFENSE/HURT: _____	STEPS TAKEN: <input type="checkbox"/>
OFFENSE/HURT: _____	STEPS TAKEN: <input type="checkbox"/>
OFFENSE/HURT: _____	STEPS TAKEN: <input type="checkbox"/>
OFFENSE/HURT: _____	STEPS TAKEN: <input type="checkbox"/>
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OFFENSE/HURT: _____	STEPS TAKEN: <input type="checkbox"/>
OFFENSE/HURT: _____	STEPS TAKEN: <input type="checkbox"/>

**STEP THREE:**

Connect with your spouse and have those Healing Conversation. Take turns going through each offense/hurt listed above, being cautious of new offenses, providing soft protests and using the steps of CATCH.

**STEP FOUR:**

End your time **praying together** for complete forgiveness! Ask God to give you greater unity as you work together as co-regulators and loving partners in your marriage.

**REMINDER:** Continue your mindset exercise from Module 1 every day to help shift your perspective!

