

INVITATION TO FORGIVENESS

Council on Faith and Life
Pamphlet #3

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PREFACE

Forgiveness is a theme that concerns every person and every human community. The Bible teaches that everyone is a sinner, who needs God's forgiveness. In our daily lives the need for forgiveness arises frequently when we hurt or are hurt by others. Sometimes the hurts appear small; at other times the injuries are profound and long-lasting. Whether small or large, these hurts require forgiveness to be offered and received in order for relationships to be set right and for God's love to continue to flow freely in and through us.

It is within the mandate of the Council on Faith and Life to resource the congregations of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada on topics vital to Christian life and witness. The matter of forgiveness and of being the church to both injured persons and offenders belongs within this circle of concern. We commend this pamphlet as a resource for study in the churches.

Helmut Harder
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God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy, and peace, so that God’s healing and hope flow through us to the world.

— Vision: Healing and Hope Statement

INTRODUCTION

This pamphlet offers key biblical understandings on the topic of forgiveness, although it does not exhaust the topic. It can be used as a vehicle to convey important teachings, as a catalyst to encourage persons in the church to share the joys and griefs they have experienced in matters of forgiveness, and as a means of promoting honest discussion on this vital topic in the church community and in the family.

The material in this pamphlet is suitable for groups of adults as well as for youth. You might want to order enough pamphlets for each person in the group. The topics allow for at least five discussion sessions following the sections of the pamphlet: Forgiven and Forgiving, God Forgives Us, We Offer Forgiveness to Others, We Receive Forgiveness from Others, and Restoration.

I. FORGIVEN AND FORGIVING

Christians are a forgiven people. We hold that all persons are sinners in need of forgiveness. The *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* says that “humanity has disobeyed God... and chosen to sin. ... We sin by making individual and group choices to do unrighteousness and injustice. ... In sinning, we become unfaithful to the covenant with God and with God’s people, destroy right relationships, use power selfishly, do violence, and become separated from God” (p.31).

Forgiveness is needed to restore right relationships and to bring us close once again to God and to others. We need not remain trapped in sin and guilt. Together with believers in the New Testament, we claim that through the atoning death of Jesus Christ, God forgives our sins (Acts 2:38; Romans 3:23–25). Humanity has disobeyed God, but God offers forgiveness to all those who come in submission (Ephesians 5). Humanity has rebelled, but the offer of reconciliation with God is always open to those who come seeking restoration (Luke 15:11–32). Forgiveness is offered by God, but it does not happen automatically—it depends upon our receiving and accepting God’s offer.

Christians are a forgiving people. Having experienced the forgiveness of God and entered into a new, right relationship with God, we extend forgiveness to others (Matthew 18:23–35). The Scriptures say: “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, *forgiving one another*, as God in Christ has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32). Jesus taught us to pray, “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). Forgiveness from God and forgiveness of one another belong together.

This pamphlet draws attention to the great importance of the process of forgiveness. It also emphasizes the complexity of such a process. Forgiveness is the right thing to do, and it seems so simple. Yet intricate dynamics, subtle emotions, as well as huge problems clutter the road to forgiveness. For this reason, Christians must nurture its practice in their midst.

Forgiveness is a journey, sometimes a long one, and we may need some time before we get to the station of complete healing, but the nice thing is that we are being healed en route.

— Lewis B. Smedes, *Shame and Grace*, p.141.

II. FORGIVENESS OFFERED AND RECEIVED

Acts of forgiveness are channels of grace which can be opened and closed. With one exception, we hold the power to let these channels flow freely or to stop them up. The exception is God’s offer of forgiveness to us. The channel of God’s forgiveness always flows freely. That

channel cannot be dammed up from God's side. On the human level, however, we have the power to let flow or to dam up the channels of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a gift—freely offered and gratefully received. Forgiveness is freely offered by God and gratefully received by sinners. Forgiveness is freely offered by persons who have been wronged and gratefully received by wrongdoers. What follows is a discussion of the four-directional flow of forgiveness.

A. GOD OFFERS FORGIVENESS TO PEOPLE

Among the people of Israel, forgiveness from God was proclaimed in the worshipping community. Here the people heard of injustices, acknowledged their sins, received God's forgiveness, and made things right where wrongs had been done. A sacrifice of atonement was brought to the temple, and the priest spoke words of forgiveness. The people left with the assurance that God had forgiven them (see Leviticus 16; 23:26–32). They also knew of their obligation to love neighbours and strangers in their midst (see Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 10:19).

The New Testament assures us that Jesus, as the promised Saviour and as God's high priest, was given the authority to forgive sins. Striking examples of this include Christ's forgiveness of the paralytic (Mark 2:1–12), the sinful woman (Luke 7:36–50), and the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1–11). Jesus accepted sinners and tax collectors and ate with them (Luke 15:1–2). His death on the cross is an atonement for the sins of all people in the world (John 3:16; Romans 5 & 6; Hebrews 9; Ephesians 2:4–5; Colossians 1:21–22). The cross reveals the length to which God is prepared to go to offer forgiveness to all.

Or is there one exception? What did Jesus mean when he said, "Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" (Mark 3:29; see Luke 12:10)? In this situation Jesus was warning his hearers against insisting that he had an unclean spirit. In their stubbornness they were denying that Jesus came from God and that he spoke with divine authority. To persist in this view unrelentingly, and not to repent of such blasphemy, finally leads

to a complete break with God and to a rejection of forgiveness even though God never withdraws the offer.

B. PEOPLE ACCEPT FORGIVENESS FROM GOD

The sinful act recorded in Genesis 3 was the beginning of great distress within the human race. God worked over generations of time to bring the message of forgiveness to the human race. As the story of Joseph and his brothers shows, forgiveness often involves a long process (for the story, see Genesis 37–50). The many biblical stories of brokenness and healing illustrate that we humans find it difficult to experience and grasp forgiveness.

Yet God’s offer of forgiveness is forthright and clear. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18). We should take a lesson from the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32). The father extends open arms of forgiveness to the son regardless of what the son has done. The younger son is forgiven and accepted even though the elder son turns his back. Forgiveness from God does not depend on our goodness. Nor does it depend on the attitudes of other people. “Everyone who believes in [Christ] receives forgiveness through his name” (Acts 10:43).

God created humans for a fruitful life of peace and righteousness in community with each other (Genesis 1:26–31). Where people worship their Creator and respect and care for one another, there people of faith witness to the awesome purpose of God (Psalm 8). But humans have broken this relationship with God and with one another, and they continue to do so (Genesis 3; Psalm 51; Romans 3:23). Fortified by attitudes and emotions of hatred, anger, fear, and frustration, and left to their own devices, people built insurmountable walls between themselves and God.

We need to hear that God forgives sins (wrongdoings) and does not hold our failures against us (Psalm 103:12; 1 John 2:1–2). Through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, God has removed the obstacles and barriers that have come between the Creator and humans because of our sin (Jeremiah 31:34; Psalm 103:5; Matthew 26:28; Romans 5 & 6; Hebrews 9). Let us drink fully the refreshing water of God’s forgiveness.

Unconditional Forgiveness

In *Man's Need and God's Action*, Reuel Howe tells the story of a child who has done something that has broken the relationship between herself and her mother. The mother tries to help her but, hostile and angry, the daughter stomps out of the room and goes upstairs. There she comes upon the new dress that her mother is planning to wear to a party that night. Nearby lies a pair of scissors. The girl picks up the scissors, mutilates the dress, symbolically and actually injuring her mother, and leaves. After some time the mother comes upstairs and sees what her daughter had done. Heartbroken, she throws herself down on the bed and cries. Soon the girl comes in and walks slowly to the bed. "Mother," she whispers. No reply. "Mother, mother, please," again pleads the daughter. After a moment the mother asks, "Please what?" "Please take me back, please take me back," begs the daughter. The mother reaches out her arms and draws her child to her in an act of forgiveness and joy at reconciliation. (pp. 132–35.)

C. PEOPLE OFFER FORGIVENESS TO PEOPLE

For the New Testament as for the Old, the community of faith is the context for extending forgiveness to other people. Jesus gives guidelines for practising forgiveness in the church (Matthew 18). To the question of how often one should forgive, he answers, "Not seven times but, I tell you, seventy-seven [or seventy times seven] times" (Matthew 18:23). Paul's call to forgive focuses on the church as a forgiving community (Colossians 3:13; Ephesians 4:32; Philemon; 1 Corinthians 5; Galatians 2:11).

People are sometimes selective as to whom they will forgive and for what. Some allow broken relationships to fester for years because they are too proud or too stubborn or too hurt to forgive. Some even say, "What you have done is unforgiveable!" But the Scriptures teach that we are to seek the restoration of broken relationships (Leviticus 19:17–18; Matthew 18:15–22).

Misconceptions about forgiveness

Wrong understandings of forgiveness arise among us. Melissa Miller, in *Family Violence: The Compassionate Church Responds* (pp.152-

3), and Carolyn Holderread Heggen, in *Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches* (chapter 7), help us to identify and address misconceptions that relate to interpersonal forgiveness.

1. To forgive does not mean to forget. Remembering is essential for forgiveness to be genuine. The desire to forget shows the discomfort and difficulty people have in dealing with emotions like anger and hatred. The emphasis on forgetting may in fact reinforce denial and hinder healing. While we must not remember so zealously that we do not forgive, we should also not forget so easily that we do not learn good lessons from things that have happened.

2. Forgiving is not the same as accepting the offence. Wrongs are never justified, acceptable, or excusable. Clearly naming the offence as sinful and hurtful is essential for forgiveness to have any meaning. Full forgiveness can only happen when there is awareness of the depth of the inflicted wrong.

3. Forgiving is not natural or automatic. The tendency to strike back in the same way we have been hurt, or to carry resentment, comes all too naturally. While forgiveness is a definite alternative to resentment and retaliation, to be forgiven requires that feelings of anger, hatred, and bitterness be acknowledged and expressed in appropriate ways. David Augsburg writes, “When forgiveness denies that there is anger, acts as if it never happened, smiles as though it never hurt, fakes as though it’s all forgotten. . . . It’s not forgiveness. It’s a magical fantasy” (*Caring Enough Not to Forgive*, p.52).

4. Forgiving is not quick, nor is it a one-time event. At least when the offence causes deep pain, forgiveness is more a process than a singular event.

5. Forgiving does not mean that trust is restored. Heggen reminds us that forgiveness and trust are two different processes. For instance, when a perpetrator of sexual abuse is forgiven, it does not mean that such a person can be trusted alone with vulnerable children.

6. Forgiving does not mean that the relationship is reconciled. Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation, though it can some-

times lead to reconciliation. Forgiveness is letting go of the resentment, and then reconciliation may or may not follow. Even when reconciliation does occur, the nature of the relationship is often quite different than it was before the offence took place.

Steps to Healing

It is no easy matter for an innocent person to deal with an offence. In chapter 17 of *Shame and Grace: Healing the Shame We Don't Deserve*, Lewis B. Smedes identifies some of the challenges facing personal hurts. These include surrendering the desire to get even and agreeing to live with the score 'un-tied;' revising one's mental image of the person who caused the harm; inviting feelings of compassion; and offering grace and pardon in the name of a gracious God.

Wilma Derksen is a person who has faced the challenge of forgiving another person who caused her great hurt—a person she has never seen. Her daughter was abducted and was discovered dead some time later. The abductor has never been found. In her article "Forgiveness is the Road to Healing," Derksen provides points of guidance for a forgiving attitude:

1. Know what the offence is and name it.
2. If an offence is to be forgiven, it must be stopped.
3. Let words and emotions flow in the healing process.
4. Get the story right on wrongs committed.
5. Ensure a climate of safety and trust for forgiveness.
6. Recognize the importance of an apology.
7. Find teachable moments, even in stories of brokenness.
8. Do not become grounded by difficult experiences. Life is too short to hold a grudge.
9. Take the long-range view on difficult experiences.
10. There's no perfect resolution; live with imperfection.
11. Choose to put the matter behind you and move forward.
12. Receive forgiveness not as a human achievement, but as a gift received from God.

Healing through the Extension of Forgiveness

David Augsburger tells the story of a young woman in California who was abducted, brutally raped, and then murdered. The young woman's mother, Goldie Mae Bristol, was initially outraged and then grew seriously depressed. She quit her job and moved from place to place. With time her bitterness only deepened. The murderer was not found.

One day a friend persuaded Goldie Mae to go to church. She continued and, gradually, with the help of a prayer and Bible study group, her remorse was replaced by peace, and she began to think and talk about forgiveness.

With the transformation in her came the opportunity to talk to church and community groups about her experience. She was even invited to tell her story in prisons. She would often say to prisoners, "I'm here to tell you that one person outside these walls forgives you. And God forgives you too."

At one of these meetings a man stood up after her talk and said, "I'm the man you've forgiven." Then in an emotion-laden scene Michael Dennis Kemp stepped forward and he and Goldie Mae embraced.

Her forgiveness was complete. His reparation had only begun. (J.J. Thiessen lecture series, unpublished.)

Forgiveness points wounded human beings away from the basic human instinct to retaliate in kind... against those who have wounded them.

— Dorothy Jean Weaver, p.151.

D. PEOPLE ACCEPT FORGIVENESS FROM PEOPLE

To receive the extended hand of forgiveness is no simple matter. It involves the process of moving beyond denial, through shame and remorse, to a deep sense of satisfaction and joy as a forgiven person. To sense forgiveness is to hear the words of Jesus, "Neither do I condemn you" (John 8:11).

For various reasons, a person may not readily welcome the forgiving hand. People want to protect their perceived reputations, so they set up defences against self-accusation and against accusation by family and

friends. Also, a sense of shame and unworthiness causes persons to hesitate to receive forgiveness. At other times a person may request forgiveness not out of a sense of repentance and a desire to set the relationship right, but in an attempt to control the situation. This is false forgiveness. These reactions only cause added turmoil. It is better to be open and honest and to confess sincerely when one has done wrong.

Is forgiveness conditional? Does it depend on the offender doing certain things? Or is forgiveness unconditional?

On the one hand, we affirm that Jesus provided sufficient grace for everyone (Romans 3:24; 2 Corinthians 12:9). The *invitation* of forgiveness is there unconditionally, regardless of the offence. “Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit” (Psalm 32:1–2).

The Need for Repentance

On the other hand, the offer of grace requires a human response. The circle is not complete until forgiveness has been *accepted*. True acceptance involves repentance and remedial action. The offender must take responsibility for their offence and change their behaviour. Without a heartfelt and life-changing response on the part of the offender, forgiveness is cheapened. God will not force reconciliation on anyone against their will.

Gayle Gerber Koontz has outlined five steps that are involved in honest repentance:

1. Accept the injured person’s feelings as true and their judgment as right.
2. Feel the pain inflicted on the injured person and grieve for it.
3. Acknowledge and confess responsibility for the injury and ask for forgiveness.
4. Desire and promise not to hurt the injured person again and take steps to address the problems that led to injury the first time.
5. Make restitution. (pp.186–187.)

The courage to accept forgiveness of wrongdoing cannot come mainly from within the person. The Spirit of God together with the integrity and support of the surrounding community gives wrongdoers the spiritual strength to accept God's forgiveness and to face the forgiving community.

Receiving Forgiveness in Community

In the book *Blood Brothers*, Elias Chacour tells how as a young, recently ordained priest, he became pastor to a Palestinian congregation in the small town of Ibillin, in Galilee. This congregation was rent by a long history of conflict; conflict that set four brothers against each other in deep enmity. The familiar traditions of Easter, however, invariably brought them all into the church where they sat on opposite sides, hostile and unrelenting. At the end of a particularly stiff Palm Sunday service, in which Chacour had given "the most unimpassioned sermon of [his] life," the congregation, as divided and distant and indifferent as ever, at last rose to stand and receive the benediction.

But Chacour offered no benediction. Instead, he "dropped [his] hand and strode toward the open doors at the back of the church," the only doors to the building, and drew them shut. He pulled a thick chain through the handles, "fastened it firmly with a padlock," walked back up front, and said, "Sitting in this building does not make you a Christian ... You are a people divided. You argue and hate each other—gossip and spread malicious lies. What do the Moslems and the unbelievers think when they see you? Surely that your religion is false. If you can't love your brother that you see, how can you say you love God who is invisible? ... For many months, I've tried to unite you. I've failed, because I'm only a man. But there is someone else who can bring you together in true unity. His name is Jesus Christ. He is the one who gives you power to forgive. So now I will be quiet and allow Him to give you that power. If you *will not* forgive, we will stay locked in here. You can kill each other and I'll provide your funerals gratis."

He stood there in silence. The community sat, "tight-lipped, fists clenched," glaring "as if carved from stone." Long minutes passed.

Outside a boy and his donkey clattered by, and Chacour knew that he was finished, it was all over.

Then the toughest of the brothers, the village policeman, rose and faced the congregation. “I am the worst one of all. . . . I’ve hated my own brothers. Hated them so much I wanted to kill them. More than any of you, I need forgiveness.” He turned to Chacour and said, “Can you forgive me, too, Abuna?” Abuna, which means ‘our father,’ is a term of deep affection and respect.

“‘Come here,’ Chacour replied. . . . and [they] greeted each other with the kiss of peace. ‘Of course I forgive you. . . . Now go and greet your brothers.’ Before he was halfway down the aisle, his three brothers had rushed to him,” and then the whole church joined in “a chaos of embracing and repentance.”

A lifeless body, the church, was returning from the dead. (pp.168–173.)

III. THE SWEET FRAGRANCE OF RESTORATION

The Old Testament tells a beautiful story about the reconciliation of two brothers, Jacob and Esau (Genesis 33:1–17). There should have been nothing bad between them. They were brothers; and brothers should support one another. What is more, they were twins; twin brothers should feel especially close to one another. But their relationship is a story of in-fighting.

Now, as adults, they seemed ready to make amends. Jacob makes the first move. He prepares a gift of many animals as a restitution. After a night of intense prayer, he organizes a family parade, and prepares to meet Esau. Jacob goes humbly, bowing to the ground seven times before his brother.

It is an emotional reconciliation. “Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept” (33:4). Jacob urges Esau to accept the gift of restitution, and Esau finally does. Then Esau says: “Let us journey on our way, and I will go alongside you” (33:12). What a finish to a stormy relationship!

There is no mention of the word ‘forgiveness’ in this biblical account. But that’s what it’s about. After many years of struggle, beginning already in the womb, Jacob and Esau offer and receive forgiveness. From that time onward, they live in peace, with appropriate spaces in their relationship.

For personal reconciliation and restoration to occur, forgiveness must be both offered and received. Restitution must be made. Gayle Gerber Koontz notes that reconciliation is not always possible. Sometimes an offender refuses to repent; sometimes an injured person finds it impossible to let go. Sometimes the hurt is simply too deep for a personal relationship to continue. But “the church has a strong role in calling sinners to repentance, offering respect to and nurturing the trust of injured ones, and mediating the grace of God’s love to both” (pp.189–190).

The restoration of relationships is the goal of forgiveness. It cannot happen except by the miracle of grace and love.

The Complexity of Forgiveness

In the novel *Saint Maybe*, by Anne Tyler, a young man named Ian is drawn one evening into a church called Church of the Second Chance. When the minister invites people to share items for prayer, Ian rises. “‘I used to be good,’ he said, ‘...but lately, I don’t know what’s happened. Everything I touch goes wrong... Pray for me to be good again... Pray for me to be forgiven.’”

They pray for him, in a silence that bathes and surrounds him and he is sure that God cannot help but listen to those prayers. When the service is over the minister, Reverend Emmett, comes and asks if Ian has received a response to his prayer.

Ian isn’t quite sure, so Reverend Emmett asks what he needs forgiveness for. Hesitantly, Ian explains. “‘I caused my older brother to, um, kill himself. ... I told him his wife was cheating on him ... and now I’m not even sure she was. So he drove into a wall. And then his wife died of sleeping pills and I guess you could say I caused that, too, more or less... So it looks as if my parents are going to have to raise

the children. ... that's why I asked for that prayer. And I honestly believe it might have worked. ... Don't you think I'm forgiven?

“Goodness, no!’ Reverend Emmett said briskly.

“... ‘But ... I thought that was kind of the point,’ Ian said. ‘I thought God forgives everything.’

“‘He does,’ Reverend Emmett said. ‘But you can’t just say, ‘I’m sorry, God.’ ... You have to offer reparation—concrete, practical reparation...’

“‘But what if there isn’t any reparation? What if it’s something nothing will fix?’

“‘Well, that’s where Jesus comes in, of course. ... Jesus remembers how difficult life on earth can be,’ Reverend Emmett told him. ‘He helps with what you can’t undo. But only after you’ve *tried* to undo it.’

“‘Tried? Tried how?’ Ian asked. ‘What would it take?’

“... ‘Well, first you’ll need to see to those children.’”

Ian objects that he is still in college and his parents won’t understand it if he drops out, but the Reverend Emmett suggests this might be God’s test for him. “‘God wants to know how far you’ll go to undo the harm you’ve done.’” Ian goes home, convinced that the pastor is right, and tells his parents, who are stunned by his confession (pp. 115–124).

The novel goes on to tell how Ian drops out of college and raises the three children. As the title implies, he is not really a saint, but he is working at restitution, at restoring relationships, working at what forgiveness is all about.

Forgiveness is the name of love practised among people who love poorly.

— Henri Nouwen

STUDY GUIDE

FIRST SESSION: FORGIVEN AND FORGIVING

1. How do you understand and experience the biblical truth that God forgives your sin/s?
2. How is the link between God's forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of one another binding? (See Matthew 6:12,14–15.) In what kind of situation might God forgive us even though we might not forgive one another?
3. How is forgiveness a simple thing? When and how does it become complex? Has your experience of forgiveness been simple or complex?
4. Read the following texts. What understandings of forgiveness do they offer? Exodus 34:6–7; Numbers 4:13–25; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Jeremiah 31:34; Psalm 103:1–5; Ephesians 2:15–17; Colossians 1:15–20.
5. How is sin more than just a personal thing? Are there structures in our society that reinforce sinful ways of doing or being? What are they?
6. How is our relationship with the earth affected by sin and in need of forgiveness? What form might restoration take in such a context?

SECOND SESSION: GOD FORGIVES US

1. How is Jesus's death on the cross central to our understanding of forgiveness?
2. Read Mark 3:21–30. What is the situation in which Jesus uses the term 'blasphemy against the Holy Spirit'? What do you think he meant? How does this apply to us today?
3. In what kind of situation might God withhold forgiveness? Why?
4. How does the practise of forgiveness help people to move from doing wrong to one another to treating people according to God's ways? (See Isaiah 1.)

5. Read Mark 2:1–12. According to this passage, what is the relationship between forgiveness and healing? How does one affect the other?
6. How have you experienced forgiveness from God? Was it easy or difficult to accept God's offer of forgiveness? How has this affected your life?
7. How does the story about the girl and her mother illustrate the need for forgiveness in our relationship with God?
8. Another story about forgiveness is that of David and Bathsheba, told in 2 Samuel 11:3–12:23. What does this story tell us about the experience of forgiveness?

THIRD SESSION: WE OFFER FORGIVENESS TO OTHERS

1. How is forgiveness understood or experienced according to the following biblical texts? Genesis 37–50; Matthew 18:23–35; Luke 19:1–10.
2. Who needs to make the start in the process of forgiveness? (See Matthew 5:21–24; 18:15.)
3. What do you think of Heggen's and Miller's description of forgiving? Do you agree or disagree with these six points?
4. What can be done to restore trust once trust has been betrayed?
5. When a church leader has transgressed, does forgiveness necessarily lead to reinstatement in the profession? Why or why not?
6. If a person who has committed a serious offence has repented and taken steps towards rehabilitation, does forgiving that person mean that they will automatically be fully included back into all aspects of normal community life? Why or why not? In what situations might it be appropriate to limit a forgiven person's participation in community life?
7. If you can, share a story of your experience of needing to forgive. How easy was it for you? Was it a painful or satisfying experience?

8. Would you be able to forgive as Wilma Derksen did? Would you want to? Why or why not?
9. How do you view Derksen's list of 12 steps towards developing a forgiving attitude? How can following these promote healing?
10. What does the story of Goldie Mae Bristol tell you about our ability to offer forgiveness?

FOURTH SESSION: WE ACCEPT FORGIVENESS FROM OTHERS

1. Why might someone reject the offer of forgiveness for wrongs they have done?
2. Should forgiveness always be offered with no conditions attached? Why or why not?
3. Should forgiveness always be granted to a person who asks for it? When might a request for forgiveness be insincere?
4. What does the story of Elias Chacour tell you about our ability to receive forgiveness?
5. If you can, share a story of your own experience of needing to be forgiven. How easy was it to acknowledge your need for forgiveness? How did the situation work out?

FIFTH SESSION: RESTORATION

1. How do forgiveness and reconciliation work together? (See Genesis 33:1–17; John 8:1–11; 2 Corinthians 5:17–19.)
2. What disciplines are needed for forgiveness to take place? How can we use these to achieve forgiveness? (See Colossians 3:12–15.)
3. If you can, share a story of how you have—or have not—experienced restoration in the process of forgiving or being forgiven. How satisfactory was the degree of restoration achieved?
3. Do you agree with the premise of *Saint Maybe*, that a person needs to 'work out' their forgiveness? Why or why not? How necessary do you think restitution is in the achievement of forgiveness? (See Romans 5:12–21.)
4. How can the church encourage and facilitate forgiveness? What emphasis should the community of believers place on restitution and the restoration of right relationships?

5. What kind of structural barriers might there be in our society—built-in attitudes, power balances, the acceptance of things as they are—that hamper the full experience of reconciliation and forgiveness? Should the church challenge these barriers? Why or why not?

6. In what kind of situation might it be necessary or meaningful for a congregation or an entire denomination to seek forgiveness? How does restoration or restitution figure into this?

FURTHER READING

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