FORGIVENESS

A NEW STORY

Recovery Program: After Betrayal and Injury

Understanding and Practicing Forgiveness
Based on the Enright Process Model of Forgiveness

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**WHAT IS FORGIVENESS?** 3

**UNCOVERING PHASE**
- UNCOVERING DEFENSE MECHANISMS 9
- UNCOVERING ANGER 15
- EXAMINING SHAME AND GUILT 21
- TELLING THE OLD STORY 25
- A NEW DIRECTION? 30

**DECISION PHASE**
- CHOOSING FORGIVENESS 33

**WORK PHASE**
- REFRAMING THE PAIN 36
- REFRAMING THE WRONGDOER 42
- DISCOVERING EMPATHY 47
- GOODWILL PART 1: MERCIFUL RESTRAINT/
  GIVING UP RESENTMENT 51
- GOODWILL PART 2: GENEROSITY, COMPASSION
  AND LOVE 56

**DEEPENING/OUTCOME PHASE**
- FINDING MEANING 60
- EXPERIENCING RELEASE: I AM STRONGER 65
- EXPERIENCING RELEASE: I HAVE CHANGED? 68
- FINDING RENEWED PURPOSE: THE CIRCLE OF BENEFIT
  GETS BIGGER 73
UNIT ONE
WHAT IS FORGIVENESS?

Researchers at the University of Wisconsin have developed a definition of forgiveness based on a careful gathering of ideas from philosophy, religious traditions, psychological principles, and personal stories of forgiveness. We have discovered that forgiveness is founded primarily on moral ideas or a “quest for the good.” In other words, forgiveness is a virtue that a person practices in order to do good things and to become a better person. We believe that forgiveness, based on this moral framework, is a psychologically healthy response to the pain and anger a person experiences due to the wrongdoing of another person. It is a way of practicing faith in Christ’s forgiving work.

We have also discovered that forgiveness is a process involving a number of steps, time, and effort. We have done a number of forgiveness therapy studies in which participants have shown significant benefits as a result of working through the forgiveness process such as relief from depression and anxiety.

Finally, we have discovered that some people are apprehensive about forgiveness because they have had some misunderstandings about what forgiveness is or how a person goes about forgiving. It is important, then, in order to begin the forgiveness process and to experience the benefits of forgiving, to know both what forgiveness is and what forgiveness is not.

What forgiveness is:

Moral
Forgiveness begins with the understanding that all persons deserve to be treated with respect. However, people do sometimes treat us disrespectfully and unfairly. Then we can be deeply hurt by our interactions with them. Forgiveness is a response to a wrongdoing or any action by a person toward us that does not respect our God-given worth and our need for well being (physical, emotional, or spiritual). In forgiving, we do two rather different things at the same time. First, we recognize the reality of the wrongdoing and the pain it caused us. Second, we also make a commitment to work on thinking, feeling, and behaving toward the wrongdoer with respect and goodwill. In other words, forgiveness is choosing a morally good (respectful) and healthy response even though the wrongdoer has chosen morally wrong (unfair, disrespectful) behavior.

Goodwill
Forgiveness is the expression of goodwill in three important ways. Each builds on the one before. 1) It involves merciful restraint from harboring resentment or pursuing revenge. 2) Forgiveness involves generosity or offering good things where possible. 3) Forgiveness involves moral love (agape). Moral love is different from simple friendship, family loyalty, or romantic love. It involves hoping for or appropriately contributing to the
betterment of the wrongdoer based on his/her God-given human worth. (This may or may not mean close personal contact with the wrongdoer).

Paradoxical
Forgiveness is the foregoing of resentment or revenge when the wrongdoer's actions deserve it and offering the gifts of mercy, generosity and moral love to the wrongdoer even though his/her past actions do not merit this goodwill. In other words, the forgiver considers both the true nature of the wrongdoing (it truly was unjust and hurtful) and the human worth of the wrongdoer (he or she is responsible for the wrongdoing but still have the same God-given value as all other human beings). As we offer the gift of forgiveness to the wrongdoer, we ourselves receive the gift of psychological healing and growth as a person of goodwill. This is a way of engaging in the sanctification process.

Beyond duty
Forgiveness is a freely chosen process (rather than a grim obligation done because of outside pressure). Forgiveness is the overcoming of wrongdoing with good. This is a way of practicing Romans chapter 12.

A process
Forgiveness is courageous and often hard work. It means taking a closer look at the pain caused by the wrongdoing and the wrongdoer. Forgiveness means making a decision to spend time and energy on three important things: 1) choosing how you want to respond to the pain, 2) choosing how you want to think, feel, and behave toward the wrongdoer, and 3) choosing what kind of person you want to become.

What forgiveness is not:
Just saying: “I forgive you.”
Saying “I forgive you” may be a start to a longer process but it is not all that’s involved in forgiving. Also, it may in some cases be uncomfortable, inappropriate, or even dangerous to tell the wrongdoer “I forgive you,” in person. This may particularly be true if he/she is not yet ready to accept responsibility for his/her actions.

Forgetting/Denial
Forgiveness does not mean ignoring natural feelings of anger and pain that come from the wrongdoing. Forgiveness is not expecting the passage of time alone to overcome the problems caused by the wrongdoing. Forgiveness is not just “letting go.” True forgiveness is not “forgive and forget.” Instead forgiveness helps you clearly identify the wrongdoing itself, its effects on you, and the positive choices you can make in response to the pain and anger you have experienced. Forgiveness can allow you to remember…but in a new way.
Condoning
Forgiveness does not mean deciding nothing that bad happened. Forgiveness is not saying such things as: “It was only this one time.”, “It won't happen again.”, “Everyone treats other people this way sometimes.”

Excusing
Forgiveness does not mean convincing yourself that the person did this because…..therefore, it wasn't really his/her responsibility. For example: “My father was neglected as a child, so he can’t help the way he is.”

Acceptance
Forgiveness is not the same as realizing that you misunderstood the situation and that no wrongdoing occurred after all. Forgiveness is more than deciding that you need to accept reasonable differences in beliefs or behaviors (those that are not actually unjust or disrespectful). Forgiveness is not simply moving on with your life by accepting that life can be difficult.

Condemning
Forgiving is not the same as deciding that she/he deserves to know they have wronged me in a resentful or “morally superior” way. In other words, when you truly forgive you do not tell the wrongdoer (or someone else) that you have forgiven him/her simply to “prove” that you are the better person.

Seeking Justice or Compensation
Forgiveness is not a quid pro quo deal (I do for you if you do for me). As you offer someone forgiveness you cannot force him/her to change. The wrongdoer may benefit from your forgiveness and change …or he/she may choose not to change. But forgiveness does free you to make positive changes yourself (considering carefully the safety and trust that is possible in the relationship). These positive personal changes can take place whether or not the wrongdoer is ready to apologize or make amends. In this way, you are not limited by the wrongdoer’s choices but can choose for yourself what you want to feel, think, or do and who you want to become.
Forgiveness does not have to wait for justice to be complete (I will forgive after he/she has apologized, restored something to me, or paid for the difficulty in some way). But forgiveness does not mean that seeking justice is unnecessary or wrong (I can forgive and still pursue fair or legal means of safety or compensation).

An important distinction:
Forgiveness is one person's moral response to another person’s wrongdoing.
Reconciliation is two parties coming together in mutual respect to rebuild
trust in the relationship. Sometimes a wrongdoer is not ready or willing to be involved in a reconciliation process. But, forgiveness can still be a healthy moral and psychological choice for the person who was hurt by the wrongdoer. In fact, the goodwill of forgiving is best offered while realistically considering the safety (both physical and emotional) and trust possible in a relationship with the wrongdoer. Even, if little or no personal contact with the wrongdoer is advisable, it is still possible to forgive.

**Forgiveness** is choosing to overcome the desire to hold onto resentment or take revenge when the wrongdoer's actions deserve it and offering the gifts of mercy, generosity and moral love (agape) to the wrongdoer even though his/her past actions do not merit this goodwill. This practice of goodwill does not deny the reality of the wrongdoing itself or the wrongdoer’s responsibility for it. Instead the forgiver expresses this goodwill as he/she freely chooses his/her own process of moral growth (who do I want to be?) or sanctification (How do I want to follow Christ?) and psychological healing (finding release from the painful outcomes of the wrongdoing). In this way both the forgiver and the wrongdoer are likely to benefit.

**Why forgive?** As you think over these ideas about forgiveness, it might sound like a lot of hard work. Forgiveness might sound “unnatural” or even “unwise” in a way – this offering of goodwill toward someone who has hurt you deeply. So you might ask, “Why should I forgive?” We have found in our research that people who forgive often experience a lasting increase in self-esteem, a decrease in anxiety and depression, and an increased sense of personal strength and well being. Another important benefit is a sense of release from the influence of the negative choices of the wrongdoer. In forgiving, you are choosing what you will think, feel, and do. You are choosing what kind of person you will become. My hope is that as you learn about the forgiveness process you will discover many of these benefits for yourself. This can be a way of modeling the life of Christ.

**Story: The Difference Forgiveness Has Made**

Linda grew up with alcoholic parents who alternately ignored or verbally abused her. A few years after she had been living on her own at college, she found that she was still exhausted from continually reliving problems from the relationship with her parents in her mind. Linda talked to a counselor who suggested that she consider forgiving her parents. At first, Linda was afraid to forgive. She wondered if forgiving meant that she would have to deny how much she had been hurt by her parent’s unfair behavior. Linda’s counselor reassured her that forgiving was not ignoring or forgetting what happened but rather looking at it in a new way. Linda was willing to start forgiving one step at a time. When I talked to Linda some time later she said that she was still working on forgiving her parents but that she was already feeling “relieved” as though a weight had been lifted off her shoulders. She has discovered that she doesn’t have to continually remember the neglect and verbal abuse from her parents as though she was a character in a play that they had written. Linda tells me that she feels that she is growing stronger every day and likes the person she is becoming. Not only that, Linda is happy to find that she has much more energy to do good things for herself and other people.
UNIT ONE
JOURNAL REFLECTIONS

What did I think about forgiveness in the past? ____________________________

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

What is new to me about what forgiveness is? ____________________________

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

What is new to me about what forgiveness is not? _________________________

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Which of those new ideas are most helpful? _______________________________

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

What other ideas about forgiveness are important to me?

I have had difficulty choosing forgiveness in the past because...

What do I think about forgiveness now?

What reflections do I have on Romans chapter 12?
UNIT TWO
UNCOVERING PSYCHOLOGICAL DEFENSES

What are psychological defenses? Psychological defenses are a method that we use to protect ourselves from an “overload” of the anger and pain that we experience after an injury of any kind. These psychological defenses very often come to the “rescue” when someone we care about deeply is the one who has unfairly injured us or someone has unfairly asserted power over us in a harmful way.

Why is it important that I understand psychological defenses? Psychological defenses are a normal method of self-protection. Everyone uses them from time to time. But it is also important to gradually face and deal with the anger and underlying pain that are a natural outcome of unfair and hurtful relationships. Defense mechanisms can help for a while when the “danger” is intense or fresh. But if defense mechanisms are used as a “shield” for too long, emotional healing can be stalled.

People who have been unfairly treated by a family member or close friend often experience a deep sense of betrayal and pain. It certainly is a normal response to resort psychological defenses to manage the anger, pain, and confusion caused by the wrongdoing. But with some amount of safe distance from the wrongdoing, it can be helpful to take a look at any defense mechanisms that are still operating and see if they are actually “helping” in any way. It may be that it is time to take a deeper look at what is underneath, the anger and pain, and begin the hard work of recovery.

Let’s think about some common defense mechanisms one by one. As we do, I invite you to ask yourself some questions: 1) Is this a defense mechanism that I use to avoid taking a hard look at the painful consequences of the wrongdoing? 2) Is this defense mechanism really working (do I still feel anxious, sad, exhausted, hurt)? 3) Do I want to consider another way of handling my feelings about the wrongdoing?

Denial is a defense mechanism that involves denying the reality of an injury or pattern of behavior that seems too painful to think about. This is a defense mechanism whereby a person avoids pain by unconsciously choosing to disbelieve the reality of painful event. A person may choose to believe that “nothing that bad” really happened. Or a person may choose to believe “that all relationships have these kinds of problems.” One may also deny the depth of anger and pain that the wrongdoing has caused. Examining and giving up denial can be frightening because that means that one will need more closely at the anger and pain that resulted from the unfair actions of the other person. Denial can be helpful as an emergency strategy but over a longer time, it can prevent other healthy and courageous choices to actively work on recovery.

Suppression is a defense mechanism that is an early form of denial. Suppression also involves denying the painful reality of the wrongdoing but in a conscious way. The person knowingly and actively attempts to push painful thoughts, feelings, or memories
out of his/her mind. In this case, a person may actively choose to pretend that the effects of the wrongdoing do not cause any pain. Feelings of anger may also be suppressed. Then the person will purposely engage in other thoughts or behaviors to bury these unwanted thoughts and feelings. Throwing oneself into an overload of projects, overeating, sleeping too much, or excessive exercise might be some examples. Suppression of pain and anger is usually ineffective and these thoughts and feelings remain just under the surface. Pain and anger can “surface partially” in some unpleasant ways such as anxiety, depression, or difficulty in ongoing relationships. Allowing the pain and anger to surface in a guided purposeful manner with some recovery strategies can open the door to eventual release from these uncomfortable feelings.

Repression is a common defense mechanism that people use in response to traumatic events and unfair treatment. This is a defense mechanism that happens automatically and unconsciously. Repression is a way of immediately and automatically removing from consciousness any acknowledgment of the traumatic event(s) and any associated thoughts or feelings that are unacceptable or frightening. If a friend, relative, or counselor asked a person who is repressing his/her experience of unfair treatment, “Has someone treated you unfairly?”.....the answer would likely be, “No.” If asked, “Do you feel angry or hurt?”.... the answer would also likely be “No.”

But repressed anger does not go away and it can be damaging over the time. Repressed anger can unexpectedly erupt onto innocent targets such as other family members, friends, or co-workers. These unwelcome and unpredictable expressions of anger can unnecessarily complicate or harm important relationships. On the other hand, repressed anger can cause a person to have numb feelings altogether. This numbness can take the form of losing touch with feelings, enthusiasm, aliveness, and energy.... or even depression.

So while repression initially operates as a “protection” against the very uncomfortable feelings of anger, this defense mechanism can actually misdirect these important feelings and cause more difficulties in the long run. While it takes great courage to face the anger and the pain that is underneath—this is courage that will be well rewarded in the recovery process.

Displacement is a defense mechanism that involves a “mistaken identity.” This simply put is when a person who has been unfairly hurt by someone unconsciously blames or acts out on another individual rather than the wrongdoer. In this way, these powerful feelings of anger and pain are misdirected toward someone (or something) else who is less threatening than the wrongdoer. A classic example of this is a person who is angry with his/her boss but instead of confronting the boss (who may seem too powerful or threatening) comes home after work and yells at his/her family members.

It is easy to understand why a person might use this defense mechanism. It may not feel safe to confront a wrongdoer about his/her behavior. In fact it is possible that the wrongdoer will deny any responsibility. So it may feel “safer” to “take it out on” other family members, friends, co-workers. But misdirecting anger in this way may both hurt whoever is on the receiving end and prevent the injured person from working through the authentic feelings of anger and pain that are a natural outcome of the wrongdoing. While it may or may not be possible to confront the wrongdoer directly, openly exploring
feelings about the wrongdoing with another trusted person can be an important starting point on the journey of healing.

**Dissociation** is a defense mechanism that is particularly common for people who experience trauma of any kind including psychological trauma. It is a way of separating oneself from a totally unacceptable or extremely painful situation. Dissociation means “blanking out” or completely distancing oneself from thoughts, feelings, and sensations during the trauma. It may seem as though the injured person is two people—one who is being unfairly hurt and one who is “watching from a distance.” Some people who have experienced severe trauma, such as wounded men on a battlefield or victims of incest, may say that this is only way that they could have survived the experience. While this defense mechanism may be essential at the actual time of the trauma, after the wrongdoing is in the past, a person may continue to have trouble getting in touch with their true feelings about the experience or have trouble feeling like a “whole person.” Uncovering the anger and pain at a safe distance from the injury can help a person experience “reintegration” or a new wholeness.

**Regression** is a defense mechanism in which a person returns to patterns of thinking, feeling, or behaving that belong to an earlier less threatening period when life was easier. This is an attempt to withdraw from the current difficult or anxiety-producing situation. Regression can be “comforting” because it serves to push away recognition of a wrongdoing by lessening the evidence of it. This lowers anxiety for a time but may also block decision-making about necessary responses to the wrongdoing or choices about recovery.

**Identification** is a very conscious effort to model or pattern oneself after another person. This can be a healthy choice when one chooses to emulate a competent person who has a strong value system and who makes positive contributions to family and community relationships. However, in situations of habitual unfair treatment, a person can feel such a loss of control that it may eventually seem that the only possible way to regain any control is by patterning him/herself after the wrongdoer. In other words, the victim begins to demonstrate the same unhealthy attitudes or behaviors as the wrongdoer toward him/her or toward someone else (for example other members of the family or community).

Alternately, the victim of unfair treatment may feel that the only way to attempt to regain some sense of predictability and control is to identity with the wrongdoer’s values. In other words, the victim may begin to believe that it is “ok” that he/she somehow did something to deserve the wrongdoer’s mistreatment. The realization that this “negative” identification is taking place can be a strong motivator for change. Freely choosing more positive role models can be a powerful part of the recovery process.

**Story:**  **Is this defense mechanism still working?**

Penny’s sister had refused to help her when she was very ill. At the time, Penny had 3 young children. A few years later, Penny realized that she had been denying how much anger and pain her sister’s behavior had caused. She had been afraid to talk to her
sister about it because it might start an argument. So much was at stake, the whole family might get involved and Penny didn’t want that. But, Penny had begun to notice that she would yell at her children any time she started felling unwell again. This was a key turning point for Penny. Something had to change.

Now Penny, with the help of a trusted Stephen Minister, is attempting to take a good look at her real feelings about her sister’s refusal to help. As Penny pulls back the curtain of denial, she is discovering some very deep feelings of anger and pain. This isn’t always easy to face. Penny says that she finds herself asking these questions: “Is it ok to be this angry?” “What will I do about the pain?” Penny has also experienced feelings of shame. “Is there some reason my sister didn’t love me enough to want to help me?”

Even though this is difficult, Penny says that she is already finding some relief. When she talks about her feelings with her Stephen Minister, she has been reassured that it is perfectly natural to feel anger over unfair and hurtful treatment. Penny has felt reassured that she did not deserve her sister’s lack of care. Penny is beginning to discover that pain is a little easier to bear now that she is talking about it openly. And she has found that the pain and anger is not “spilling over” onto her children any more. Penny is starting to feel more hopeful about her future.
UNIT TWO
JOURNAL REFLECTIONS

Am I still using any one of these defense mechanisms? __________________________

If so which one (s)? __________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

How does the defense mechanism seem to help? ______________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

How might the defense mechanism block my recovery? ______________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
How does it affect my other relationships?


Why might it be “scary” to give the defense mechanism up?


Might it be a relief to give the defense mechanism up?


UNIT THREE
UNCOVERING ANGER

Am I Angry? One of the first steps in forgiving is recognizing the anger that is present because of a wrongdoing that you have experienced. Sometimes this is very hard to acknowledge. After all, we are often given rather mixed messages about anger. Many of us have been taught that it is wrong or “unloving” to express anger. Alternately, some therapists in the last few decades have advocated “releasing anger” by doing such things as punching pillows, venting anger through letters or personal confrontations, physical exercise and other methods that “let off steam.” Recognizing the presence of anger and choosing how best to express it are two important aspects of the forgiveness process.

Is Anger Good or Bad? Anger is a protective reaction to unjust events. The philosopher Margaret Holmgren (1993) believes that anger as a response to unfair, hurtful behavior demonstrates self-respect. A person who feels or expresses anger about a wrongdoing is, in fact, acknowledging his/her own worth as a human being. The wrongdoer has, after all, denied the God-given worth of the other person by the unfair actions or attitudes.

People who have experienced a wrongdoing naturally and logically feel anger. And acknowledging this anger can have some very real benefits. First, anger helps to validate the reality of the wrongdoing. The unfair treatment was real and it caused pain. Second, anger can help a person clarify the responsibility of the wrongdoer for the choice to carry out the wrongdoing. No one deserves to be treated unfairly and hurtfully. Third, anger can help to motivate a person to take strong steps toward change for him/herself. Finally the appropriate expression of anger along with productive responses to the wrongdoing can counteract feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness, and despair.

The recognition and expression of anger about a wrongdoing is a necessary and important aspect of recovery. However, the way a person expresses the anger and the duration of that expression are important considerations. As we discussed in the previous unit, avoiding feelings of anger by the overuse of defense mechanisms may lead to unhealthy, indirect expressions of anger such as anxiety, depression, and feelings of “numbness.” On the other hand, unpredictable “outbursts” of anger and habitual venting are also not productive or healthy.

What Should I do with My Anger? If the expression of anger is necessary, what is a good way to express it? Perhaps a better question might be: "Why should I express my anger?" Admitting anger rather than avoiding it is courageous. And this courage can lead to a constructive expression of anger that has a purpose. The past cannot be forgotten nor wished away. The anger is a signal that some important work needs to be done. Allowing anger to be a motivator for change is a good reason for expressing it. Taking time to talk directly and honestly about the anger with a trusted friend or counselor can be helpful. It is important to move beyond talking when you are ready (so that there is not only the venting) and to begin to think about how you want to learn from the anger.

You might ask, “What can I learn from anger?” As has already been mentioned, you can validate the reality of the wrongdoing, the wrongdoer’s responsibility, and your
worth as a person that has been violated. You can plan and implement safe parameters as to how you will interact with the person who has hurt you. And you can choose (when you are ready) to take a closer look at the pain that is at the root of the anger. Unfair treatment hurts. The losses associated with the wrongdoing may also be significant. The pain will need to be gradually felt and grieved. As you go along in the forgiveness process, you can begin to deal directly with the reality of this pain.

Anger is a normal, necessary warning signal and protective response when a person is unfairly and deeply hurt. But even though anger is important, it is not a long-term solution. Instead, the recognition and expression of anger can open the door to the rewarding work of recovery. You can use your expressions of anger to ask yourself some crucial questions. How do I want to be respected and show respect to others? How can I live with pain that I didn’t deserve? Can the experience of working through the pain make me stronger? How do I want things to be different in the future?

What are Some Expressions of Anger That Don’t Help? Anger is a response to unjust behavior that fairly attributes the responsibility for the wrongdoing to the wrongdoer. However, sometimes anger can be confused with blame. Blame is different than anger in that the person not only fairly attributes responsibility to the wrongdoer for the wrongdoing and the outcomes of the wrongdoing, but he/she also blames the wrongdoer for most everything else that is not going well in his/her life. Blame spreads anger into every aspect of the person’s life. Constructive expressions of anger can eventually free a person from focusing on the wrongdoing and the wrongdoer. Blaming can keep a person focused on the both. Anger is a starting point for recovery. Blame can stall recovery indefinitely.

Resentment is unresolved anger that is replayed over and over again. Resentment often develops when it is difficult to express anger directly to someone who has hurt us. This can often be the case with a wrongdoer who is an intimate friend or family member. It may seem that the only way to express anger is to do it indirectly by repeatedly reviewing the wrongdoing in your mind and perhaps imagining “getting even” with the wrongdoer. Whereas anger can have a moral quality and signal a person to work through a problem, resentment keeps a person stuck in the problem— at least in his/her own thoughts. Continuing resentment can hinder recovery. Constructive expressions of anger can help a person uncover and work through the pain underneath. Resentment may instead add to the pain. An old adage says, “Resentment is like drinking poison and thinking that by doing so you are going to get even with the other person.” Revenge will not relieve the pain the wrongdoing caused.

Summary: Anger is a normal, healthy response to unjust and hurtful events. Directly expressed anger (in a safe context) can be a powerful motivator for change. It can help a person validate the reality of the wrongdoing, establish the wrongdoer’s responsibility for it, and demonstrate self-respect. The direct expression of anger can allow a person to gradually and courageously look at the pain underneath. Then the work of recovery can begin in earnest.

On the other hand, suppressing anger (or overuse of any other defense mechanism) is not healthy and can result in either turning the anger against oneself (as in anxiety, depression, or low-self-esteem) or turning the anger unexpectedly toward others.
Unresolved anger can also take the form of blame or resentment which can keep a person “stuck” in the past wrongdoing if only in her own thoughts. Plans for or thoughts of revenge will not relieve the pain the wrongdoing caused.

Admitting anger takes courage. But it can help you ask some very important questions: How do I want to be respected and show respect to others? How can I live with pain that I didn’t deserve? Can the experience of working through the pain make me stronger? How do I want things to be different in the future?


**Story:** Anger: A Necessary Response but an Unwelcome Companion

Mary entered therapy during a break-up of a friendship due to some unfair and untrue gossip that this former friend had started and which had caused Mary the loss of a leadership role at her church. As she described her former friend’s behavior to the therapist, the therapist helped Mary acknowledge the unfair and hurtful events that she had endured. Mary was surprised as she began to recognize strong feelings of anger. She wondered to herself if the anger had always been there but that she had been afraid to express it. What would her friend have done? Was it wrong to feel so angry?

As Mary continued to see her therapist, she still found it difficult to talk directly about the anger that she had begun to uncover. Mary noticed that she was feeling listless and anxious. She also found herself spending a lot of time thinking about her former friend’s behavior and even thinking about how to “get even.” She felt that she was getting nowhere. And it felt like the anger was still there and “leaking out” in some very unpleasant ways.

Then during one session with her therapist, Mary did find herself openly becoming very angry as she described hearing the unfair gossip for the first time. As she expressed the anger, she began to cry and feel the deep pain that was underneath. Mary was surprised that although she had been very uncomfortable at first, she experienced some release afterwards. Sharing this anger and pain with someone who can be trusted to respect these feelings seemed like a way to eventually “lighten the load.”

Mary now believes that expressing anger is an important turning point in her healing process. She wants to work through the anger and deal with the pain so that she doesn’t have always carry “the unwelcome burden” of unresolved feelings about her former friend’s gossip with her on the rest of her life journey.
UNIT THREE
JOURNAL REFLECTIONS

What does your anger look like?

____________________________________

____________________________________

____________________________________

Intensity

____________________________________

____________________________________

Thoughts

____________________________________

____________________________________

____________________________________

Feelings

____________________________________

____________________________________

____________________________________

____________________________________

Duration

____________________________________

____________________________________

____________________________________

____________________________________

How do you express your anger?

____________________________________

____________________________________

____________________________________
Directly?

Indirectly?

Do you experience blaming or resentment or thoughts of revenge?

When you think about the wrongdoing, can you clearly attribute the responsibility to the wrongdoer?

What practical parameters can you establish to protect yourself from further harm?

Can you describe the pain or fear that is underneath your anger?
Is facing that pain disturbing or upsetting?

Can a person become stronger by working through pain?

How do you want to be respected and show respect to others?
UNIT FOUR
EXAMINING SHAME AND GUILT

What is shame? Shame is a pervasive sense of disgrace, embarrassment, or humiliation. These feelings develop in response to unfair treatment by others rather than because of what we have actually done or who we actually are. Shame is the unfairly acquired view that one’s whole person is completely inadequate. A person who experiences shame has strong and frequent feelings of “self-consciousness” and imagines that if any one looked too closely he/she would be seen as hopelessly flawed.

When a person has experienced the disrespect of unfair treatment by a close friend, family member, or community member, this person may take on the wrongdoing’s viewpoint… “Perhaps he/she treated me like this because I deserved it in some way or because that I am not ‘good enough’ or because I am ‘unlovable’.”

It can be a key step in recovery to examine the presence of shame. Taking on shame can add to the pain that a person already experiences from the wrongdoing itself. Clearly identifying the presence of shame and carefully considering the source – the disrespectful actions of the wrongdoer—can help a person make new decisions about how he/she will choose to view him/herself. Shame is not a true perspective on the injured person’s worth….shame is part of the injury.

How is shame different from guilt? Sometimes shame is confused with guilt. It may be helpful to stop and consider the difference between shame and guilt.

Shame is a feeling of general inadequacy in relation to others that a person develops after unfair treatment by someone else. By contrast, guilt is a feeling that a person actually did something wrong or behaved in a way that violated a particular social standard, religious virtue, or inner standard valued by the person him/herself. Guilt is a response to a specific action or behavior pattern whereas shame is the idea (imposed by the wrongdoing) that the whole self is flawed. Whereas appropriate guilt can be self-guiding and lead to self-improvement, shame can reinforce low self-esteem and lead to anxiety and depression.

No one is perfect. We all do some things that lead to appropriate guilt. This guilt can promote a healthy self-awareness that leads to self-improvement and the enhancement of our relationships with others. But shame is expressed in low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. It is important, again, to identify these feelings and examine them. In doing so, a person can begin to make new choices about how he/she wants to think and feel about him/herself, the wrongdoing, and the wrongdoer.

Who is responsible? One antidote to shame is to clearly understand that the wrongdoer is responsible for the wrongdoing. No one deserves unfair treatment. It is the wrongdoer who deserves to take on appropriate guilt for the wrongdoing. And the person who has been mistreated does not need to hold onto to shame as though he/she was responsible for the wrongdoer’s unfair action or attitudes.

Who I am? Another antidote to shame is to stop and consider who you are. Every person has equal God-given worth as a human being. And you are a valuable
person with both good qualities and human limitations. This is a balanced view that every person deserves to have about him/herself. You are an important member of the human community….made in the image of God. Just like everyone else, you are a person who is learning and changing—not hopelessly flawed—and not deserving disrespect.

**What information are you receiving about yourself?** Another antidote to shame is to remember to consider positive sources of information about yourself. People other than the wrongdoer value you and treat you fairly. Also, reflection on God’s love for you can change your perspective. This can be a source of comfort.

**Story: Am I to Blame?** Linda began to talk to a friend after she was unfairly fired from her job. At first she didn’t want to tell anyone about it. She worked very hard but nothing she did seemed to prevent her boss from yelling at her. Linda wondered what was wrong with her. She felt ashamed that she couldn’t make her employment situation “work.”

Linda’s friend assured her that there was nothing she could have done to prevent being fired and that she did not deserve the mistreatment that she had suffered on the job. Her boss was responsible for his unrealistic expectations and negative behavior. Linda’s friend also reminded her that she was a good mother and friend.

It began to occur to Linda that only her boss thought that there was “something wrong” with her. The bad things that her boss had said about her were not true. She did have other good, rewarding relationships. She was a good friend, parent, neighbor, and volunteer. Linda began to imagine what kind of new job she would like to have. What would a work situation look like if both people respected each other? What things would she want to have for herself in a relationship with a new boss? How could both people benefit from the relationship? These are questions that Linda now knows she deserves to ask herself.
UNIT FOUR
JOURNAL REFLECTIONS

Do I experience shame?  _______________________________________________________

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How does the shame affect my every day life?  _______________________________________

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What messages do I still carry in my head because of the wrongdoing?  _____________

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Who am I? (A collection of good qualities, strengths, and abilities: messages from people other than the wrongdoer)

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What does God say about His love for me?

How would I like to be treated by other people?

How do I like to treat other people?
UNIT FIVE
TELLING THE STORY

Telling the Story The last few units have invited you to work on uncovering feelings of anger, pain, and shame caused by the wrongdoing that you have experienced. This can be very difficult and uncomfortable. It takes courage to do this part of the forgiveness process. Often, in order to uncover these feelings and take a “productive look” at them, it is necessary to tell some of the “stories” about the wrongdoing. This is a healthy way to clarify what happened and what it meant to you.

Validation It can be helpful to tell “stories” about the wrongdoing to someone other than the wrongdoer who can be trusted to hear and validate some important things. First, the wrongdoer’s behavior is not fair and he is the one responsible for it. Second, your feelings of anger and pain are normal, protective responses to the unfair treatment. Third, it may be unlikely that the wrongdoer will listen to your requests for change or compensation. Therefore, it can be helpful to review your experience with someone who will listen respectfully to your honest expressions of discomfort and requests for respect.

Exploring Feelings As you tell some of the “stories” at a safe distance from the wrongdoer, you can take a closer look at the anger and pain caused by the wrongdoing. You can recognize the reality and the importance of these feelings. You can then choose some appropriate expressions of anger and begin grieving the pain.

Motivation for Change Telling some “stories” of the wrongdoing to someone other than the wrongdoer can help you explore ways to address the wrongdoing. You can express anger in appropriate ways that help in making decisions that reflect respect for yourself and others. And you can begin to ask yourself a key question: How can I live with pain that I didn’t deserve?

Cognitive Rehearsal A person can choose to tell “stories” about the wrongdoing as described above to work on recovery. However, there is another way that “stories” of the wrongdoing can appear in a person’s mind in the form of unwanted “reruns.” This is called cognitive rehearsal.

Why does it happen? This is a common response to traumatic experiences that are unfair and unchangeable. You could not have prevented or changed the unfair event, but your mind is “replaying” the traumatic scene due to the distress of feeling “out of control” of how things will turn out. Cognitive rehearsal is also an indirect way of responding to the fact that the wrongdoer disregarded your feelings and needs by his/her wrong actions. He/she couldn’t “hear” you. Cognitive rehearsal “replays” the event “or “makes it known” in response to this highly uncomfortable experience of “not being heard.”

When does it happen? These “reruns” may take the form of recurrent dreams, unwanted and intrusive thoughts, or preoccupation with the “reruns” in place of other desired activities. Cognitive rehearsal may happen anytime and may not always be under a person’s conscious control. Some people describe cognitive rehearsal as being “stuck” in a bad play.

Content The most common content is a “rerun” the wrongdoing. Cognitive rehearsal may also include ideas and feelings about permanent damage that may have
resulted from the wrongdoing or fears that no one else will believe that it was unfair.

**Summary** There are two ways to “tell stories” about your experience with a wrongdoing. One way is to deliberately “tell stories” to a person other than the wrongdoer for the purpose of validation, understanding, the direct expression of feelings, and problem solving. Cognitive rehearsal is another way that the “stories” are told that is not direct and that may hinder recovery. Cognitive rehearsal is an indirect, often unconscious response to traumatic events that occurs as unwanted “reruns.” Direct “story telling” in order to make decisions that facilitate recovery may help you write a “new role” for yourself in the future. This also can be a strong antidote for unwanted cognitive rehearsal or “reruns” of the wrongdoing.

**Story: That Same Old Story** Penny found that even though her mother had hurt her by calling her names (stupid, lazy) such a long time ago, some of the old “scenes” of the verbal abuse would come to her mind without warning. Penny might be on a walk, reading a book, playing with her children, just waking up in the morning….she couldn’t predict when the “reruns” might start. She felt trapped during these intrusive thoughts and exhausted afterwards. Penny could never fully relax. It seemed like her mother was still verbally attacking her….at least in her mind. Penny was tired of being the victim in a never-ending play….a play with the same old conclusion. In the “reruns” she would try to explain to her mother how she felt and what she wanted. But her mother still didn’t “hear” her.

Penny decided to talk to a good friend about her thoughts. She discovered that talking over the same old “scenes” with someone who did “hear” helped her sort out some things. Penny was not to blame for her mother’s verbal abuse. Her mother’s behavior was wrong. It was inadequate poor parenting and would have been highly stressful for anyone. As Penny talked with her friend she realized some of the tension was easing. However, once she left her friend, Penny noticed that she was still exhausted.

The next time Penny met with her friend, she determined to use these “sorting out” times to make some decisions. She wanted to express her anger and pain in a way that pointed her toward a new start. Penny wanted to work through the pain she felt instead of passing it onto other people by repeating the “stories” about her mother in the form of gossip (at least some people know how bad she was –was how it might go). This kind of “telling the story” only led to some immediate release from the tension but nothing more.

Instead, Penny discovered that she wanted to tell the “stories” just enough to get perspective and to make a “new role” for herself in the future. She didn’t want to be cast as a victim any longer. Now, Penny wanted to be a survivor. In time, as Penny was purposeful about telling the “stories” about her mother’s past verbal abuse with her friend, she found also support in trying out some new ways of living in the present. After all, she could now make many decisions free of her mother’s negative influence. Penny could be a parent who didn’t verbally abuse her own children. She also discovered that the intrusive, unpredictable “reruns” became less and less frequent.
UNIT FIVE
JOURNAL REFLECTIONS

Telling the Story

What do you need to be heard?

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What do you need validated?

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What do you understand differently now?

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How does this motivate you?

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________________________________________________________________________
The Reruns

What stories do you play over and over again?

What role do you play?
How you do feel when you are experiencing the “reruns”?_____________________

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How would you like to rewrite your role in the future?_____________________

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UNIT SIX
NEW DIRECTIONS?

How far you have come: The part of the forgiveness process that you have been working on so far is called the “uncovering phase.” During this phase you have been introduced to the concept of forgiveness itself and explored how forgiveness might apply to the wrongdoing you have experienced. You have been doing the work of the “uncovering phase” by examining any continuing use of psychological defense mechanisms and then taking a courageous look at the anger, pain, and shame that you likely have as a result of the wrongdoing.

This “uncovering” has helped you understand anger as a normal protective response when a person is unfairly and deeply hurt. You have practiced expressing anger in a positive way that helps you ask the questions: What kind of respectful treatment would I like? What kind of pain am I experiencing because of the wrongdoing?

“Uncovering” pain has given you the opportunity to consider grieving the pain in a productive way. Again you have practiced asking yourself some key questions: How can I live with pain that I didn’t deserve? Can I bear to look closely at the pain? Can the experience of working through the pain make me stronger?

“Telling the Story” is also part of the “uncovering phase.” You have practiced “telling stories” about your experience with the wrongdoing for validation, understanding, the direct expression of feelings, and problem solving. This kind of direct, purposeful “story telling” can facilitate your recovery.

A Cost-Benefit analysis: The work of recovery after a wrongdoing can be gradual and take considerable time. Coming this far through the “uncovering phase” of the forgiveness process has taken courage and hard work. You are to be commended. You can continue to revisit any of the units that you have worked on so far as often as you feel is necessary. Now is a time that you can stop and take stock of what has happened thus far and ask yourself where you want to go from here. You can look at the benefits you gained thus far and also consider the costs of continuing some responses to the wrongdoing that will likely block your recovery.

Costs of Psychological Defenses You have learned that psychological defenses are a normal “emergency” method of self-protection from the pain and anger caused by a deep, unfair injury. But you have also learned that when defense mechanisms are used as a “shield” for too long, emotional healing can be stalled and you may express the underlying anger and pain in unpredictable ways such as outbursts of anger, low self-esteem, anxiety or depression.

Costs of Long-term or Inappropriate Anger You have explored the idea that anger is a normal way of showing self-respect when someone has treated you unfairly. But you have also looked at the difference between appropriate anger and blame or resentment. Blame and resentment may keep a person “stuck” in the experience of the wrongdoing. Blame and resentment can make anger a way of life rather that a starting point for recovery.
Costs of Cognitive Rehearsal You have thought about two ways to “tell stories” about the wrongdoing. One healthy way is to deliberately “tell stories” to a trusted person other than the wrongdoer to work on recovery. Cognitive rehearsal is the other way that the “stories” are told that is an indirect, often unconscious response to traumatic events that occurs as unwanted “reruns.” Cognitive rehearsal may hinder your recovery and continue as a preoccupation with unresolved pain and anger.

Energy Depletion The “uncovering phase” is the beginning of the forgiveness process. It is hard work. However, continuing to use psychological defenses, unresolved anger, preoccupation with shame, and cognitive rehearsal can be even more exhausting. Excess energy can be put into either avoiding feelings (anger and pain) about the injury or being preoccupied with unresolved feelings (pain and resentment). The excessive energy spent on the injury is then drained away from other important activities that can bring satisfaction and promote recovery.

Anger and Pain: Suggestions Thus Far You have been encouraged to practice expressing anger in a positive way (not just “venting” or “stuffing”) that helps you ask the questions: What limits do I need to reasonably protect myself? How do I want to be respected and show respect to others? What kind of pain am I experiencing because of the wrongdoing?

You have also been encouraged to consider grieving and working through the pain in a productive way that leads to these questions: How can I live with pain that I didn’t deserve? Can the experience of working through the pain make me stronger? How do I want things to be different in the future?

You might now wonder: When will I start to feel better? What else might I need to do? I don’t want to have unresolved anger or pain. I don’t to be preoccupied with resentment, blaming, or shame. How can I become free of these negative feelings and thoughts?

What else can help? Deciding to forgive the wrongdoer is a step that can help you continue on the journey of recovery. In the “uncovering phase” you have already shown self-respect by recognizing the unfairness and hurt caused by the wrongdoing. Now you can go forward to the “decision phase” and the “work phase” of the forgiveness process where you will take some courageous steps that will help you continue to show this self-respect and to grieve the pain of the wrongdoing at the same time.

Forgiveness helps you do this by not only reframing the injury as you have already done (it wasn’t fair, the wrongdoer was responsible, and it hurt deeply), but also by reframing the pain (it hurts, I didn’t deserve, but I am not going to pass it back in negative thoughts, feelings, or actions toward the wrongdoer). You will also reframe the wrongdoer (she/he was responsible, but she/he is still has God-given worth as a human being) and reframe yourself (I am a competent person who can choose to feel, think, and act according to my own values with God’s help).
Is it time for something new? Is forgiveness a possibility?
It is your choice. Now that you have reviewed your courageous work through the uncovering phase of the forgiveness process, you can begin to forgive by making a free and deliberate commitment to do some hard work…take some courageous steps. You can ask yourself these questions: What would it be like for me if I don’t forgive? Even though the rest of the forgiveness process is likely to be difficult, might I find release? Finally, you ask yourself if you are already doing some forgiving things. Are you already working to limit resentful thoughts toward the wrongdoer? Have you done some generous things for the wrongdoer?

What does it mean to choose forgiveness? What do I do? When you choose forgiveness you essentially do two things. You have a “change of heart” and you commit to working through the forgiveness process.

A Change of Heart Uncovering the anger and pain from an unfair, deep hurt can lead to a “change of heart.” What does this change of heart mean? It means a major life change for the better or deciding to go in a new and more positive direction. This “change of heart” can be especially powerful when you choose it as a consequence of unjust suffering. You cannot change the reality of the pain and loss caused by the wrongdoing. But you can choose a morally good, respectful, and healthy pattern of thinking, feeling, and behaving even though the wrongdoer did not. You can choose a new direction; strike out on a better journey.

What happens when you have a “change of heart?” A “change of heart” is essentially deciding to do good things even when something unfair has happened to you. When something bad happens, you turn to the good. And you turn to the source of goodness, Jesus Christ, for help. A change of heart means deciding to “love your enemy.” The choice to experience a “change of heart” may be difficult. Old ways of coping may still seem familiar, while the new idea of forgiving may seem “scary” or it may seem like letting the wrongdoer “off the hook.” But forgiveness also has tremendous possibilities for personal growth and emotional release. Will you take the risk? Will you choose the hard but rewarding journey? Are you ready to ask yourself these questions?

1) Am I willing to continue to work through the pain in a way that will lead to personal growth?

2) Can I begin to consider having empathy for the wrongdoer? Do I want to be the kind of person who can have empathy without condoning or excusing…. but real empathy nonetheless?

3) Can I desire compassion toward the wrongdoer? Do I want to be a compassionate person – even to someone who has hurt me?
4) Do I want to be the kind of person who practices mercy?

5) Do I want to offer moral (agape) love?

As you answer these questions for yourself, I think you will be reminded that the choice to forgive or a “change of heart” in response to unjust suffering is a remarkable new beginning. Forgiveness is a courageous choice; an active choice not a passive acceptance of wrongdoing; an effective and affirming choice rather than a neutral forgetting or an ineffective denial. Choosing forgiveness means that you are deciding what path you are going to take, by affirming your own beliefs and acting on them. Choosing forgiveness means choosing a bold, new direction with new possibilities. You are making this choice as a strong person who can choose to feel, think, and act by looking to examples of forgiveness….like the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. It is a journey of the heart… a changed and changing heart.

**Committing to the Forgiveness Process** Forgiveness is often more than a one-time decision. It is a process. Forgiveness cannot be forced or rushed. You are the one deciding to work on forgiveness at a pace and at a time that is best for you. Forgiveness is not easy. It doesn’t usually happen quickly. Forgiveness involves many steps along a journey. The desire to forgive (or a “change of heart”) is the first step that you take. The commitment to work on the process of forgiveness is the second. You will be exploring a number of other steps along the way.

The work of the forgiveness process takes courage and stamina. Although, forgiveness will benefit you, your family, and the person who hurt you, working on forgiving can sometimes be difficult. It involves taking a different perspective on the pain that has resulted from the wrongdoing. It also means taking a new look at the wrongdoer. It means desiring the well-being of someone who hurt you. These aren’t easy tasks.

You can gain strength by becoming the kind of person that you want to be. You can grow spiritually, becoming more like Christ with His help. In this way the wrongdoing will come to have less and less negative power in your life. Instead the good choices you make in the forgiveness process can release energy and strength and hope.

**A Beginning Next Step** A person can often validate a “change of heart” and a commitment to the forgiveness process by beginning to practice merciful restraint toward the person who hurt them. In other words, you can see evidence of your decision to forgive by your desire to refrain from resentment (or revenge) toward the wrongdoer. This is a very important beginning step…one that is not at all simple or easy. You may have to check yourself and choose merciful restraint many times over. For a time this may be as far as you can go. Deeper changes will come as you work through the steps of the forgiveness process.
Do I want a “change of heart”?  

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Am I willing to spend time and energy on forgiving?  

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Am I willing to risk the hard work of forgiveness?  

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How will God help me with this?  

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__________________________________________
UNIT EIGHT
REFRAMING THE PAIN

Why do I have pain? A wrongdoing by a friend or family member can leave behind pain in a number of ways. The actual wrongdoing inflicts deep pain. The very unfairness itself—especially if from someone you loved—brings its own pain. In addition, there is the pain from a number of losses that are likely the result of the wrongdoing.

What do I do with the Pain? Saying that you have pain from a wrongdoing that you didn’t deserve is only the beginning. The pain will not go away or be forgotten without some willingness to face and move through it. So, then, what should you do with the pain?

Old Options You can “stuff” the pain and experience anxiety or even depression. Or you can “pass on” the pain by acting negatively toward the wrongdoer or other people.

New Option You no longer have to “stuff” it. You no longer have to “take it on” as though you deserved it. You can shoulder this undeserved, unwelcome pain and process it in such a way that you can maintain your self-respect, grieve what has happened, and become a stronger person for it. This may at first sound too difficult and too unpleasant. But it is the option with the greatest potential for healing.

How do I Bear the Undeserved Pain? Bearing the pain becomes possible by “reframing the pain” or taking a new view of it. Margaret Holmgren (1993) is a philosopher who experienced childhood abuse. She believes that bearing undeserved pain as part of the forgiveness process is based on respect. You didn’t deserve the pain and you can’t change what has happened. But you can change how you will respond. You can “reframe the pain” so that you can respond with respect. Respect for yourself and respect for the wrongdoer. You have affirmed self-respect in acknowledging that the wrongdoing was unfair and hurtful and that you wouldn’t want it to happen again. You respect yourself as a person of God-give worth. But in bearing the pain, you also respect the wrongdoer—even though she/he didn’t respect you. The wrongdoer is a person of God-given worth also—even though she/he has made some very poor choices in his/her treatment of you. You rely on this value of respect not to pass back the pain to him/her. You shoulder the pain and work through it in order to change and grow from the experience that you did not deserve. You choose not to pass back the pain to the wrongdoer so that she/he will “get what she/he deserves”—or to “teach him/her a lesson.” You allow the wrongdoer to learn to work on the mistake (serious mistake though it was) when she/he is ready and able to do so. You act on your belief that everyone deserves respect based on your belief in God-given human worth. God values everyone equally and sent His Son to die for all people.

If you were to pass back the pain in order to “set things right” or to “teach him/her
a lesson,” you would very likely only start a revolving cycle of “passing the pain.” This would stall the recovery process indefinitely. If you choose not to pass back the pain, you will avoid this. But better than that, you will be exercising your own freedom and strength. Your value for respect will help you weather the pain. You will be facing what needs to be faced in order to become the kind of person you want to be. The kind of person God can help you become.

**Helpful Strategies to Process the Pain** You might be thinking that while respect is important to me and I do not want to pass the pain back to the wrongdoer (or anyone else), I still do not know what to do with the pain when it comes. Here are some suggestions:

**Taking Time** Pain may be an unwelcome “surprise” visitor from time to time. Stop and take the time you need to listen to it and feel it. Time crying is productive time—it empties the bucket of tears you’ve been accumulating—empties it drop by drop.

**Paying Attention to the Source of the Pain** You may want to reflect on what is actually causing the pain. What incident, what loss, the unfairness itself? In some ways, feeling the pain validates your experience, your need to be loved and treated fairly. You may find some relief in being to express these authentic needs when they were denied for so long.

**Can Something be Learned?—Released?** As you allow yourself the time and place to experience the pain, you can make some discoveries. What have you learned about yourself as a person as you weather this? What is important to you? What have you learned about life and other people? You may also come to a place where you experience the pain of an incident or loss and say “That is enough—at least for now—I can release it. I’ve cried it through.”

**Standing in the Wave**
It may be helpful to think of these intermittent experiences of pain as waves. The wave will come, it will reach a peak, but then it will recede. Perhaps you can picture yourself standing in the wave. Turning to face it. It isn’t easy for you to stand. The wave is powerful. It almost knocks you off your feet. But you find you can stand and hold up in it until it passes. You can weather it. And you are stronger afterward.

Sometimes you may need to have someone else stand with you in the wave. Someone to lend some support, to hold your hand, to tell that it will soon be over. (perhaps a special friend or family member, or imagine God standing with you). In either case, you can take courage, that your “muscles” will get stronger every time you weather the wave. The “muscles” of a changing, growing person. A person who can face difficulty and choose to learn from it. A person who can find release from
the pain without passing it on to others. Read Isaiah 61: 1-3.

**The Transitional Person** As you choose to weather the pain and find some release, you might that you have less and less desire to pass back the pain. In this way, you can become a transitional person. The wrongdoing most likely affected other people in addition to you. And in some ways it also affected the wrongdoer negatively. You can be the person in the history of this group of people who decides to stop the process of transmitting pain from one person to another. As you choose not to “pass on the pain” you are doing something that may have a healing impact in the future for this group of people that you cannot at present foresee. Bearing the undeserved pain may well be the hardest work of forgiveness. It is also an aspect of forgiveness that can be a major turning point for you—and for others.

UNIT EIGHT
JOURNAL REFLECTIONS

Is pain still an unwelcome visitor?

When?

Am I clear that I don’t deserve the pain?

Am I still willing to face it?

What ideas about respect that I have learned in this unit will help me bear the pain?
What ideas about respect will help me not pass back the pain to the wrongdoer?

What do I do with the pain when it comes?

Do I take time with the pain?

Can I understand the source of the pain?

Do I learn something from the pain?
Can I find some release from grieving?

Does the picture of standing strong in the waves of pain help me?

How so?

How does God help me?

Do I want to be a transitional person?

What would that look like for me?
UNIT NINE
REFRAMING THE WRONGDOER

What Does it Mean to Reframe the Wrongdoer? To reframe means to take a new look that includes fresh ideas, information, and perspectives. In this way you can take the problem (your uncomfortable thoughts and feelings about the wrongdoer) out of the “old frame” of reference that hasn’t been helpful for recovery and put the same problem into a “new frame” of reference that will promote recovery. You have already worked at reframing the wrongdoing in the uncovering phase. And you have practiced reframing the unfair pain from the wrongdoing. You have experienced some success and some release. Now reframing the wrongdoer is the next step in the forgiveness process that will eventually bring more and more release from the negative outcomes of the wrongdoing. However, you may experience feelings and thoughts as you do the work of reframing the wrongdoing that will require you to go back and use the “tools” that you have learned so far. Forgiveness is often two steps forward and one step back. But as you honestly work through each memory as it presents itself, you will be on the path you want, the path of recovery.

What Do I Do When I Reframe the Wrongdoer? In reframing the wrongdoer you will do at least three things. The first way that you will reframe the wrongdoing is to put him/her in context. The second way that you will reframe the wrongdoer is to affirm his/her God-given human worth. The third way that you will reframe the wrongdoer is to integrate your view of him/her as a person both with God-given worth and responsibility for the wrongdoing (make the picture whole). Let’s take these ideas one by one.

Putting the Wrongdoer in Context This simply means putting the wrongdoer in the “big picture.” The big picture means a consideration of things about the wrongdoer other than his/her unfair and hurtful behavior. You can put the wrongdoing in a bigger setting by being willing to think about 1) the wrongdoer as a person with a past history that may make it difficult to make good decisions, 2) the wrongdoer as a person with pressures and struggles at the time of the wrongdoing, or 3) the wrongdoer as a person who may be acting out of his own low self-esteem, anger, pain or fear. You look at this “big picture” not to condone or excuse but to understand. You still clearly know that he/she was responsible for his/her choice to do something hurtful and unfair. But seeing this “big picture” can help you have a more complete view of the wrongdoer as a complex person with problems, pressures, and vulnerabilities. The wrongdoing was real but it is also part of a larger story.

God’s View You can also “picture” the wrongdoer the way the God does. God loves all human beings even when we do something wrong. No matter what a person does wrong, that person’s God-given worth does not change. You can practice your own faith in God at this point and “picture” the wrongdoer the way God does. He did something wrong but God still values him deeply. So deeply
that He sent His only Son to die for the forgiveness of that wrongdoing. This is “God’s picture.”

**The Whole Picture** The third way that you will reframe the wrongdoer is to integrate your view of him/her. To integrate means simply to make whole. It may have been the case that you condoned or excused the wrongdoer in order to protect yourself from overwhelming feelings or preserve your desire to have a “good relationship” with him/her. In other words, you may have seen the wrongdoer unrealistically, as better than he/she actually was. Or once you began exploring the negative outcomes of the wrongdoing, you may have seen the wrongdoer only as the person who hurt you unfairly. He/she is the wrongdoer and nothing more. In other words, you may see him/her as more flawed, or worse than he/she actually is.

But seeking an integrated view of the wrongdoer is part of the work of forgiving. Integration means that you will two important things at the same time. You hold the person responsible for the wrongdoing. But you will also realistically see other things about him/her, qualities and behaviors that you may have enjoyed and valued. The person is more than the wrongdoing. Perhaps you can incorporate good memories of the person along with the bad ones. He/she is a whole person, not unrealistically good, not evil incarnate. This “whole picture” can help you begin to wish the wrongdoer well.

**What is the Benefit of Reframing?** Reframing can help you have a new perspective on the wrongdoer, the wrongdoing, and yourself. These “new pictures” can help you see with new eyes. The wrongdoer was responsible for the wrongdoing. But he/she is more than that. You are someone who was treated unfairly. But you are more than that. The wrongdoer is a complex person who is a valuable to God and who may have his/her own pain or low self-esteem. You are a complex person who is valuable to God. You have been hurt but you can also care about the pain of others…. including the wrongdoer. As you view the wrongdoer as a whole: the good and the bad, the strengths and the weaknesses, his/her responsibility for the wrongdoing and his/her own difficulties….. you can become more whole yourself. You can see that the wrongdoing, although it was directed at you, was most likely not about you. Rather it was the result of the wrongdoer’s own problems and vulnerabilities. This can ease the burden of the unfair experience in some ways. And it can “humanize” the wrongdoer. You can begin to think, feel, and behave toward him/her as a person of God-given worth…a person who has made serious mistakes…but a person of worth. You are doing the work of forgiveness and that is healing work.
UNIT NINE
JOURNAL REFLECTIONS

The “Big Picture”:
Is the wrongdoer a person with a past history that may have been difficult?

What might have been some pressures and struggles the wrongdoer experienced around the time of the wrongdoing?

Might the wrongdoer have been acting out of his/her own anger, pain or low self-esteem?

Can you see the wrongdoer a person with God-given worth?
What new insights have you gained about God’s love in a broken world?

Draw a circle to represent the wrongdoer. Write the wrongdoing in the circle. Can you think of good things about the wrongdoer? List some of your thoughts in the circle.

Can you hold the wrongdoer responsible for the wrongdoing AND consider positive things about him/her?
Now that you have worked on these “new pictures” of the wrongdoer, how have your thoughts toward him/her changed?

How does God’s love for both you and the wrongdoer help you work on these new thoughts?
UNIT TEN
DISCOVERING EMPATHY

What is empathy? Empathy is an imaginative picture of the condition or state of mind of another person. In other words, empathy means to place yourself in the “other person’s shoes” and to “understand the other person’s feelings.”

In the last unit, you practiced reframing the wrongdoer. The desire and ability to have empathy is a logical extension of this reframing. In reframing, you develop understanding about the wrongdoer. Along with this new perspective, you might realize that you are beginning to “picture yourself inside the life of the wrongdoer” in order to understand her/his feelings. You discover empathy. In reframing you had new thoughts about the wrongdoer; now you may begin to have new feelings about him/her. You imagine his/her “emotional life” in order to respond to him/her as a fallible yet vulnerable and valuable human being.

What Empathy is Not. Empathy is not the same as sympathy, which is “feeling sorry for,” or “pity” for the other person. Therefore, empathy does not mean that you feel sorry for the person in such a way that leads to condoning or excusing. Rather empathy means that you understand “the wrongdoer’s emotional perspective” while still acknowledging his/her responsibility for the wrongdoing.

Why is Empathy Important? Empathy (like reframing) helps to “humanize” the person who has hurt you. As you allow yourself to be sensitive to the wrongdoer’s “internal frame of reference,” you may begin to experience some positive changes for yourself as well. You will likely discover a gradual decrease in feelings about “wanting to get even” however subtle those feelings may be. Empathy and “acting out” toward another are opposites. Your desire to relinquish resentment and revenge is then enhanced.

What is the goal of empathy? Empathy is the foundation for both merciful restraint (not wishing the other harm) and for compassion. It is the beginning point for the goodwill that is offered to the person who hurt you. In experiencing empathy, you are preparing for the paradoxical stance of forgiveness. You can then say, “I know that person who hurt me is responsible, I also understand his/her human vulnerabilities, and I want to treat him/her well.”

Some Cautions Take your time. This is a step that cannot be rushed. If you have any difficulty confusing empathy with condoning and excusing, please spend the time reviewing the distinction. If at any time it is too painful to consider empathy for the wrongdoer because of any unvalidated pain you are still experiencing from the wrongdoing, please ask for an understanding ear. Remember Jesus Christ has empathy for the wrongdoer…..but also for you.
UNIT TEN
JOURNAL REFLECTIONS

Has the reframing unit helped you discover empathy for the wrongdoer? ________________
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As you “picture yourself” inside his/her life what does that look like? ________________
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What is difficult for you about discovering empathy?

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Are you clear about the distinction between empathy and condoning or excusing? _____

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How does God help you with empathy for the wrongdoer?

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How has empathy helped you in decreased thoughts of resentment or revenge?

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UNIT ELEVEN
GOODWILL PART I: MERCIFUL RESTRAINT

What is Merciful Restraint? Merciful restraint simply means consciously choosing to restrain oneself from harboring resentment or pursuing revenge. It has been suggested earlier that your desire to work on merciful restraint is evidence that you have chosen to begin the forgiveness process.

Forgiveness means having new thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward the person who hurt you. Unit Nine has provided you some tools to help you begin to “reframe” the wrongdoer or think differently about him/her. Unit Ten has suggested some ideas and questions to help you practice feelings of empathy toward the wrongdoer. Now in this unit, you will find some questions to help you stop and consider carefully your choices to practice merciful restraint. Thus you will be thinking, feeling, and behaving differently toward the wrongdoer. Other deeper thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward him/her will likely follow such as compassion, generosity, and moral love. But merciful restraint is a key beginning step for these later developments in the forgiveness process.

Merciful restraint is a step in forgiving that will likely require your attention and conscious choice many times. Actually this can be quite beneficial. Since merciful restraint is an early form of offering goodwill to the wrongdoer, the practice of it can be a “front line” of sorts. You can begin to consider goodwill toward the wrongdoer and at the same time check back on the earlier units in this program if you find yourself having difficulty. Practicing merciful restraint, then, can be a point on a feedback loop back to the skills that you have learned thus far, particularly when a tendency toward resentment and/or revenge is triggered by an as yet unresolved memory or when present circumstances bring painful issues to the forefront.

Recognizing Resentment and Revenge Resentment is unresolved anger that is replayed over and over again. You can check yourself when you are having angry thoughts by distinguishing between constructive anger and the “replays” of resentment. Anger is constructive in that it helps a person identify elements about an unfair incident that weren’t perhaps as clear before. Constructive anger also signals us to think through the problems caused by the unfair injury and work through the pain underneath. Resentment, on the other hand, is more like what one might call “holding a grudge.” Resentment may keep a person stuck in unresolved feelings about the unfair injury and may also direct some of the negative reactions both toward the wrongdoer and to other family members and friends. Choosing merciful restraint from resentment can redirect you back to work through anger and pain constructively and direct you forward to behave toward the wrongdoer based on your new thoughts and feelings about him/her and according to your own value for offering the goodwill that comes with forgiving. So, in other words, merciful restraint not only stops negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors but also leaves room for positive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Revenge often naturally follows resentment. Revenge essentially means, “getting even” in some way. Revenge can be very subtle. For example, taking some pleasure at the wrongdoer’s misfortunes or unnecessarily gossiping about the wrongdoer. Revenge can happen even if the wrongdoer is unaware of it. Therefore, revenge often impacts the
wronged person instead of the wrongdoer.

Merciful Restraint: It’s Your Choice. Giving up resentment and revenge is a crucial choice on your journey of forgiveness. Neither resentment nor revenge will “even the score” or ultimately make you feel better. Resentment will stall your own healing and keep you stuck in the past. Revenge will likely rob you of energy than you could be spending on other growth producing thoughts and activities. Both resentment and revenge can actually hurt you more than the wrongdoer.

Having said that resentment and revenge are unhealthy, it is also important to note that these reactions are tempting and easy to entertain occasionally. Everyone does. But consciously checking yourself and choosing merciful restraint allows you to pursue a positive response both to the problems caused by the wrongdoing and to the wrongdoer. Merciful restraint allows you to practice goodwill toward the wrongdoer and releases you to pursue your own well being.
UNIT ELEVEN
JOURNAL REFLECTIONS

When does resentment come to my mind ("holding a grudge")?


What forms of subtle revenge do I practice? (e.g. gossip, or a mental picture of “getting even” or of someone else “setting him/her straight”)


What will help me stop and choose another response?


Do I need to have anger about a new aspect of the wrongdoing validated by someone I trust?

Do I need to go back and do more work to acknowledge and process the pain?

Might more work reframing the wrongdoer help?

How does empathy help me restrain myself from resentment or revenge?
Does it help to stop and consider the ways in which resentment and revenge may actually hurt me? or others?

How do I feel when I stop myself from resentful or revengeful thoughts and/or behaviors?

How does merciful restraint benefit me, the wrongdoer, other people?
UNIT TWELVE
GOODWILL PART II: GENEROSITY, COMPASSION, AND LOVE

Goodwill The dictionary defines goodwill as the cheerful readiness for friendliness or benevolence (kindliness) toward another person on one level and the desire for the well being of the other person on a deeper level. It was suggested at the beginning of this recovery program, that forgiveness includes goodwill in at least three ways: merciful restraint, generosity, and moral love (agape). You might remember this definition of forgiveness: Forgiveness is the foregoing of resentment or revenge (merciful restraint) when the wrongdoer's actions deserve it and offering the gifts of generosity and moral love to the wrongdoer even though his/her past actions do not merit this goodwill.

You have practiced intentionally choosing merciful restraint in the last unit. This next unit, Goodwill Part II, will help you think about the gifts of generosity and moral love and give you the opportunity to consider how you might want to practice offering these gifts to the wrongdoer. All of the aspects of goodwill in the forgiveness process are based your ongoing work to reframe the pain from the wrongdoing, reframe the wrongdoer (while still acknowledging his/her responsibility for the wrongdoing) and the discovery of empathy (being able to see his/her “emotional context”). The goodwill that you will gradually offer to the wrongdoer as part of the forgiveness process will also likely be enhanced by the development of compassion.

Let’s look then at these three important concepts: generosity, compassion, and moral love (agape).

Generosity Generosity literally means intentionally relinquishing pettiness and instead choosing to be a magnanimous person (a large soul who is willing to benefit someone whose actions have clearly not merited the benefit). So generosity is not merely giving a neutral person or someone that you have had no difficulty with $10.00 instead of $5.00. Instead generosity is liberally giving good things to someone who has insulted or hurt you. In other words, generosity means freely demonstrating the goodwill of forgiving in some overt way. So, then, generosity is taking a step beyond merciful restraint (or choosing to forego the negative responses of resentment and/or revenge) to offer positive things to the wrongdoer. These good things might include positive attention, respectful times in conversation or other contacts, remembrances on holidays, helpfulness, or simply speaking well of the person and promoting good memories of him/her where possible.

Compassion Compassion means having a deep desire and a willingness to act toward the alleviation of another person’s suffering. The development of compassion is a logical outcome from reframing the wrongdoer and your discovery of empathy for him/her. You may now think of the wrongdoer as someone with his/her own past hurts and present difficulties. Compassion, then, is a step beyond generosity and can enhance the motivation behind generosity. You will not only be considering giving good things that the wrongdoer does not deserve, but you will do so out of a deep concern for his/her welfare.

The development of compassion can also lead you to realize the possibility of
caring for another person unconditionally—even another person who has hurt you badly. Having a passion to see another person’s suffering alleviated does not, then, depend upon that person’s good behavior but rather that person’s humanity. This brings us to the next level of goodwill in forgiveness: moral love.

**Moral Love** Moral love (agape) is founded on the absolute equal worth of all human beings. This worth is God-given and unconditional and so that worth does not change based on any kind of “merit system” (by effort, mistakes, family affiliation, race, religion, gender, ethnic group, etc.) that people might devise. This kind of love prompts a person to deeply care for the ultimate well being of other people just because they are members of the human community—like you are. This kind of deep love extends even to those people who have hurt you (or your enemies, if you will). This may seem difficult or even impossible. But offering moral love to another person, especially someone who has hurt you deeply and unfairly, confirms not only his/her God-given worth but yours as well. And this is where you can practice following Christ by “loving your enemy.”

You might also ask, “How do I offer moral love (agape)?” You simply do many of the types of things that were mentioned in the section on generosity and compassion—but with an even deeper motive for the well being of the wrongdoer. You do it by practicing God’s love for him. Some people also find that prayer for the wrongdoer’s ultimate wellbeing in relationship with God is a powerful way of practicing moral love.

**The Benefits of Offering Goodwill** Consider what it means to offer goodwill… even to someone who has hurt you so deeply. You can decide what kind of response you will make to a wrongdoing based on the transforming virtues of generosity, compassion, and moral love. You can choose to act as magnanimous person … a large soul who is willing to benefit someone whose actions have clearly not merited this benevolence. Offering goodwill to someone who has hurt you is where the great paradox of forgiveness becomes most apparent. Forgiving offers the wrongdoer unmerited benevolence while changing you as a person. You do him/her good and that does you good. We will look at this potential change in you more thoroughly in the next unit. And it will take time….the benefit for both of you will accrue gradually over time….but this process will be transforming. This means living out *Romans Chapter 12.*
UNIT TWELVE
JOURNAL REFLECTIONS

Is the practice of merciful restraint gradually opening up the possibility of generosity? toward the wrongdoer?

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What are some ways that I am already being generous toward him/her?

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Have reframing (both of the pain and of the wrongdoer) and empathy led to feelings of compassion for him/her?

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*Read 1 John 4:9-13*  How do I understand moral love (agape)?

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How might I show moral love (agape?) for the wrongdoer? ______________________

What are the benefits of loving (agape) my enemy (the wrongdoer)?______________
UNIT THIRTEEN
FINDING MEANING IN SUFFERING:
WHAT KIND OF PERSON DO I WANT TO BE?

You Have Come a Long Way. It was suggested at the beginning of this forgiveness recovery program that forgiveness is more than a decision. It is a commitment to an ongoing process. The forgiveness process that you are learning is divided into four phases. You have now worked through three of these four phases. It is time to stop and consider how far you have come. You have done the hard work of taking an honest and comprehensive look at the unfair injury during the Uncovering Phase (Units 1-6). You have made the decision to have a change of heart and commit to the work of forgiveness in the Decision Phase (Unit 7). And you have rolled up your sleeves and worked on forgiving the wrongdoer during the Work Phase (Units 8-12). In the Work Phase you have courageously taken a new perspective on the pain from the wrongdoing. You have been willing to reframe the wrongdoer as a fallible yet complex, vulnerable human being with God-given worth. You have also been willing to practice empathy, merciful restraint, compassion, generosity, and moral love toward him/her. You are to be commended for this heartfelt and difficult work.

You might want to stop and take stock at this point and ask yourself some questions. What is different for me now that I have done this forgiveness work? How have my feelings, thoughts, and behaviors toward the wrongdoer changed?

You might also want to ask yourself the question: “How I am changing as a person?” In fact, in the next phase of forgiveness, the Deepening Phase, that question will be the focus.

Finding Meaning in Suffering The central concept in the Deepening Phase is called “Finding Meaning in Suffering.” You might well wonder how suffering can be meaningful. After all, most people would want to avoid suffering if at all possible. However, you, yourself, have been subjected to unfair suffering because of a wrongdoing. Unfortunately, unfair suffering is a part of life and, therefore, finding meaning in suffering becomes an essential way of adapting to these experiences. You didn’t ask for the suffering, you didn’t cause it, and you can’t change it. But you can find meaning in the experience.

What is Finding Meaning in Suffering? Some people think, on first consideration, that finding meaning in suffering is seeking to understand why the other person hurt you. This information might be helpful in reframing the wrongdoer. It may also help validate that you didn’t deserve the unfair treatment. But this is not the same thing as finding meaning in suffering.

A psychotherapist named Viktor Frankl (1969) is the person who is known for establishing the concept of finding meaning in suffering. Frankl is a Holocaust concentration camp survivor and brings considerable personal understanding to
the experience of unfair suffering. In addition, Dr. Frankl (1969) spent a large part of his career working with Holocaust survivors and victims of other traumatic events. He became convinced that the foundation of psychological health is the ability to process unfair suffering as an opportunity to grow and deepen as a person.

Viktor Frankl (1969) believes that people want more than mere happiness; they want to find meaning in their lives. And inevitably bad things, unfair things happen that cannot be changed. But a person can make what Frankl (1969) calls an attitudinal change. A person can take a courageous stand for personal moral growth as he/she faces the unfair suffering. Frankl (1969) claims that this courageous stand involves a “turning to the good” based on “transcendent moral virtues” (virtues that are central to a person’s worldview). We have been talking about some of these very virtues in forgiving: the God-given worth of all people, respect, mercy, compassion, generosity, moral love, forgiveness itself. Finding meaning in suffering, then, is courageously choosing to see an unfair situation, as an opportunity to live by these “transcendent moral virtues.” Romans 5: 1-5 says it even better: “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in the hope of the glory (moral attributes) of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

So in other words, forgiving, is one way of finding meaning in suffering. In forgiving you choose to act on moral virtues that come from the moral attributes of God. Finding meaning in suffering involves asking yourself this question: “Considering the unchangeable and painful reality of the wrongdoing I have experienced, what kind of person do I want to become?” It is possible for you, then, by acting on moral virtues such as mercy, compassion, moral love, and forgiveness, to face the unjust suffering with courage and strength. Frankl (1969) would summarize the experience of finding meaning in suffering in this way:

….the noblest appreciation of meaning is reserved for those who, by the very attitude with which they choose to respond to this predicament (a meaningless or cruel situation), rise above it and grow beyond themselves. What matters is the stand they take—a stand which allows for transforming their predicament into achievement, triumph and heroism.”

As you work on forgiving, you are choosing to respond to the wrongdoing by expecting goodness to triumph….the way Christ triumphed over evil on the cross. And forgiving with this expectation can change you deeply. It is a way of allowing yourself to be conformed to the image of Christ.

How do I feel about unfair suffering?

Do I want to find meaning in the unfair suffering?

What would that be like for me?

Who are some forgivers that I admire?
How does God help me forgive? What does Christ’s example mean to me? ________

How have I already grown as a result of working on forgiving the wrongdoer? ________
Can I imagine Christ helping me overcome evil with goodness?

How do I feel about “who I am in Christ” when I take the courage to see suffering as an opportunity to change for the better?

Would I like to be an example of a forgiving person?
UNIT FOURTEEN
EXPERIENCING RELEASE PART ONE:
AM I STRONGER?

As was stated in the very beginning of this program, forgiveness is choosing to relinquish the desire to harbor resentment or take revenge when the wrongdoer's actions deserve it and choosing instead to offer the gifts of mercy, generosity and moral love to the wrongdoer even though his past actions do not merit this goodwill. The forgiving person (you) offers this goodwill for the benefit of the wrongdoer but as you do so you are also pursuing your own process of moral and spiritual growth (who do I want to become?) and psychological healing (finding release from the painful outcomes of the wrongdoing). You have worked hard at this process. At this time, you can stop and take a look at the benefits of forgiveness for yourself. In this unit, you will be invited to take a look at the personal release and strengths you have acquired by reframing the wrongdoing, the wrongdoer, and the pain from the wrongdoing. In the next unit you can stop and look at your progress in offering the gifts of forgiveness to the wrongdoer (your feelings, thoughts, and behaviors toward him/her) and the outcomes for you (release from such difficulties as anxiety and sadness). And the last unit will invite you to plan for the future.

**Release** Since you have courageously chosen to work on forgiveness, you may be discovering that you have less unresolved anger or pain. You may be noticing that you have fewer times where thoughts of resentment or blame come to the surface. You have likely deepened your sense of respect, compassion, and unconditional concern for yourself, the wrongdoer, and other people.

It is likely that you are now discovering that the unexpected, unpleasant thoughts about the wrongdoing are becoming less frequent or less troublesome. You might even be discovering that you experience “new thoughts” about the wrongdoing that include the positive ways that you are responding it in the present by forgiving. You might even begin to say that you have a new story about the wrongdoing which ends in the triumph of forgiveness. You have found the freedom of seeing the wrongdoing as an opportunity for spiritual growth. You are free from the “prison” of the past.
UNIT FOURTEEN
JOURNAL REFLECTIONS

Did I find release from anger about the wrongdoing?

Do I experience less pain from the wrongdoing?

Do resentment and blame come up less often?

What kind of relief am I experiencing?

Are the mental “reruns” of the wrongdoing less frequent?
Do I have new positive stories to think or talk about (forgiveness stories)?

Do I experience more self-esteem? more confidence? more hope?

What new personal strengths have I discovered (or rediscovered) as I have worked on forgiving?

Do I feel freer to practice following Christ’s example?
UNIT FIFTEEN
EXPERIENCING RELEASE PART TWO:
HAVE I CHANGED?

In the previous unit, you were invited to consider the release and strength that has come as a result of your choice to work on forgiveness. In this unit, you will be invited to stop and look at the positive changes from forgiveness process—both for the wrongdoer and for yourself. In the next and last unit, you will be invited to think about how these positive changes will influence your plans for the future and to consider the potential benefit for a larger circle of people (beyond the wrongdoer and yourself.)

As you offer the goodwill of forgiveness to the wrongdoer, you are likely experiencing changes in two important ways that affect both him/her and yourself. First, as you practice merciful restraint, you are likely discovering a decrease in negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward the wrongdoer. Secondly, as you practice generosity, compassion, and moral love toward your former partner, you are likely discovering an increase in positive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward him/her. These are outcomes of forgiving that we talked about at the very beginning of the process. Forgiveness does mean a change in thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward the person who hurt you. This change, in itself, is very significant for anyone who has suffered betrayal and deep hurt from a family member. But there is more. While, a decrease in negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors along with an increase in positive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward the wrongdoer may seem to most obviously be beneficial for him/her—these changes in thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are beneficial for you as well.

**Discovery** For many people the positive outcomes of forgiveness come gradually, so it may be helpful for you to stop and reflect on the profound changes that are already in place. As you offer the gifts of generosity, compassion and moral love toward the wrongdoer, you naturally increase in positive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors towards him/her. Again, it may seem obvious that this will benefit him/her either directly or indirectly. But there is benefit for you as well. You are choosing what kind of person you want to be. You can begin to feel more “like yourself.” Anger gives way to quiet determination and compassion. Feelings of anxiety give way to a sense of expectation and a belief in your own ability to cope with life….difficulties and all. Sadness and/or depression gives way to hope and peace. Enright (2001) recounts these experiences of people who forgave:

Michael: “I began very quickly to lose episodic nightmares and began to dream more happily in color.”

Maria: “I felt more like my old self—more peaceful that I have resolved the issue. I felt liberation.”

Mary Ann: “I am no longer tired all the time, my house is clean, my life is in order. My relationship with my children is terrific. I can remember a time when I was so depressed I could not imagine ever being happy, but it’s as though it happened to someone else. I am not that person any more. During the difficult process, I held onto a line from the book of Joel (in the Hebrew bible) ‘I have restored the years the locusts have eaten.’ I felt that my life was like a field eaten clean by locusts and that in forgiving God remade me, so that people don’t see the victim that I was, but the joyful person I am becoming.”

As you consider your own story of forgiving, how would you describe the positive changes in yourself so far? What liberation do you hope to see in the future as you continue to work on the forgiveness process?

UNIT FIFTEEN
JOURNAL REFLECTIONS

What are your current thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward the wrongdoer?

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How has this changed since the beginning of the forgiveness process?_____________

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How would you describe your current experience with feelings of anxiety? sadness or
depression? ________________________

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Is this different compared to your feelings at the beginning of the forgiveness process?

How so?

Are you having any new feelings of well-being?

Can you think of a “before” forgiveness and an “after” forgiveness comparison for yourself?
In what way might your forgiveness directly or indirectly benefit the wrongdoer?

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How has your relationship with God changed as you have worked on forgiving?

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UNIT SIXTEEN
THE FUTURE: FINDING RENEWED PURPOSE

In the two previous units, you were invited to consider the new strengths that you developed by courageously choosing to forgive and to work on the process of forgiving the wrongdoer. You have had the chance to reflect on the benefits of forgiving for yourself and the potential benefits for the person who hurt you unfairly. Now in this last unit, you will be invited to reflect on how forgiveness will influence your plans for the future and to imagine the potential benefit for a larger circle of people (beyond the wrongdoer and yourself.)

**Finding Renewed Purpose** In choosing to forgive and work on the forgiveness process, you have discovered release, strength, and new energy. Now the stage is set for a further aspect of the deepening phase of the forgiveness process: finding renewed purpose in life. Finding renewed purpose is often a result of finding meaning in suffering…but it is somewhat different. Finding meaning in suffering is “key” for the positive outcomes of the forgiveness process. You find the strength to change inwardly as you choose to stand for moral virtues such as mercy, compassion, moral love (agape) in response to unfair suffering. This is intrapersonal change….you’ve changed deeply as a person. And you practice these virtues by offering goodwill toward the person that you are forgiving. This is interpersonal change….change in your relationship with another person. In that way you benefit both the person who hurt you and yourself. Finding purpose involves taking this process of change and benefit a step further. Finding purpose means finding a direction for your future that allows you to offer what you have learned to others. For example, you might want to make your experience of forgiving a foundation for helping others who have experienced similar difficulties. This renewed purpose is based, then, on the intrapersonal change from choosing forgiveness (What kind of person am I becoming?) and the interpersonal change of forgiving the wrongdoer (I offer the gifts of goodwill). Now you can take these experiences and consider new possibilities for your life that widens the circle of people who benefit from your choice to forgive (Now that I’ve changed and I’ve practiced goodwill, can I help someone else?). Here are some inspiring examples of renewed purpose:

Marietta’s daughter Susie was murdered in 1973. Marietta bravely chose to forgive Susie’s murderer. Since that time, she has experienced profound changes in her life. Marietta has reached deep inside her own experience of forgiving, found support in a community of faith, and has spent the last nearly 30 years helping other families who have family members that were murdered. Marietta teaches these families the healing alternative of forgiveness. Marietta has also displayed her deepened commitment to mercy for offenders by working to eliminate the death penalty.

Mary Ann found that her experience with forgiveness provided her with insight and compassion for others who were suffering from unresolved anger.
Mary Ann takes opportunities to share her own story when it will help friends, acquaintances, and sometimes even strangers to forgive.

After forgiving her former abusive spouse, Arlene has discovered enormous freedom in parenting her three children. Arlene finds that she is directing less and less unresolved anger toward them and that she has far more energy to develop positive parenting skills. Arlene knows that she is becoming an example of forgiveness for her children. Arlene also looks forward to helping other members of her family who are struggling with resentment from old hurts.

A number of incest survivors who participated in Dr. Suzanne Freedman’s (1994) forgiveness intervention research have gone on to become counselors and presently work with other incest survivors. Many of them have also experienced an increase in positive parenting skills for their own children.

After working on forgiving her abusive ex-husband, Linda discovered that she also wanted to forgive her mother for alcoholism and abuse during her childhood. Linda now works as a volunteer with other adult children of alcoholics.

Jean, a woman, who experienced a painful divorce after her husband’s affair, now facilitates pre-divorce forgiveness interventions for married couples who are interested in reconciling.

Sam, a young man who forgave a father who abandoned him, now is working to develop a forgiveness education program for elementary school children.

Remember when you read these examples, that your renewed purpose will be uniquely your own…and it will likely happen gradually…step-by-step. You’ve started on a marvelous journey, a forgiveness journey that will last a lifetime. It is a journey that continues….with great potential for your future. Life is not easy but your forgiving response to the difficult and unfair things that have happened and that may yet come your way, can bring healing to you, to the person who hurt you, and to others.

Here is one more forgiveness story. You probably know the hero of this one: Joseph (Genesis 37-50). This is an ancient story of a favored son, Joseph, whose jealous brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt. Joseph served faithfully as an Egyptian household slave for a powerful man named Potiphar. But Potiphar’s wife, after failing to seduce Joseph, became angry and had Joseph thrown into prison. Now Joseph had two very unfair events to cope with. Rather than becoming bitter, Joseph stood by virtues that he believed in and took strength from the God he relied on. Joseph then found many opportunities to benefit his Egyptian overlords, his brothers, and his family. On his release from prison, Joseph proves himself to be a wise and capable civil servant in Egypt. Years later, during a famine, both the Egyptians and Joseph’s brothers come to him for help. Joseph helped the Egyptians manage their food supplies and offered his
brothers precious grain as well. Joseph, by this time, had attained a very high position in Egypt and he could have taken revenge. But instead, he extended forgiveness and mercy to his brothers, his entire extended family, and to the Egyptians. An ever-widening circle of benefit flowed out from Joseph’s decision to forgive. Joseph pursued a lifelong forgiveness journey and this was his expression of the outcome. “God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.” *Genesis 41:52*


UNIT SIXTEEN
JOURNAL REFLECTIONS

Can you envision a new purpose for your life?

How might you interact with other people to pursue that purpose?

How will this be part of your unfolding story, your life-long journey of forgiveness?