

**FORGIVING
WHAT
YOU
CAN'T
FORGET**



STUDY GUIDE

FORGIVING WHAT YOU CAN'T FORGET

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Session 1:

PRE-READING: Introduction, Chapters 1-2

OPENING PRAYER

Take a few minutes to open your group meeting in prayer. Thank God for joining you, ask him to guide your conversation and request that he reveal his truth to you.

BIBLE READING:

Read aloud: Matthew 18:21-35

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

"At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

"His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'

"But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Read through and discuss the questions below with your group. Don't feel a need to get through all the questions. Instead, have group members share thoughts on whichever ones they connect with, and let the Spirit guide your conversation.

Introduction:

1. Do you ever find yourself defining your life by before and after a deep hurt? Do you believe it's possible to truly move on from something like that and live a beautiful life? Does forgiveness ever feel like a dirty word to you? Why is that? Have you ever learned how to truly forgive someone?

Chapter 1:

1. Have you noticed cynicism, bitterness, resentment, delay or trust issues in your life as a result of a painful event? What do those things do to our hearts? How have those things impacted your life?
2. Can forgiveness seem offensive or impossible at times? Why do you think that? What role does fairness and justice play in healing from a traumatic situation?
3. What does unforgiveness lead to? What does forgiveness provide us? In what ways is forgiveness a double-edged sword? What does it feel like to receive forgiveness? Is it easy for you to receive forgiveness from others?
4. What is your first reaction when someone hurts you? What does God call us to do with our hurt? What do the words redemption, reunion and reconciliation mean to you? How do they relate to the painful events from your past?
5. Is forgiveness something that sounds appealing to you? Why or why not?

Chapter 2:

1. Do you have something painful (no matter how big) from your past that you continue to revisit in your thoughts?
2. Which one of the lists on pages 16-17 and 21 resonate with you the most? Do you have a tendency to resist forgiveness or deny the pain? Which statements, specifically, have you told yourself or others? Are you processing life through the lens of the way you want it to be or the way it actually is?
3. Have you ever thought that forgiveness feels like a cruel command from God? Why or why not? Can you understand someone thinking that? What is the truth about forgiveness? How is it a blessing?
4. Have you ever felt that it's easier to deny your pain than do the hard work of dealing and healing from something? Why do we think that sometimes?

PRAYER JOURNALING

Journaling is a wonderful way to talk to God. We invite you to use the following pages during your prayer time as you read through *Forgiving What You Can't Forget* with your group.

Date: _____

Today I read _____ **chapter(s)**

Takeaways as I read...

_____ *How I can apply this to my life...* _____



Dear God,

Teach me...

You are...

I confess...

I'm thankful for...

Specific Prayer Requests:

Amen.

Session 2:

PRE-READING: Chapters 3-4

OPENING PRAYER

Take a few minutes to open your group meeting in prayer. Thank God for joining you, ask him to guide your conversation and request that he reveal his truth to you.

BIBLE READING:

Read aloud: John 5:1-9

The Healing at the Pool

Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.

One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

“Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Read through and discuss the questions below with your group. Don't feel a need to get through all the questions. Instead, have group members share thoughts on whichever ones they connect with, and let the Spirit guide your conversation.

Chapter 3:

1. Have you ever felt like you had made progress toward forgiving someone, only for something to happen and it all seem to disappear? What does it mean for forgiveness to be a “complicated grace”? How does unresolved hurt impact others in our lives?

Chapter 4:

1. What is the significance of Jesus asking the paralyzed man in John 5 if he wanted to get well? What does that say about us healing from pain? Who gets to decide if you heal and forgive? Where does healing come from? Why does that matter?
2. What is our role in being healed? The author pointed out that our brain and body are programmed to run for home. Where is our home? What does this “home” provide us (Hebrews 13:14-16)?

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Dear God,

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You are...

I confess...

I'm thankful for...

Specific Prayer Requests:

Amen.

Session 3:

PRE-READING: Chapters 5-6

OPENING PRAYER

Take a few minutes to open your group meeting in prayer. Thank God for joining you, ask him to guide your conversation and request that he reveal his truth to you.

BIBLE READING:

Read aloud: Genesis 1:26-31

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day..

Read aloud: Genesis 2:18-25

Adam and Eve

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said,

*“This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called ‘woman,’
for she was taken out of man.”*

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Read through and discuss the questions below with your group. Don't feel a need to get through all the questions. Instead, have group members share thoughts on whichever ones they connect with, and let the Spirit guide your conversation.

Chapter 5:

1. What stood out to you from this chapter? As the author told her story, what were the stories that came to mind from your life? What is the difference between our story and the story we tell ourselves? How do we learn to view and interpret the world, events and other people based on our experiences?
2. Where has God shown up in your life? What are the moments where he felt absent? How can you see him working in those moments now? When have you felt closest to God?
3. Share your Hope Story with your Life Group. How did God bring you to Hope in the first place? Who are the people and events God used to do that?

Chapter 6

1. How do our experiences impact the perceptions we carry? What does it mean to make connections between what has happened in our lives and the reasons we do some of the things we say and believe?
2. What is the purpose of feelings? What has been your experience with feelings? Do you try to hide them or are they often loud, like the author mentioned? What does it mean to have a healthy relationship with our feelings?
3. What role does vulnerability play in our relationships? Have you ever been vulnerable with someone? How does that feel? What does that provide us? Have you ever been hurt by being vulnerable with someone? How did you respond to that?

4. Are there times of the day or seasons of the year that you should enjoy but avoid? Are there places you should enjoy, but find yourself not wanting to go there? Are there types of people you avoid or find yourself feeling especially anxious around? Are there certain words or phrases that trigger more emotion than you feel they should? Are there life events that when the memories are talked about, you find yourself wanting to escape the conversation?
5. What are some of the connections you made in your story? What did you learn? How can that help you to grow?

CLOSING PRAYER: Popcorn Prayer

When your discussion time has ended, close in group prayer while sitting in a circle. Select someone in your group to open the group prayer and someone to close. In between, allow for others to jump in and say a prayer. Once the “popcorn prayers” have slowed, have the closing prayer finish the prayer.

APPLICATION: Write Your Story

In a journal, write out your story, similar to how the author did in Chapter 5. What do you remember from your childhood? How did those things impact how you view the world? What is the story that you tell yourself about the world, yourself and God as a result? Don’t worry about the order of the story, just write the things you remember and what they meant to you.

NOTES:



PRAYER JOURNALING

Journaling is a wonderful way to talk to God. We invite you to use the following pages during your prayer time as you read through *Forgiving What You Can't Forget* with your group.

Date: _____

Today I read _____ **chapter(s)**

Takeaways as I read...

_____ *How I can apply this to my life...* _____



Dear God,

Teach me...

You are...

I confess...

I'm thankful for...

Specific Prayer Requests:

Amen.

Session 4:

PRE-READING: Chapters 7-8

OPENING PRAYER

Take a few minutes to open your group meeting in prayer. Thank God for joining you, ask him to guide your conversation and request that he reveal his truth to you.

BIBLE READING:

Read aloud: Romans 5:1-5

Peace and Hope

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Read aloud: Romans 5:1-5

Love in Action

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

On the contrary:

*"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."*

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Read through and discuss the questions below with your group. Don't feel a need to get through all the questions. Instead, have group members share thoughts on whichever ones they connect with, and let the Spirit guide your conversation.

Chapter 7:

1. As you wrote out your story from last week's application, what stood out to you? Did you learn anything about yourself and how you see and interact with the world?

2. Lysa talks about noticing unresolved hurt in how other people interact with others. Have you ever noticed that? Why is it easier to see that in other people than it is in ourselves? What does that mean for identifying those areas in ourselves so that we can correct them and heal?
3. Have you ever noticed yourself believing awful things about yourself? What does God say about those things? What does God believe about you?
4. What does it mean to “correct the dots”? What are the dots in your story that need correcting? Have you identified unresolved pain or unforgiveness in your life that needs addressed?

Chapter 8:

1. Are there things that you constantly worry about? What do those things say about your life experiences? How are those experiences causing you to worry? Does your worry make sense? What does worry do to you?
2. Do you feel like the hurt you carry is unforgivable because it’s unchangeable? What does unforgiveness do to the experience? How does it perpetuate it? How does it cause us more hurt? Is there something that you’ve let hurt you for too long?
3. Do you ever feel like you want to get revenge on someone for what they’ve done? What would revenge do about the hurt? Would it change anything? Has revenge ever made a situation better?
4. How can we develop empathy and compassion for the people who hurt us? What does this give us the freedom to do?

CLOSING PRAYER: Circle Prayer

Sit in a circle for closing prayer time. Give everyone a chance to share their prayer requests aloud. Then, have one person open the prayer. Have everyone pray for the person to their left. When one person is finished, go to the next person in the circle, so that by the end, everyone has been prayed for by the person sitting next to them.

APPLICATION: Journal Your Thoughts

Read through the questions on pages 95-98. Spend some time with God writing out your true, honest answers to those questions. Just get your thoughts out onto the page and don’t worry about it being neat or clean. This probably won’t be a one-time exercise. Go through this as many times as you need to until you feel like you’ve gotten everything out. Then, spend time in prayer with God, asking him to speak to you and reveal his truth.

PRAYER JOURNALING

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Date: _____

Today I read _____ **chapter(s)**

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_____ *How I can apply this to my life...* _____



Dear God,

Teach me...

You are...

I confess...

I'm thankful for...

Specific Prayer Requests:

Amen.

Session 5:

PRE-READING: Chapters 9-10

OPENING PRAYER

Take a few minutes to open your group meeting in prayer. Thank God for joining you, ask him to guide your conversation and request that he reveal his truth to you.

BIBLE READING:

Read aloud: Romans 12:9-21

Love in Action

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary:

*"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."*

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Read aloud: John 16:20-22

The Disciples' Grief Will Turn to Joy

Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Read through and discuss the questions below with your group. Don't feel a need to get through all the questions. Instead, have group members share thoughts on whichever ones they connect with, and let the Spirit guide your conversation.

Chapter 9:

1. Do you ever feel the desire to control things that are out of your control? What does that feel like? Have you ever warned someone of their actions only to have them ignore you completely? What does that feel like? How did you react? How do you want to react? How does that affect you?
2. What is it like trying to control other people? Do you ever get frustrated when someone doesn't do what you've told them to do and it came back to hurt both of you? When someone is hurting others, what does that say about them?
3. What can we do when someone's choices are negatively impacting us? Have you ever had to draw boundaries? Was that difficult? What was the reaction of the other person? What boundaries did you set? How did you communicate them?
4. How can we still love people who are making poor choices but minimize the impact those choices have on others? What role does compassion play in setting boundaries and loving others? How can we develop more compassion for people who are hurting others?
5. How do we know when we've crossed the line from loving someone to enabling them? What are the purpose of boundaries? How do they help you? What are some boundaries you can set for people in your life who are hurting you? Read through and discuss the questions on pages 133-134.

Chapter 10:

1. Have you ever wondered where God was when something bad happened to you? Have you ever questioned why he didn't stop it? How is our perspective different than God's? Why does that matter? Think back to a time when you felt abandoned or hurt by someone else. How did you feel about hope and fear? Which one felt like a better reaction to the situation? Why?
2. Have you ever wondered what an unanswered prayer says about how God feels about you? What is the truth? What does God think of you? Have you ever asked the questions that Google lists as the top questions about God on page 146? What does that say about our reaction to suffering? How does fear change our perspective?
3. How can we make healthy choices, like attending church, when we don't want to? What does this do for our spiritual health? How does worship change things?

PRAYER JOURNALING

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Date: _____

Today I read _____ **chapter(s)**

Takeaways as I read...

_____ *How I can apply this to my life...* _____



Dear God,

Teach me...

You are...

I confess...

I'm thankful for...

Specific Prayer Requests:

Amen.

Session 6:

PRE-READING: Chapters 11-12

OPENING PRAYER

Take a few minutes to open your group meeting in prayer. Thank God for joining you, ask him to guide your conversation and request that he reveal his truth to you.

BIBLE READING:

Read aloud: 1 Corinthians 13:9-12

Love Is Indispensable

For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Read through and discuss the questions below with your group. Don't feel a need to get through all the questions. Instead, have group members share thoughts on whichever ones they connect with, and let the Spirit guide your conversation.

Chapter 11:

1. Have you ever felt let down by something God allowed to happen? How did that affect your trust of him? If your trust level changed, why? If it stayed the same, why? What did you wish God would've done instead? How do you think that would have changed your life?
2. Have you ever considered that God may have a different perspective on your life situation than you? How would that change the situation? How would that change your trust level? How do we decide whether a prayer has been answered or not?
3. How does communication impact a relationship? Does your prayer life have an impact on how much you trust God through the good and bad?
4. Do you ever feel like you expect too little of God and too much of yourself in your prayers? How so? Why is it significant that God provided "daily bread" in many different ways? What does that say about how our prayers are answered? Do you think some of your prayers are for answers that allow you to stay in control of the situation? What does God want from us?

5. Do you believe there's something God knows about the situation that you don't? How does that knowledge change our prayers? What are you currently praying for? How can you keep your eyes and heart open to how God may answer that in a different way than you expect?

Chapter 12:

1. What does it mean for loss to be a crucible? Where have you experienced loss in your life? How did that impact you? How can you heal from that loss?
2. What is bitterness? What causes bitterness? How can bitterness be turned into something beautiful? Read through the bullet point list on pages 175-176. Are you experiencing any of those feelings? Have you ever experienced them in the past?
3. In what areas of your life do you feel a hardness toward others? Why is that? How can you turn that hardness into softness? What does it mean to sit in the grief? What does sitting in grief do for us?

CLOSING PRAYER: Prayer Journal

When your conversation is finished, take some time to close your group meeting in prayer. Give everyone a few minutes to share a prayer request. Then, have someone in your group close the group in prayer. If you want, have someone open the prayer and another person close.

Have someone in your group start acting as the prayer leader, recording the group's prayers and sending them out by email or text later in the week to remind everyone. Then, keep note of the ways God has answered your group's prayers and celebrate those things.

APPLICATION: Prayer Journal

Start keeping a prayer journal. Record the things that you are praying for each day. Then, over time, go back to your prayers from days, weeks and months gone by and make note of how God answered those prayers. Make note of how his response may have been different but better than how you thought it would be answered.

NOTES:

PRAYER JOURNALING

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Takeaways as I read...

_____ *How I can apply this to my life...* _____



Dear God,

Teach me...

You are...

I confess...

I'm thankful for...

Specific Prayer Requests:

Amen.

Session 7:

PRE-READING: Chapters 13-14

OPENING PRAYER

Take a few minutes to open your group meeting in prayer. Thank God for joining you, ask him to guide your conversation and request that he reveal his truth to you.

BIBLE READING:

Read aloud: Hebrews 12:14-15

Warning and Encouragement

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

Read aloud: Matthew 6:9-12

Prayer

“This, then, is how you should pray:

*“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.’*

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Read through and discuss the questions below with your group. Don't feel a need to get through all the questions. Instead, have group members share thoughts on whichever ones they connect with, and let the Spirit guide your conversation.

Chapter 13:

1. Have you ever had a similar experience to the author when unrelated hurts all piled up at once and created a spirit of bitterness? What causes our reaction to things like that? How does unresolved pain continue to impact ourselves and others? What's the difference between resentment and

bitterness? When we notice those feelings, what is a good way to handle and address them?

2. Have you ever felt angry that God didn't defend you? Have you ever assumed that God didn't deal with a situation? Why do we assume that? What is the truth of the situation?
3. What role does humility play in forgiveness? How do we cultivate humility? Why is humility so difficult sometimes?
4. Read the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32. Which son do you identify with the most? Why? How are both sons lost? Do you believe that everything the Father has is yours because you belong to him? Do you truly believe that everything you really want, God has?
5. Do you have peace right now? What does it mean to have peace? What is keeping you from peace? Are there some relationships in your life that seem not at peace? How can you have peace in your relationships?

Chapter 14:

1. How is forgiveness a daily process? How can you make it a part of your daily life? What progress have you seen in your life in the area of forgiveness since starting this study? What is an area of forgiveness that you still need to work on more?
2. What does the Lord's Prayer remind us about forgiveness? As you read the words in Matthew 6, what stands out to you most about forgiveness?
3. How does confession play a role in forgiveness? In what ways have you practiced confession in the past? How can you include confession in your life moving forward? What's the difference between feeling and living the feelings listed on page 211? What does confession and forgiveness do to chaos in our lives?

CLOSING PRAYER: The Lord's Prayer

When your conversation is finished, take some time to close your group meeting in prayer. Give everyone a few minutes to share a prayer request. Then, have someone in your group close the group in prayer. If you want, have someone open the prayer and another person close.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

PRAYER JOURNALING

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Dear God,

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I confess...

I'm thankful for...

Specific Prayer Requests:

Amen.



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