

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Forgiving Others, Forgiving Ourselves: Understanding & Healing Our Emotional Wounds

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Chapter One: The Nature of Forgiveness

- Based on your experiences, how would you define *forgiveness*?
- Describe times when you have had difficulty letting go of negative feelings associated with particular experiences. What made letting go difficult?
- If someone has wronged you, what do you require of the wrongdoer in order for you to release bad feelings you may harbor?

Chapter Two: Ways We Experience Forgiveness

- How do you typically respond to situations requiring forgiveness: with grace, by working through your emotions, by encouraging dialogue or by setting down conditions?
- List some examples of the psychological, relational and spiritual perspectives of forgiveness in your life.
- What helps you get over harm that's been done to you?

Chapter Three: Benefits of Forgiving and Being Forgiven

- What physical feelings do you experience when someone does something to you that requires your forgiveness?
- How have you been affected by someone else's quarrel?
- How might your family benefit if you were to achieve forgiveness in a relationship important to you?
- What are the needs for forgiveness in a community in which you are involved?
- When has lack of forgiveness affected your workplace? How? Who were the players and what was the outcome?

Chapter Four: Resisting the Practice of Forgiveness

- Why is it sometimes more difficult to forgive a loved one than someone who isn't as close to you?
- Can you remember a time when you experienced a desire to avenge a hurtful act? Did you take revenge? Why or why not? If you did, was revenge satisfying?
- When, if ever, is forgiveness possible without an apology?
- What are the norms relating to forgiveness in your community?
- How do you feel about offering forgiveness to someone who has harmed others?

Chapter Five: What Facilitates Forgiveness?

- Is there any offense that is unforgiveable? If so, what is it?
- How did those in your family of origin practice forgiveness? Or did they just ignore issues requiring forgiveness?
- How do your religious beliefs align with your practice of forgiveness?

- What do you consider the most important aspect of a situation in deciding whether or not to forgive someone for a serious offense?
- Describe typical practices of forgiveness that you see in your community.

Chapter Six: The Path to Forgiveness

- Where are you on the forgiveness journey with respect to some hurts in your life? Just beginning, down the road a bit or at the end and seeking closure?
- What is it within you that makes you want to hold on to unpleasant memories?
- What would it take for you to forgive and let go, understanding that this doesn't mean you have to reconcile with the person who harmed you?
- What would it take for you to extend mercy and benevolence to someone who harmed you in the past?
- What is the connection between asking for forgiveness and forgiving others in your life?

Chapter Seven: Self-Forgiveness

- For which behaviors or attitudes do you find it most difficult to forgive yourself?
- What past community practices seem shameful to you?
- What does your inner critic say about your past mistakes?
- Ask yourself, "Does the energy I am spending on self-loathing help anyone? If not, how might that energy be better directed?"
- When you are successful in forgiving yourself, how does it happen?
- To whom can you turn when self-talk doesn't do the job?

Chapter Eight: The Role of Apology

- What's important for you to hear when you feel someone has said or done something that offended you?
- When you have apologized to another, what did you want the other person to know?
- When you received an apology from someone in the past, how did it affect the relationship?
- There may be many ways to apologize without words, such as changing behavior, sharing a hug or doing something kind for someone. What are some ways you apologize without using the words *I'm sorry*?

Chapter Nine: Reconciliation

- If you are the victim of someone else's harmful actions, what is your response?
- In your life, how has forgiveness been related to reconciliation?
- When you were a child, how did the adults in your life model reconciliation? Did people just hope bad behavior would be forgotten or did they openly discuss the behavior?
- What are some situations where you could forgive but not choose reconciliation?
- Where in your life do you need to experience reconciliation? What would it take to get that process started?

Chapter Ten: When Forgiving and Reconciling Are Difficult

- How well do you manage your emotions when you have to meet with someone you have had difficulty forgiving?

- When you have harmed someone by something you've said or done, what steps do you take to repair the relationship?
- What was your family drama? What evidence of it do you see in your adult life?
- When you know you are in the presence of a difficult person, what do you do to protect yourself from potential harm?
- Where in life could you expand your expectation square and reduce some of the stress in your life?

Chapter Eleven: Helping Others Forgive

- Have you ever helped another person offer or seek forgiveness? If so, what was the experience like for you?
- What has helping others navigate the process of forgiveness taught you about your own ability (or inability) to forgive?
- Would you ever say no to a request for help from someone who wanted to forgive or be forgiven? If so, what would be your reasoning?
- If you do say no to a request for help, what resources might you suggest to assist your friends, family members or colleagues?