HEALING THROUGH FORGIVENESS

edited by

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FORGIVENESS EXERCISE 1

Reflection Questions

For many people who have been hurt, the very idea of forgiveness can be startling or upsetting. It is a whole process in itself, which most likely will occur after a period of grieving. The assignments and the handout materials are intended to assist you with that process.

Assuming that you have some interest, or at least some curiosity about the topic of forgiveness (because you are reading this now!), it may be useful to reflect on questions about your current ideas and stance regarding forgiveness. These questions can help you get started.

Why are you interested in the topic of forgiveness?

What do you think forgiveness means?

What makes forgiveness difficult for you?

Is there someone whom you have not forgiven? Briefly, what happened?

What makes it hard for you to forgive that person?

What might change if you forgive that person?
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What is Forgiveness?

Our definition of forgiveness:
Changing my thoughts, feelings, and actions toward someone who has hurt me so that I can live a healthier and more satisfying life.

Some parameters of the process of forgiveness:
1. Interpersonal forgiveness is toward a person (not toward an object or something that happened).
2. Forgiveness comes after a deep, personal, long-lasting injury by another person. It can be an emotional, physical, or psychological wound.
3. The injury really happened, although its depth or duration may vary for people.
4. Forgiveness comes after a sense that justice or fairness has been denied; that the one injured was "innocent," did not "deserve" what happened, or was not at fault.
5. The injury, the pain, or damage may not have been intended by the injurer, nevertheless harm has been done. The injurer may not realize how much damage was done, but the pain exists.
6. There are emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of the injury, and so forgiveness requires changes in one's feeling, thinking, and actions.
7. Forgiveness is a gift to oneself -- the one who carries the burden and effects of the injury.
8. An offender does not have to apologize in order for the injured person to forgive. Waiting for an apology puts the power for one's healing in the offender's hands instead of the victim's.
9. The difficulty of arriving at forgiveness is affected by many variables. (More later.)
10. Forgiveness is a long process, not an easy one-time event.
11. Forgiveness occurs late in one's healing process.
Forgiveness as Healing

It is not surprising that people who have been hurt have a strong reaction to the idea of forgiveness. After all, they have been seriously harmed by someone who used their authority, power, size, age, etc. against someone who was vulnerable.

Often the resistance to forgiveness has some roots in a misunderstanding about the nature of forgiveness itself. The language we use suggests that forgiveness is something which is "given" to the offender. This seems unjust if not absolutely ridiculous – why should the victim give anything to the perpetrator?

Anyone who has been seriously harmed by another person can usually provide a large number of reasons why the option of forgiveness will not be considered. They seem very reasonable to the victim and to others. [You might think of some of your reasons right now and jot them down.]

Imagine for a moment you are involved in a serious car accident. You are sitting at a red light and suddenly the car behind you runs into you. The driver of that car is injured, your arm is broken, and you have some severe bleeding from a head wound. Would you refuse to go to the hospital to have your arm put in a cast, and to get some x-rays and stitches for your head wound?

Now think of those reasons you listed earlier for not forgiving the person who caused your injury. Apply those same reasons to the imaginary situation of your car accident and the resulting broken arm and head injury. Do your reasons make sense? Quite often they sound rather silly when applied to a physical injury: "I won't give that other driver the satisfaction of seeing me go to the hospital." "Why should I have to get help when it's her fault?" "The other driver doesn't deserve for me to seek treatment for my injuries." "If the driver doesn't apologize, I'm not going to the hospital."

Forgiveness is an important issue because there are many people living with serious wounds and deep pain. They need care and attention, and forgiveness is a process for healing. Forgiveness is not something that is "given" to the offender, but something that is done to alleviate the wounded person's pain and suffering.

Wounded people have thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are directly related to their injury. The offender may or may not be around any more, but the wounds can persist long past the event, causing more pain. Forgiveness is the process of changing the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of the injured person in order to heal and live a less painful and more satisfying life. So if the word "forgiveness" causes difficulty, simply substitute the word "healing." To refuse to engage in the process of forgiveness is like saying, "I refuse to heal."
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**Interpersonal Forgiveness: Components of a Process**

**Uncovering Phase**
1. Examination of psychological defenses and the issues involved
2. Confrontation of anger; the point is to release, not harbor, the anger
3. Admittance of shame, when this is appropriate
4. Awareness of depleted emotional energy
5. Awareness of cognitive rehearsal of the offense
6. Insight that the injured party may be comparing self with the injurer
7. Realization that oneself may be permanently and adversely changed by the injury
8. Insight into a possibly altered “just world” view

**Decision Phase**
9. A change of heart/conversion/new insights that old resolution strategies are not working
10. Willingness to consider forgiveness as an option
11. Commitment to forgive the offender

**Work Phase**
12. Reframing, through role-taking, who the wrongdoer is by viewing him or her in context
13. Empathy and compassion toward the offender
14. Bearing/accepting the pain
15. Giving a moral gift to the offender [taking into account personal trust and safety]

**Deepening Phase**
16. Finding meaning for self and others in the suffering and in the forgiveness process
17. Realization that self has needed others’ forgiveness in the past
18. Insight that one is not alone (universality, support)
19. Realization that self may have a new purpose in life because of the injury
20. Awareness of decreased negative affect and, perhaps, increased positive affect, if this begins to emerge, toward the injurer; awareness of internal emotional release

Forgiveness is NOT...

When you remember that forgiveness is a process of personal healing, and you understand the Enright model, you will see that people confuse many thoughts, feelings, and behaviors with forgiveness, when in fact they are not the same. **It becomes clear that...**

**Forgiveness** is not a response to a minor slight; (it follows a deep injury with serious effects).
**Forgiveness** is not simply saying "I forgive you" when one's anger or resentment remain.
**Forgiveness** is not allowing one's negative feelings to diminish with the passage of time;
    (it is a deliberate effort to change one's thoughts, feelings, and behavior).
**Forgiveness** is not a quick and easy substitute for feelings of hatred.
**Forgiveness** is not only mourning (but may include mourning as part of the process).
**Forgiveness** is not allowing an injurer to do whatever he/she wants;
    (it requires the ability to protect oneself).
**Forgiveness** is not forgetting or denying that an injury has occurred;
    (it is unlikely that such deep injuries can be forgotten).
**Forgiveness** is not denying the consequences of the offender's actions;
    (their effects are what has led to the need for forgiveness).
**Forgiveness** is not condoning or excusing an injury.
** Forgiveness** is not tolerating another's injurious action, or "putting up" with injustice;
    (it begins by acknowledging that injustice or unfairness has occurred).
**Forgiveness** is not simply refraining from retaliation; (that is a start, but not enough).
**Forgiveness** is not reminding injurers about their offenses;
    (the tendency to do this diminishes during the process of forgiveness).
**Forgiveness** is not punishment to "pay back" another for an injury; (this diminishes, too).
**Forgiveness** is not re-establishing justice, or restoring fairness;
    (forgiveness cannot un-do the past).
**Forgiveness** does not require that the offender has changed or made amends.
**Forgiveness** is not one's (required) response to an apology or restitution;
    (it is a free decision, whether or not the offender has apologized or provided restitution).
**Forgiveness** is not the reduction, suspension, or commutation of a punishment;
    (even if forgiven, injurers are still responsible for the consequences of their actions).
**Forgiveness** is not legal pardon, mercy, or leniency for a crime.
**Forgiveness** is not for the "weak" or those who seek easy answers; (it takes time and effort).
**Forgiveness** is not denying the consequences of the offender's actions.
**Forgiveness** is not simple, fast, linear, or constant.
**Forgiveness** is not solely self-centered; (in the end, it has a concern for the other person, too).
**Forgiveness** is not the same as reconciliation between two people;
    (it is a personal process, while reconciliation restores a relationship).
**Forgiveness** is not a process of conflict resolution, or conciliation, arbitration, or mediation.
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FORGIVENESS EXERCISE 2

More Reflection Questions

After responding to the reflection questions in Exercise 1, spend some time with pages F2-F5, which consider various definitions and understandings of what interpersonal forgiveness is, and what it is not. Next, review your answers in Exercise 1. Then respond to the following:

After reading those pages, do you think about forgiveness differently?

Did any of your answers in Exercise 1 change because of what you read?

Did anything change that might make forgiveness easier for you?

What still remains hard for you when you think about forgiveness?

What are specific obstacles (emotions, thoughts, behaviors) that get in the way of you forgiving the person(s) that caused your trauma?

What are your reasons for not forgiving that person?
The Process of Forgiveness

Interpersonal forgiveness is a very complex phenomenon. It is much more than saying "I forgive you." It involves the will, and changes in emotions, thoughts, and behavior. Spend some time with page F4 that presents the "components" of a process of forgiveness.

Remember that interpersonal forgiveness is a process, not a one-time event. It takes place over an extended period of time. All of the components of the process may not occur for each injury, and they may not occur in the order presented in the handouts.

Part A. Recall a small injury which you have already forgiven. Reflect upon that experience and how the various components of the forgiveness process did (or did not) occur. Think about the person who caused the injury.

Does the process of interpersonal forgiveness described in the handouts make sense to you?

Does the process seem realistic? Why or why not?

Do some steps seem unnecessary or impossible? Which ones? Why?
Forgiveness Exercise 3 (cont'd)

Part B. Recall another incident in which you were harmed in some way, perhaps more seriously than the injury in part A. Reflect again upon that experience and how the various components of the forgiveness process did (or did not) occur. Think about the person who caused the injury.

Does the process make more (or less) sense to you?

Does the process seem realistic or not? Why or why not?

Do some steps seem unnecessary or impossible? Which ones? Why?

What differences do you notice between the injuries and your process of forgiveness?
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Why Should I Forgive?

"The only way to heal the pain that will not heal itself is to forgive the person who hurts us." (Smedes)

"Forgiving has the power to stop the reruns of the pain and frees us from the bondage to the offender." (Benson)

Religiosity may affect the desire to forgive, but has not been shown actually to affect the process or success to forgive family or close relationships. (Subkoviak)

Forgiveness provides

a. Restoration of sense of personal power, freedom, moral living
   -- show respect for oneself - one who refuses to forgive suffers twice
   -- move toward a less willful, less demanding, less dogmatic self!
   -- acknowledge the difference between persons and their deeds
   -- show respect for others as moral agents

b. Positive change in affect and well-being
   -- release negative emotions (guilt, anger, resentment, sadness, hostility, shame)
   -- improve self-esteem
   -- move beyond fear of rejection and fear of love
   -- move beyond fear of vulnerability
   -- move toward self-forgiveness
   -- free oneself from the perpetuation of harmful repercussions from the injury
   -- increase openness to learning and insight

c. Improved physical and mental health
   -- lower one's state of anxiety

d. Improvement of interpersonal relationships
   -- overcome alienation, isolation, loneliness
   -- move beyond fear of intimacy
   -- move into closeness (being liked and accepted as who we are)
   -- move into intimacy (mutual self-disclosure)
   -- improve one's dealing with other interpersonal hurts
   -- restore integrity to one's relationship to others, and for believers to God
   -- restore and/or renew relationships
   -- free oneself to end or turn away from injurious relationships

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Refusal to Forgive

I may refuse to extend forgiveness because I

- shrink from feeling intense sorrow, hurt, and rage because of wrong done to me.
- wait for or hope offender will change, and thus "earn" my forgiveness.
- want to maintain my anger.
- maintain anger in order to keep the offender at a distance, and to protect myself.
- desire to maintain personal sense of justice and fair retribution.
- am unwilling or unable to accept my own culpability.
- want to deny complicity in helping to bring about the hurtful event by blaming another (projecting my responsibility upon the one who hurt me).

The results of my refusal to forgive may

- adversely affect my own well-being:
  - I may avoid awareness of my refusal to forgive:
  - I may hinder my self-forgiveness by my need to "suffer more;"
  - I may resort to avoidance methods: medications, drugs, work, overeating, alcohol.

- lead to manipulation of others toward feeling sorry for me (gives me "love").

- give the offender power to influence my emotions (rage and resentment).

- give the offender power to influence my relationships
  (e.g., I avoid people who are friendly with the offender).

- adversely influence my relationship with God:
  - I may hinder my reception of forgiveness from God;
  - I may believe that I need to "suffer more" in order to "earn" God's forgiveness;
  - I may not extend forgiveness to God who has not actually "caused" injury;
    (God may lack culpability or responsibility for the harm, e.g. natural disasters).
Objections to Interpersonal Forgiveness

Some people react negatively to the idea of "giving forgiveness" because they think of it...

as **Weakness** in a person incapable of asserting right to justice, who lacks a power to retaliate.

**Response:** Forgiveness should not be confused with timidity or moral feebleness. In fact, forgiveness is a process that requires personal strength (self-acceptance, psychological strength, and respect for the other). It is only achieved after a hard-fought battle.

as a **Power Play** to one-up or dominate the offender, so that the offender "owes me one."

**R.** Forgiveness wipes the slate clean so that parties come together as interpersonal equals. It may require modesty and humility in the forgiver, rather than a sense of superiority.

as a **Reversal of Societal Justice,** and its excess may lead to the perpetuation of crime.

**R.** Forgiveness is confused here with legal mercy or pardon. One may practice forgiveness while still requiring justice.

as a **Block to Personal Justice,** depriving oneself of one's right to justice.

**R.** Forgiveness is a free decision (and may depend on one's decision to pursue justice).

as **Perpetuating Injustice,** because one cannot cancel a wrong that has been done.

**R.** Forgiveness does not cancel the deed, but its distorting affects on one's relations with the wrongdoer and perhaps with others.

as **Inducing Inferiority in the Other**

**R.** Whether or not the offender is aware of the forgiveness does not detract from the gift being given or its misinterpretation.

as **Implying a Lack of Self-Respect** (if one forgives too hastily).

**R.** This is true only as it relates to the speed of the process and not forgiveness itself.

as a **Lack of Respect for Others:** if one is not resentful, one does not respect the offender!

**R.** One's willingness to "cancel the debt" (to reach out in love) is valuing the other person.

as **Alienation,** thereby separating us from our true nature as aggressive beings!

**R.** Is it true that aggression is part of our true nature? More importantly, deep and long-lasting anger itself is alienating to oneself and others. Forgiveness has the potential to restore relationships, rather than alienate.
Objections to Interpersonal Forgiveness (cont'd)

as Producing Hypersensitivity to Hurt, making injuries larger by focusing on them!
R. Forgiveness means an honest look at the pain, not distorting it.

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FORGIVENESS EXERCISE 4

How I Forgive

It is one thing to think about forgiveness, or even want to extend forgiveness, and yet another to actually begin to do it. It is likely that new reasons continue to emerge for why I will not forgive. Spend some time with pages F10-F12 about "the refusal to forgive" and "objections to forgiveness." Then respond to the following:

Do I really want to forgive? Why?

Do I have different reasons for deeper wounds compared to light wounds, or for significant relationships compared to acquaintances and strangers?

What signs (changes in my emotions, thoughts, or behavior) show that I have forgiven someone?

Are there signs or steps that demonstrate when I have not forgiven someone?

How do I feel, think, and behave, when I have not extended forgiveness? What price do I pay?
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FORGIVENESS EXERCISE 5

The Process of Forgiveness – Practicing It!

Use the skills you have learned in RENEW for grounding yourself, holding your feelings, and feeling safe in the present. Then allow yourself to recall a more serious injury.

How have you already started to extend forgiveness toward the person(s)? What are the components of the process that have already taken place?

In what ways have you not yet extended forgiveness toward the person(s)? What are the components of the process that have already taken place?

What component(s) seem to be feasible "next steps?"
1. 
2. 
3. 

What are concrete things that you might do to accomplish each of those "next steps?"
Be creative!
1. a.
   b.
   c.
2. a.
   b.
   c.
Forgiveness Exercise 5 (cont'd)

3. a.
   b.
   c.

Select one or two of the creative possibilities that seem possible for you to do, and write them here:
1.
2.

As you consider these possibilities, what are the possible obstacles or hindrances to doing them?

Are each of those obstacles and hindrances a feeling, a thought, or a behavior? How might you address each of those obstacles or hindrances? For example, can you hold multiple and mixed feelings, or allow yourself to act even while having the feeling? Consider whether your thought might be a cognitive distortion and how you might re-state it to be more accurate or true? What support might you seek in order to enact or adapt your behavior? How will you maintain that behavior if it becomes difficult?

What will it look like if you take a step and overcome those obstacles and hindrances? What might it feel like? What will you be thinking? How will your behavior change? Consider page F18 -- are there some ways you are slipping into pseudo-forgiveness?

It's time to make a decision. What will you do in order to extend your forgiveness? How and when will you do it? Who will you tell? Who will support you?

When you take the next step, consider how it went. How have things changed? Was it worth it? Is there something still to do that will improve that step? Is there something you learned in the process that will help you when you take the next step?
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Obstacles to Forgiveness

- authoritarian homelife or religious environment
- lack of personal experience of forgiveness by others, or toward oneself
- exaggeration of the offense
- lack of a need/desire/willingness to forgive oneself
- refusal to forgive
- self-righteous attitudes: difficult offer forgiveness because humility is required
- use of the Scriptures

Variables Which Affect Forgiveness

- severity of the hurt
- depth of relationship or level of commitment toward the offender
- whether offender acknowledges the offense
- intention of the offender
- frequency of the wrong
- ego-strength of one offended
- one’s own personal history of giving and receiving forgiveness
- personal contact (or lack thereof) with the offender
- will (or decision) to forgive
- psychological qualities and health of the injured party
- moral development of the injured party
- ability to understand forgiveness
- ability to choose a strategy of forgiveness
- the benefit of hatred and anger to one’s identity
- anger as a tool to maintain distance and dissipate loyalty ties with the offender, esp. family
- religiositiy
- obstacles [above]
FORGIVENESS EXERCISE 6

The Process of Forgiveness – The Challenges

The process of interpersonal is not a smooth path with a small incline. It’s more likely a journey of fits and starts and stops, steps forward and a little sliding backwards. As you reflect upon your journey of forgiveness thus far, refer to the list of obstacles and variables on page F16.

Which obstacles seem most obvious in your own process?

How might you address those obstacles in a general way throughout your life?

Which variables seem most pertinent in your process of extending interpersonal forgiveness?

What steps might you take to address those variables?
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Have I Really Forgiven?
Beware of Pseudo Forgiveness!

This expression "pseudo forgiveness" denotes a belief that forgiveness has been extended, but in fact has not happened. Pseudo forgiveness can take a variety of forms, including:

a. *Premature forgiveness* --
   a tendency to forgive too easily or quickly to suppress one's negative feelings.

b. *Identifying with the offender* --
   a belief that the injury was justified: "I would do the same in those circumstances."

c. *Power-seeking* --
   a response of forgiveness so that the other person is in debt to the forgiver.

d. *Condoning* --
   a toleration of the behavior because I have no other choice [e.g., to keep my job].

e. *Denial* --
   a refusal to acknowledge the event, the injury, or the subsequent pain;
   therefore, the injured person can also deny any need to forgive;
   there may be a tendency to let the offense go [to condone or excuse it?]
   which may reduce self-esteem and reduce personal integrity.

f. *Reaction formation* --
   a contradiction between external forgiveness and one's inner reality, blocking anxiety;
   if anxiety were manifested, it would force the injured to confront the inner emotions;
   then "forgiveness" masks and perpetuates the despair, rather than offering release,
   e.g., a "saint" claims to have forgiven but harbors resentment, mistrust, and blame.

g. *Projection* --
   a transference of one's own sense of imperfection onto another (innocent) person
   e.g., a forgiver first condemns the other, and then "forgives" the other!

h. *Distancing* --
   keeping one's distance after having "forgiven" in the fear or risk of being hurt again

i. *Fantasy* --
   imagining the perfection of the offender and therefore forgiving the imperfections,
   e.g., a child imagines parents as perfect, and therefore forgives their abuse.
Forgiveness and Humility: A Living Example

An incident in the life of Corrie TenBoom

"Corrie Ten Boom was a member of the Dutch resistance during the Second World War. She and her family were captured and sentenced to Nazi prison camps where they experienced great privation. By the war's end, Corrie was a sole survivor from her family. After the war, she toured the world with a message of forgiveness.

"In one anecdote, she had just finished a talk on forgiveness when she was approached by an old man. He confessed to being a guard in one of the prison camps, and he asked Corrie to grant him forgiveness on behalf of the Jews and members of the resistance whom he had harmed. Although he did not recognize Corrie, Corrie recognized him. He was a guard at the camp where she had been prisoner. Rage, resentment, and desire for revenge flooded through her. Forgiveness was the last response she could muster. Then she thought, I have just finished a talk on forgiveness, yet I'm willing to condemn this man to everlasting hell. Surely, my offence against him is as great as anything he might have done. After recognizing her own imperfection, Corrie, in humility, extended forgiveness to the man."

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FORGIVENESS EXERCISE 7

The Process of Forgiveness

Read page F19. Corrie Ten Boom's life and example stand as an example of grievous harm and deep forgiveness. How do you respond (your feelings, thoughts, behaviors) to this incident?

The process of extending forgiveness is really a "way of life." Yet the most difficult and lengthy process may be granting forgiveness to the person who perpetrated your trauma. You have already practiced the steps above. When you are ready, you can begin to use them as you remember the trauma and the person(s) who harmed you so grievously.

Summary of the steps (for further explanation, refer to Exercise 5):

Use the skills you have learned in RENEW for grounding yourself, holding your feelings, accepting multiple and mixed feelings, and feeling safe in the present. Then allow yourself to recall your own injury and, finally, the person who harmed you.

a. How have you already started to extend forgiveness toward the person(s)? What are the components of the process that have already taken place?

b. In what ways have you not yet extended forgiveness toward the person(s)? What are the components of the process that have already taken place?

c. What component(s) seem to be feasible "next steps?"

d. What are concrete things that you might do to accomplish each of those steps? Be creative!

e. Select and write down one or two of the creative possibilities that seem possible for you to do.

f. As you consider the possibilities, what are the possible obstacles or hindrances to doing them?

g. Are each of those obstacles and hindrances a feeling, a thought, or a behavior? How might you address each of those obstacles or hindrances? Can you hold mixed and multiple feelings, or allow yourself to act even while having the feeling? Do you have any cognitive distortions and how might you re-state them to be more accurate or true? What support might you seek in order to enact or adapt your behavior? How will you maintain that behavior if it becomes difficult?
Forgiveness Exercise 7 (cont'd)

h. What will it look like if you take a step and overcome those obstacles and hindrances? What might it feel like? What will you be thinking? How will your behavior change? Consider page F18 -- are there some ways you are slipping into pseudo-forgiveness?

i. It's time to make decision. What will you do in order to extend your forgiveness? How and when will you do it? Who will you tell? Who will support you?

j. Take time to reflect on the process. When you take the next step, consider how it went. How have things changed? Was it worth it? Is there something still to do that will improve that step? Is there something you learned in the process that will help you when you take the next step?

k. Repeat as necessary.
The Process of Forgiveness – Only for Those who Dare!

In the process of forgiveness, there are some components that people find especially difficult. They require a closer examination of the person who has caused the injury. Here are a couple of "dangerous questions" to consider when you are ready!

Use the skills you have learned in RENEW for grounding yourself, holding your feelings, accepting multiple and mixed feelings, and feeling safe in the present. Then allow yourself to recall your own injury, and the person who harmed you.

What factors in the offender's life contributed to the behavior which injured you? What was the offender's life history? What pressures and/or the extenuating circumstances contributed to the harmful behavior that you suffered?

Do you have some understanding or even empathy for your offender? Are there other people who are similar to your offender, and how do you respond to them?

How are you and your offender different from one another?

Are there ways that you and your offender are similar to one another?

What insights have you gained about yourself, and about the person who harmed you?
Misunderstanding the Christian Scriptures about Forgiveness

One difficulty for some Christians is the different assumptions they make about interpersonal forgiveness. Some of their assumptions flow from varied approaches to the interpretation of Scriptures among Christian denominations and individuals. This is true both for clients and therapists. Some of those assumptions can cause great harm.

First, misunderstanding what interpersonal forgiveness is can create problems. For example, interpersonal forgiveness does not require anyone to "tolerate" someone's sin. Care must be taken that "codependents" do not use forgiveness to justify living with dysfunctional or harmful behavior. Christianity does not teach that a person should never suffer the consequences of their behavior. Nor does it preach that all criminals must be forgiven and therefore released from prison; they have an obligation to repair or restore the harm done.

Second, misusing Scripture may move a person toward inappropriate or pseudo-forgiveness. For example, a therapist may tell a client to "turn the other cheek" (Matthew 5: 39). It is better to note that Jesus himself did not always turn his cheek! Consider, for example, his dialogue with the Pharisees (Matthew 12: 34-37), and his encounter with the money changers (John 2: 14-17). Remember, there is no Christian duty to tolerate sinful, harmful, or dysfunctional behavior.

Third, overemphasis on the decision to forgive can short-circuit the actual process of forgiveness. For example, some say, "Don't let the sun go down on your anger" (Ephesians 4:26). However, it is better to give that passage a non-literal meaning, and apply it in a more general way: we ought to be expedient in taking care of our issues and the injuries we have caused others. We ought to avoid promoting premature forgiveness or "pseudo-forgiveness" [see page F10].

Finally, note that forgiveness is a process (not a single moment). For example, God's grieving over the infidelity of Israel (Hosea 11:8-9). Forgiveness takes time!

exercise continues on next page
Forgiveness Exercise 9 (cont’d)

For your personal reflection: the Scriptures and forgiveness

Read the conclusion of the epic story of Joseph (Genesis 50: 15-21). How does Joseph’s forgiveness of his brothers compare and contrast to the components of the process of interpersonal forgiveness?

Read the story of the loving Father and his two sons (Luke 15: 11-32). How do the components of the process of interpersonal forgiveness underlie the father’s forgiveness and the brother’s lack of forgiveness?