

# Helping a Disciple Forgive Others

Very early in the discipling process, the disciple should forgive someone who offended him so that he experiences how his own act of obedience, intersects with the grace and power of God. In many instances, a disciple will begin his time with you by sharing his anger or discouragement about someone important in his life. In order for him to progress in his sanctification, he must be confronted with his need to forgive or he will remain “stuck” in his bitterness and continue to “vent,” blame others and remain entrenched in self-pity or suppression. Therefore, we highly recommend that you give the homework assignment to write a list to forgive someone who offended your disciple *in the first session*. (By the second or third session, he should be praying to forgive the offender first.)

However, you may have a disciple who is an effective suppresser and does not feel the emotions of anger or self-pity. Yet, the offense *should have* elicited emotional pain. The suppresser must also be led through forgiving, which will help him to face and deal with reality God’s way. Neither the outwardly angry disciple, nor the one who has suppressed, has biblically dealt with the offender and the offenses. Both types have turned to their own resources. Forgiving is not only commanded by God, it is *imperative* to get your disciple moving toward a deeper relationship with God and others. You should lead your disciple to forgive a difficult offender, who is a key person in the disciple’s life, during one of the first few meetings.

Hopefully, as your disciple chooses to forgive, he will then see that though God’s commands may seem extremely difficult, the Holy Spirit’s power is experienced as he takes steps of faith to obey. He begins to understand that God’s goal is to teach him how to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). The expectation is set that not only are you and your disciple going to communicate about problems, but action is going to be taken to deal with them in accordance with God’s Word.

## I. **Biblical information about forgiveness:**

A. Forgiveness is the crux of our relationship with God.

1. We cannot have a relationship with our Heavenly Father without forgiveness through Christ’s finished work. (Ps. 103:10)
2. We cannot have a meaningful relationship with each other without the ingredient of forgiveness.
  - a. It is the **most** essential ingredient to a relationship since we are all sinners, who repeatedly sin against each other.
  - b. There will be a severed relationship or a relationship with a barrier unless forgiveness takes place.
  - c. Forgiveness is the “glue” that can keep a relationship together.
3. God views the sin of unforgiveness as extremely important.
  - a. Unforgiveness is one of the few specific sins a believer can commit to which the Lord attaches many specific negative consequences. (Mark 11:25,26)

***“For if you forgive others for their transgressions,  
your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others,  
then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”***

**Matt. 6:14,15**

## HELPING A DISCIPLE FORGIVE OTHERS

It is interesting that unforgiveness is the **only** sin a believer can commit for which God does not forgive him until he forgives others. This passage is clearly directed toward the believer since God is addressed as “your heavenly Father.” Even the “Lord’s Prayer” contains a contingency. “Forgive us our debts *as* we also have forgiven our debtors.” (Matt. 6:12) For further clarification on this passage, see the *Positional/Fellowship* diagram.

- b. Refusal to forgive often results in giving Satan or demonic forces a gateway or foothold on our hearts, opening us to his schemes. (Eph. 4:26,27; 2 Cor. 2:9-11)
  - c. Pride is the root of unforgiveness. It is prideful and arrogant not to forgive because one is ultimately saying,
    - (1). “I will remain in the superior, controlling position by not forgiving.”
    - (2). “I will continue to hold your sin over you. I will defy God by judging you.” (Luke 6:36,37)
    - (3). “I believe my sins before God are not as great as yours. I don’t understand God’s forgiveness of me. Therefore, I really don’t believe that the ground is level at the foot of the cross and that apart from Christ’s finished work, I stand equally condemned with my offender.”
- C. Forgiveness is one of the **major** keys of the victorious Christian life.
1. Without forgiveness of others, our relationship with God is hindered. (Mark 11:25,26; Matt. 6:14,15)
  2. Without forgiveness, we cannot have a meaningful relationship with the offender.
  3. Without forgiveness, the impact of bitterness may adversely affect many lives. (Heb. 12:15)
  4. Without forgiveness, we are tempted to seek revenge. (Rom. 12:17-21)
  5. Without forgiveness, we will nurture a superior, judgmental attitude toward the offender. (Phil. 2:3; Prov. 16:18; Luke 6:36,37)
  6. Without forgiveness, we may gossip and slander. (Prov. 20:19; Col. 3:8; 1 Pet. 2:1)
  7. Without forgiveness, our Christian walk is encumbered because we become entangled in bitterness, malice, suppression, hostility, slander, withdrawal, repaying evil for evil, etc. (Heb. 12:1; Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8)
  8. Without forgiveness, we are not emotionally free. We become our own jailers, imprisoned by bitterness, hatred and/or suppression. (John 8:31b,32; Matt. 18:34,35)
  9. Without forgiveness, we cannot love unconditionally. (1 John 5:11,12,20,21; 1 Pet. 1:22)
  10. Without forgiveness, we cannot obey Christ’s command to love our enemies. (Luke 6:27-36)
  11. Without forgiveness, we can not honor all men. (1 Pet. 2:17)
  12. Without forgiveness, we reject God’s sovereign plan for our lives, which includes the offender and offenses. (Eph. 1:11; Ps. 115:3)

## HELPING A DISCIPLE FORGIVE OTHERS

- D. God's forgiveness of the believer cost Christ His life on Calvary.
1. Forgiveness is *costly* to the one who forgives.
    - a. It is an act of selfless love which covers a multitude of sins. (1 Pet. 4:8)
    - b. It is an act of mercy, which is *withholding* what someone deserves and of grace, which is *giving* them what they do not deserve.
      - 1) We are to have mercy on the offender as God has mercy on us. (Matt. 18:33)
      - 2) The merciful will be blessed and shown mercy. (Matt. 5:7; Luke 6:37,38)
  2. We bear the pain of someone else's sin ourselves. Then we are able to pass that burden on to Christ, so we are free from the pain.

***“Cast your burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain you;  
He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.”***

**Ps. 55:22 NASB**

*“We forgive...*

*We yank our wills to obedience. We acquiesce to bearing the pain and then find that He has taken our distresses upon Himself. We experience release, the person we have hated is unbound. There is joy in the looking back. We become able to love. Nothing is impossible with God.”*

*Key to an Open Heart*

Karen Burton Mains

- E. Forgiveness does not necessarily release the offender from consequences, admonishment and/or discipline.
1. God forgives the believer, yet often there are consequences for our sinful choices. 2 Sam. 12:13,14 is an example of the direct consequences of David's sin.

***“You can choose your sin. God will choose your consequences.” (Gal. 6:7)***
  2. The believer may need to admonish for the sake of the offender, even though he has forgiven his transgressor. Encourage your disciple to
    - a. strike the balance between overlooking sin and rebuking. (Prov. 19:11; Lev. 19:17)
    - b. forgive *before* admonishing an offender. When preparing someone to admonish, always make sure he has forgiven the one who has sinned against him, so he can confront without bitterness or anger.
  3. Those in positions of authority may need to discipline the offender after forgiving him.
    - a. God requires parents to discipline their children when needed. (Prov. 19:18; Prov. 23:13)
    - b. God commands the Church to discipline the rebel. (Matt. 19:17; 1 Cor. 5)
    - c. Discipline is an act of love. (Heb. 12:7-11)

## HELPING A DISCIPLE FORGIVE OTHERS

4. God may lead the believer to not enable an offender to continue to sin even though he has forgiven.
  5. The offender may not be trustworthy even though he is forgiven. Do not equate forgiveness with trust. They are two separate issues. (Ps. 118:8,9)
- F. The all-encompassing (no loopholes!) command of God in Mark 11:25 is to forgive *anyone* a person has *anything* against, which includes both the living and the dead.

### II. Order for forgiving:

- A. There are three strands involving forgiveness: forgiving others, seeking God's forgiveness, and seeking the forgiveness of others (reconciliation).
- B. The disciple needs to forgive an offender *before* he seeks God's forgiveness for his own sin against that person. Forgive *first*, then confess sins to God so that he can be forgiven.
  1. This is God's order! (Matt. 6:12,14,15; Mark 11:25,26)
  2. This step of forgiving the offender first, usually leads to a greater understanding of his own sin.
    - a. He is released from focusing on the offender and his sin.
    - b. He, while in the act of forgiving the offender, may realize, "I've done that, too."
    - c. He is less likely to excuse his own *responsive sins* in the light of what the offender has done to him.

### III. Preparation for the commitment to forgive:

- A. Ask the disciple to share his "story" in the first session. Usually that account will reveal the first person he needs to forgive.
- B. Direct the disciple to begin with a *key relationship* that is obviously the most difficult.
  1. Begin with one person.
  2. The discipler or the disciple may choose which person to forgive first.
- C. Assign homework to write a list of ways the offender has sinned against and/or hurt the disciple.
- D. Instruct him to include the following on his list:
  1. *personality traits* that are sinful, such as being a controller, an intimidator, cold, unaffectionate, never admitting he was wrong, etc.
  2. *specific words or incidents* that were particularly hurtful.
  3. *grievances or complaints* against the offender. (Col. 3:13)
    - a. The Greek for these words encompass more than just sin.
    - b. God commands forgiveness, "... ***if you hold anything against anyone.***" (Mark 11:25; Col. 3:13)
    - c. God commands us to get rid of *sinful responses* such as bitterness, anger, malice, etc. These may be caused by an offender's sin, perceived sin or things

## HELPING A DISCIPLE FORGIVE OTHERS

that are not sin. (Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8; Heb. 12:15)

**Note:** For instance, irritating habits may not be sin, but still need to be forgiven because in response to them, resentment, impatience, superiority, judgmental attitudes, etc. are produced. These are attitudes and behaviors God commands us to get rid of. The *means* of being freed from them is through forgiving. (John 8:31,32)

4. *ways the offender hurt others*, such as siblings, mother, father, children, friends, etc., which, in turn, angered or hurt your disciple. (Mark 11:25)
5. *perceived sins and motives*.
  - a. Whether it was really sin or not, it impacted his life as painful, and the disciple needs to be released through forgiveness. (Mark 11:25)
  - b. If you see fear of rejection patterns and/or super-sensitivity to how people respond to him, gently show him that the perceived sin of the offenders may not be valid. Usually you will do this over a period of time after you have gathered more data and he has forgiven perceived sins.
  - c. If the disciple is not sure the sin took place, but it *appears* it did, he should forgive. Forgive by saying, "I forgive (name) for **apparently** or **probably** (name the offense).
6. *sexual sins* in courtship and marriage when forgiving a spouse or partner's sexual sin.

**Note:** When discipling an individual who is preparing a list for his/her spouse, ask him/her to include sexual sin if it took place in courtship.
- E. Instruct him to *first* write the things that come to his mind on a list, asking God to help him recall. Then he should use the *Forgiveness Checklist* as a tool to further develop his list.
  1. Give your disciple the checklist which can be obtained on the CTO website.
  2. Give your disciple a new copy of the checklist for each offender he forgives or ask him to download it from the website.
- F. Share with him that the more specific his list is, the more specific will be his commitment to forgive. This usually results in a more complete freedom from the hurt and bitterness.

### IV. Expanding the list:

- A. Ask the disciple to read aloud the list he has written and those he has checked.
- B. Expand his list. The data gathering tool, *Expanding a Forgiveness List, CTD*, is available for your use on the CTO website.
  1. Go over specific recorded data or what information has already been shared, pointing out various aspects of the offender's sin. If the disciple agrees, write it on the list.
  2. Correct euphemisms with biblical terms. Examples:

## HELPING A DISCIPLE FORGIVE OTHERS

<u>Euphemism</u>	<u>Biblical term</u>
alcoholic	drunkard
affair	adultery
sexual relationship	fornication
abortion	killing a child
suicide/suicidal	killed himself or wanting to kill himself
overeating	gluttony

3. Do not allow terms as “He *made* me” or “He *caused* me to sin,” on the disciple’s list. Instead say, “He *influenced* me to (name the sin).” For instance, “I forgive my dad for *influencing* me to be a people-pleaser.”

### V. Forgiveness teaching:

- A. Ask your disciple to read aloud and discuss the principles and scriptures in *Forgiving Others, Sections I – IV* after expanding his list.
- B. Scripture should *always* precede the acts of obedience. If time does not allow for teaching of forgiveness principles and scriptures, then postpone the teaching until the next session.
  1. Ask your disciple to explain the meaning or you offer explanations to clarify his understanding.
  2. Personalize the commands by asking from time to time, “What is God saying to you in this verse?” or “What is God telling you to do in this passage?”
- C. Instruct him that he is actually making the commitment to forgive now and to say, “I forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for (name the sin).” Say those words separately for each sin instead of grouping sins together.

**Note:** Do not teach these concepts of forgiveness again after the first offender is forgiven. For subsequent lists, refresh the disciple’s memory about the three-fold commitment he is ready to make. Then ask him to read one or more verses about forgiving from *Section IV*, before praying to forgive another person.

### VI. Prayer of commitment:

- A. Open in prayer, asking God to free the forgiver from all bondages of bitterness, anger, self-pity, suppression or whatever applies to the situation.
- B. Pray silently, as your disciple forgives each offense that he will be released or freed from the impact of this sin.
- C. Feel free to interrupt his prayer to
  1. correct him if he says 2 or 3 times, “Help me to forgive” or “I want to forgive.” Instead he should say, “I forgive \_\_\_\_\_” as a commitment.
  2. add anything the Holy Spirit brings to mind that is not on the list.
- D. Close in prayer. Cover the concepts (without reading them to your disciple) in *Forgiving Others, VI*, with your disciple.

## HELPING A DISCIPLE FORGIVE OTHERS

### VII. Acting on the commitment:

- A. Explain his need to *act* on the 3-fold commitment by renewing his mind.
- B. Assign *Renewing Your Mind Outline, CTO* if the disciple has not already memorized it. Emphasize his need to utilize it when tempted to dwell on the sins he has just forgiven.
  1. Share that he does not forgive again for the offense just forgiven, but he needs to ask God's forgiveness for desiring to dwell on it.
  2. Tell him to "force his mind" by thanking God for the very transgression that is upsetting, angering or creating self-pitying in him. (Eph. 5:20)
  3. Encourage him to pray for love and compassion toward his offender.

**Note:** Most disciples experience an immediate release when they have completed their commitment to forgive. However, some do not. In those cases, you must encourage them to frequently *act* on their commitment by renewing their mind until the Holy Spirit chooses in His timing, to release them. Remember the believer's responsibility is to commit to forgiveness. The Holy Spirit's role is to bring freedom and healing, as he acts on that decision. (John 8:31,32)

- C. Assign the remainder of *Forgiving Others, VII - XI*, as homework.
- D. Do not forget at some point in the future to have your disciple to memorize the *1-2-3-4-5 Memory Outline, CTO*, to be utilized when he is being offended by others in a stressful situation. It is particularly useful if he has an ongoing relationship with the person forgiven, but faces repeated and continuing offenses.
  1. Do not assign this too close to the time he is memorizing and beginning to practice *Renewing Your Mind Outline, CTO*, or he may confuse them.
  2. He needs to learn how to keep current with his forgiveness by frequently forgiving the offender in prayer as new offenses come to mind, occur or former ones reoccur.
- E. There may be situations in which a disciple, living with a frequently offending person,
  1. needs to write another list for that person to acknowledge repetitive transgressions since his last commitment to forgive was made.
  2. should meet with his discipler every few months, or as anger builds, to make another commitment.

### VIII. Dealing with resistance:

**Note:** Many Christians will *say* they have forgiven. However, some don't know how and others have forgiven in a general way, but greater freedom is experienced through being more specific and having a witness. Therefore, we require every CTO disciple to go through the forgiveness lists on key people in their lives. The following are common objections and possible answers for these objections:

- *"I don't want to drag up the past."*

**Answer:** "God wants us to face emotional pain head-on and to deal with it biblically. Our past experiences can greatly impact our present lives, including the way we view God and others and the way we make decisions. God commands us to be free of bitterness, anger, malice, etc. (Read Eph. 4:31).

## HELPING A DISCIPLE FORGIVE OTHERS

Many of our sinful attitudes, which are evident in our lives, stem from things that have happened in the past. We are not going to spend extensive time discussing past transgressions against you, but we need to list them so you can forgive and be emotionally freed from your past.”

- “I’ve already forgiven. I don’t have any bitterness or anger toward \_\_\_\_\_.”

*Answer:* “I don’t doubt that you have forgiven. Many times people have forgiven, but their forgiveness may not be complete. I will help you to make a list that will be very specific in the offenses you forgive. I want you to fully understand what the scriptures say about the subject and how to apply them so that your forgiveness is **complete**. We want to lay your past to rest so it does not impinge on your present circumstances. Since you have forgiven, this should not be a painful exercise.” (Heb. 12:1)

- “I am here to be trained.”

*Answer:* For those who are going through CTO to train others, you can say, “I don’t doubt that you have forgiven. But since you will be leading others through this experience, will you be willing to do this as part of your training?”

- A. The disciple may refuse to go through forgiving even with explanations.
  1. Terminate the discipleship or it will result in just being a Bible study, discussing the lessons each week.
  2. Remember, one of the core values of CTO is the *application* of God’s word. Therefore, most of CTO’s biblical principles are learned through experience, which produces transformation.
  3. Suggest kindly that other discipling methodologies may be more compatible with his expectations and desires.
- B. Do not be covered or intimidated by his pressure to continue discipling without the *acts* of obedience.
- C. Encourage the suppresser who fears or resists this assignment because it may be painful that he needs to acknowledge the pain, which he has “stuffed” and deal with it God’s way.
  1. *Suppression* is the *counterfeit* for biblical forgiveness.
    - a. The disciple may *feel* no pain, bitterness or anger.
    - b. The suppressor becomes adept in learning ways to block pain to protect himself.
  2. A suppresser needs to write a list of ways he’s been sinned against, regardless of whether he is hurting, embittered, angry, self-pitying or not.
- D. The discipler gives **hope** that praying with a witness to forgive will bring results.

### IX Steps for an individual: *Initial Six Sessions for an Individual, CTD*

- A. First, the individual forgives, for example, his father. (Forgiveness list)
- B. Next, the disciple must seek *God’s forgiveness* for how he sinned against his father. (Confession list)



## HELPING A DISCIPLE FORGIVE OTHERS

- C. Then, he must seek his father's forgiveness for his own sin against his father.  
(Reconciliation list)

**Note:** Go through the above steps with his father (or whomever). Complete the three steps of forgiveness before going to the next person who needs to be forgiven.

### X. Steps for a couple or two people: *Initial Six Sessions for a Couple or Two People, CTD*

- A. Please read these instructions for these sessions carefully as they differ from an individual.
- B. Realize that a couple's initial sessions differ from an individual's in the manner in which forgiveness is approached.
1. Each spouse lists the ways he or she sinned against the other.
  2. Each spouse seeks forgiveness of the other. Then they seek God's forgiveness in the following session.

**Note:** When asking them to list ways each sinned against his/her spouse, tell them to include *sexual sin* if it took place in the courtship.

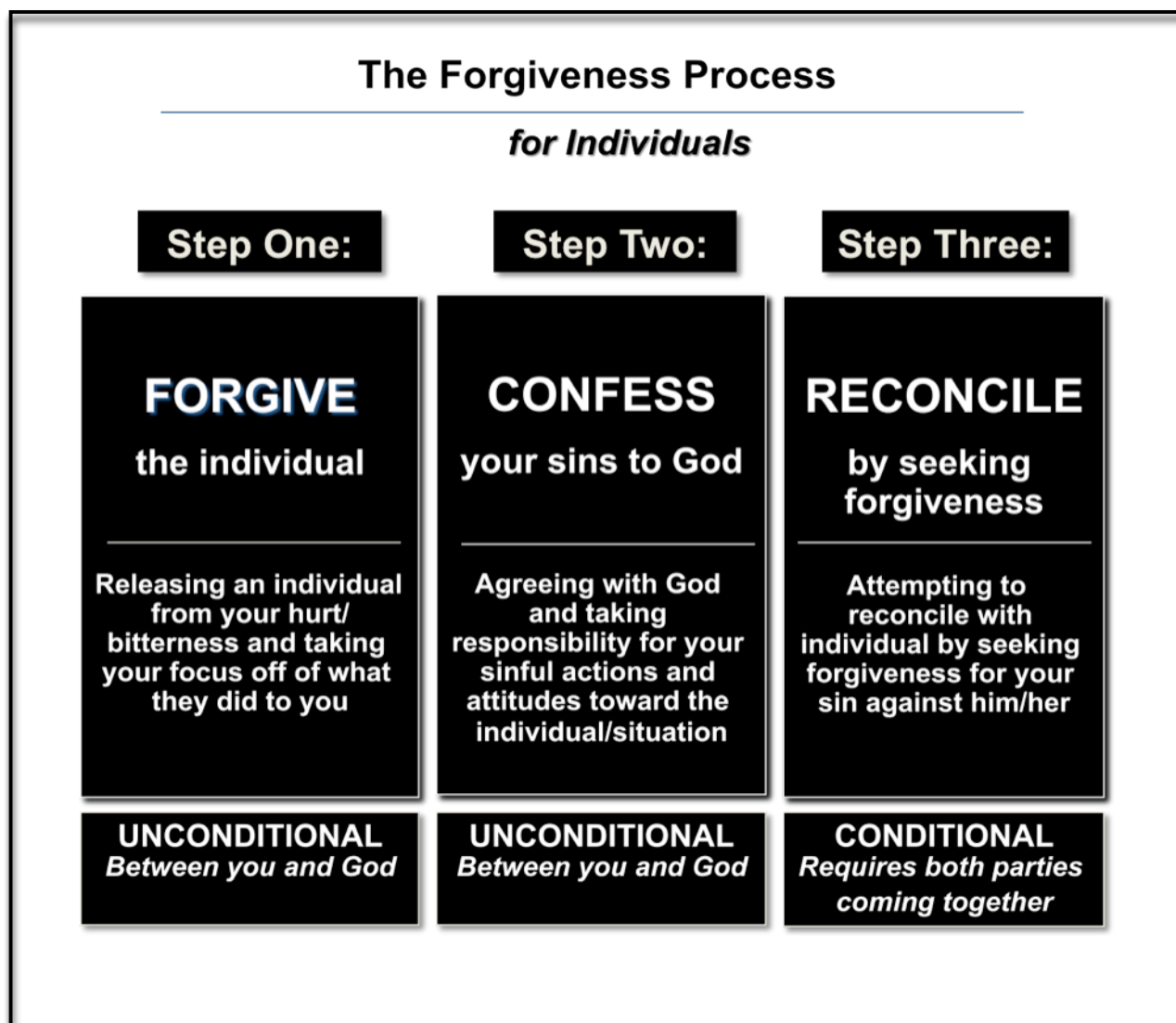
- C. After they have forgiven each other, work with them together, as often as possible, in forgiving others.
1. For instance, if the wife is forgiving her mother, the husband can prepare a forgiveness list on the same person, which is his mother-in-law.
  2. Even though many of the transgressions on both of their lists may be the same, they each forgive individually.

**Note:** Please study the diagrams at the end of this lesson, which will help you understand the different approaches used with an individual or a couple.

### XI. Recommendations:

- A. *All* disciples are to forgive:
1. Key people: spouse, parents, in-laws, ex spouses, older children, whether or not they had a negative impact or only a few things need to be forgiven
  2. Other people whose sin significantly impacted the disciple a negative way
  3. Those on the "Fast Track for leaders will usually only work through two key relationships.
- B. Parents and others are to be forgiven for *influencing* the disciple to certain behaviors and attitudes.
- C. In-laws are to be forgiven for how they negatively *influenced* the spouse's behaviors, attitudes and control strategies, whether or not the disciple knew them.

## HELPING A DISCIPLE FORGIVE OTHERS



## *Preparing Your Disciple to Forgive an Individual*

### Step One:

#### **FORGIVE the individual**

1. Have disciple write a personal list of ways he has sinned against the person he forgave
2. Have disciple add to list utilizing the *Confession Checklist*
3. Have disciple read his list to you - Expand this list
4. Summarize Section I-II in *Confessing Sin*; have disciple read Section III; summarize Section IV
5. Read/discuss verses about God's forgiveness
6. Have disciple confess sins to God with you as his witness

### Step Two:

#### **CONFESS their sins to God**

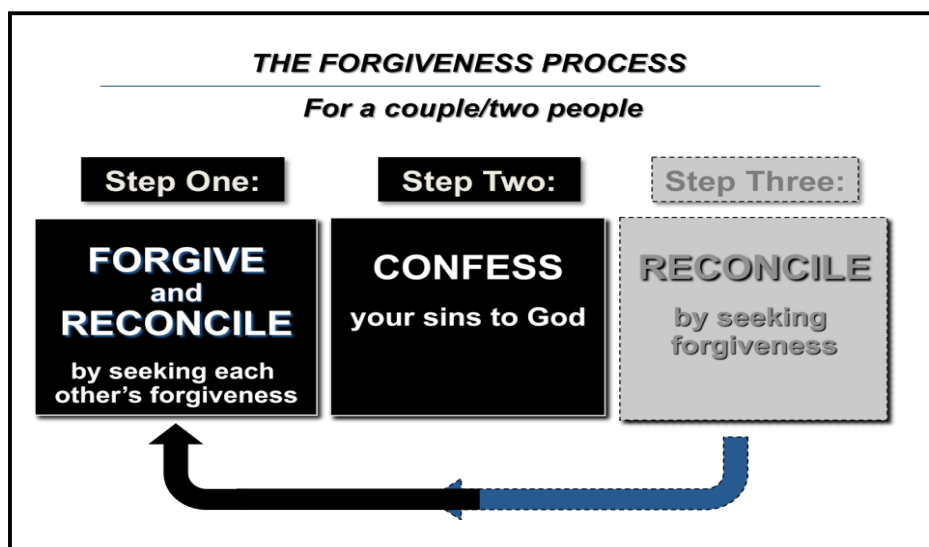
1. Have disciple to write a personal list of ways individual has sinned against/hurt him
2. Have disciple add to list utilizing the *Forgiveness Checklist*
3. Have disciple read his list to you - Expand this list
4. Read/discuss sections I-IV in *Forgiving Others*
5. Have disciple forgive individual in prayer with you as his witness
6. Remind disciple to uphold 3-fold commitment
7. Explain *Renewing Your Mind Outline* and have him memorize/practice it

### Step Three:

#### **RECONCILE by seeking forgiveness**

1. Condense his Confession List into the sins for which he needs to seek forgiveness
2. Instruct disciple how to seek forgiveness
3. Address fears and possible scenarios if necessary
4. Have disciple seek reconciliation
5. Encourage disciple to
  - Leave the outcome of the relationship to God
  - Practice biblical love toward other person
  - Forgive any new offenses
  - Practice renewing his mind

## HELPING A DISCIPLE FORGIVE OTHERS



### Step One:

## FORGIVE RECONCILE

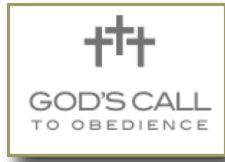
1. Have each person write a personal list of ways he/she has sinned against the other
2. Have them add to their list utilizing the *Confession Checklist*
3. Have each read his/her list to you  
- Expand lists in presence of both
4. Read/discuss sections I-IV in *Forgiving Others*
5. Have each person seek forgiveness of the other person with you as their witness
6. Remind them to uphold 3-fold commitment
7. Explain *Renewing Your Mind Outline* and have them memorize and practice as needed

### Step Two:

## CONFESS their sins to God

1. Use Reconciliation List as their Confession List
2. Read/discuss sections I-II in *Confessing Sin*
3. Have disciple read Section III
4. Summarize Section IV
5. Read/discuss verses about God's forgiveness from *Confessing Sin*
6. Have disciple confess sins to God with you as their witness
7. Read follow-up verses if time
8. Encourage them to continue to seek each other's forgiveness

## HELPING A DISCIPLE FORGIVE OTHERS



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

You have discovered through your own experience with forgiving how important this act of obedience is to your relationship with God and with the one who offended you. Therefore, you want to be adequately prepared to assist your disciple in his commitments to forgive.

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#### SECTION ONE : FORGIVENESS ISSUES

1. Why is forgiveness so important?
2. Why is biblical forgiveness rarely practiced today?
3. What are some reasons why forgiveness should be addressed early in the discipling process?
4. Should forgiveness of those who have offended the disciple prior to one's salvation be addressed? Why or why not?
5. What are some common reasons for not forgiving someone?

## HELPING A DISCIPLE FORGIVE OTHERS

### SECTION TWO: THE DISCIPLER'S ROLE

1. Why should a forgiveness list be specific and thorough versus more general in nature?
2. What is the discipler's role in the forgiveness process and why is it important?
3. Why is it important for you to continue throughout the discipling process to hold your disciple accountable to forgive all those in key relationships to him, as well as any other relationship where bitterness or suppression exist?
4. What can you do if your disciple has already prayed through a forgiveness list but does not appear free from resentment or bitterness?