

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership
Leader's Guide

FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

LESSON 2: HEALING HURTS

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Disciple Essentials module titled Forgiveness and Reconciliation. It can be difficult to accept God's forgiveness in our lives and extend forgiveness to others. Forgiving others goes against our natural inclination. But as we allow God to change our hearts and minds, we can experience reconciliation with God and with one another. This module explores the Biblical foundations of forgiveness, the process required for reconciliation, and how to promote living at peace with one another. It also examines forgiveness as it may be required between individuals or members of a community.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audience for these lessons is Christians who are maturing in their faith and desiring to serve God. The lessons will be especially helpful to those who are pastors, church leaders, mentors or teachers, but also anyone wishing to grow in their relationship with God.

The Leader's Guide is intended to help you as a leader in your preparation. These lesson outlines may be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials found online at www.discipleshipessentials.org.

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FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

LESSON 2: HEALING HURTS

PURPOSE

This lesson will examine how the Christian should respond to sins committed against them. It will identify how sin's destructive nature impacts our relationships with others, and the necessary stages of healing.

LEADER'S NOTE

You may not know anything about your participants, or you may have known them for many years. But it is likely that you don't know the deep emotional wounds that they carry. This lesson may trigger strong emotions or memories for which they will need time to process. Sometimes we are unaware of our hurts until we verbalize them. There is great power in proclaiming Jesus' victory over sin – including the sins that have hurt us in the past. Concentrate on the hope found in Jesus, and the sufficiency of God for our every need, including emotional ones! Our enemy would like to keep us in perpetual grief and anger rather than acceptance, forgiveness, and even praise. Emphasize that healing is a process, and that it is worth the effort to face fears and pains of our past in order to bring glory to God, and experience peace and wholeness!

INTRODUCTION

Select two or three of the following questions to ask the group.

- ❖ Have you ever had a physical wound or injury that required the assistance of a medical professional? What would have happened without medical attention?
- ❖ Have you ever met someone who recovered from a life situation you thought would be impossible? What was their situation and what is their life like now?
- ❖ Are you inclined to talk about a past hurt, or keep it inside? Which do you think is healthier? Can either of these methods lead to true healing, or neither of them?
- ❖ Would you find it harder to deal with a lifetime physical ailment or an intense emotional wound? Why might one be more difficult than the other?



STUDY

Instruct the group on the following points.

TEACH:

- ❖ **How We Hurt:** We live in a world where each of us has hurts. We come to God with brokenness, rejection, inadequacy and trauma; from all these things God longs to give us peace and set us free. Our burdens and hurts can even bring us into closer relationship with Him. However, if we do not give these over to Him, our hurts can destroy us.
 - Emotional hurts lie deep within us. They can be concealed, but they won't be healed unless they are properly acknowledged, and God is sought in the healing process.
 - God created us and knows everything about us. In His Word, He says that it is easier to endure physical sickness than a crushed spirit (or emotional wound) ([Proverbs 18:14](#)). Read these verses about our spiritual wounds:
 - o [Psalm 34:17-20](#)
 - o [James 5:14](#)
 - o [Psalm 147:2-3](#)
 - o [Psalm 34:18](#)
 - o [Philippians 4:19](#)
 - o [Jeremiah 30:17](#)
 - o [1 Peter 5:10](#)
 - An important step in forgiving others and being reconciled to them is to seek healing for our own spiritual wounds. As we can see from the previous verses, God desires to heal us. We must open ourselves to Him in order to find peace.
- ❖ **The Destructive Power of Sin:** The results of sin can be damaging (physically, mentally, and emotionally). Sin is at the root of actions that cause harm.
 - Every person will have different hurts, and there are too many to be named. But here are some examples:
 - o Rejection
 - o Abandonment
 - o Abuse (physical, emotional or sexual)
 - o Neglect
 - o Violence and torture
 - o Shame and Ridicule
 - o War and terrorism
 - o Embarrassment
 - o Manipulation or control
 - o Slavery
 - o Poverty
 - Every person is affected by negative things that are said to them and done to them. These wounds may resurface as emotional or even physical problems. Some of these are:
 - o Anxiety
 - o Depression
 - o Addictions
 - o Difficulty with intimacy
 - o Anger
 - o Eating disorders



- o Psychiatric disorders
 - o Abusing others
 - o Phobias and worry
 - o Sexual confusion
 - o Destructive choices
 - o Self-harm / suicide
 - o Unhealthy relationships
- Two people can undergo the same life circumstances with very different results. We cannot know the effect sins (harmful actions) will have on us, but we do know they always bring with them death and destruction. Sin breaks wholeness. Forgiveness stops sin from hurting us further, but we must understand the destructive power of sin in order to forgive. Sin breaks God's heart – it should break ours also!
- o Romans 6:23
 - o Romans 5:12
 - o Isaiah 59:2
 - o James 1:15
 - o Ephesians 2:1-10

ASK

What do the previous verses say is the result of sin? Is it the result of sin every time?

Consider sin in a relationship. What dies or ends when there is sin?

What can we hope in? What power does God have over death, and how did He demonstrate it?

TEACH:

- ❖ **The Danger of Unhealed Wounds:** Pain from past hurts can affect our daily lives in ways we are not even aware of. Just as we would care for a physical wound, we must be attentive to our emotional wounds. If left unhealed, bitterness and anger can infect them, poisoning our lives until we are unable to experience joy, love, and kindness.
 - **Wounds affect the way we think:** What our mind constantly replays can actually alter the way our brain works. As we ruminate on these hurts, mental pathways become entrenched and it can become difficult to think any other way. What we have been called by others in the past, or the way we have been treated, changes our self-identity. When our thought patterns grow more and more destructive, we can begin to hate ourselves and those around us, making it impossible to live a joyful life.
 - **Wounds affect the choices we make:** When we have experienced hardships and traumas, we may make choices to avoid our fears rather than pursue good things. When people have been critical about our choices in the past, it may be difficult to make confident decisions in the future.
 - **Wounds affect our ability to have quality relationships:** Trust is essential in every relationship. Past wounds can prevent us from trusting people in the future. We may



even expect destructive or abusive behaviour from them . It may be difficult to allow someone to love us when we feel unlovable.

- **Wounds affect our emotional balance:** A person who has emotional balance will feel both highs and lows throughout the day, but none of these emotions will be out of control or keep them from accomplishing goals. Someone who is not balanced may not be able to move on from sadness, anger, or an addiction while seeking pleasure.
- **Wounds affect our fellowship with God:** Some wounds will impair our ability to trust, love, and follow God. The way we perceive God can be altered by past hurts. If we have had a father who hurt us, it may be difficult to trust our heavenly Father. Past hurts inflicted by 'spiritual' people may colour how we perceive the Christian faith and may cause us confusion about the truth.

ASK:

Think about the fact that all of us have unseen emotional wounds that cause us pain long after the incident happened. What evidences do you see in your community that many people are wounded and are in need of healing?

TEACH:

- ❖ **Stages of Healing:** God longs to heal us and restore our peace. Psalm 71:20 says, "you who have made me see many troubles and calamities will revive me again; from the depths of the earth you will bring me up again." We can trust God to heal us, but we must allow Him to enter the dark places of our inner world.

A physical wound heals when there is restoration of infected tissue with live healthy tissue. Just like physical wounds, spiritual or emotional wounds require healing. These wounds can be very painful, and may require removal of that which aggravates them (resentment, hatred, blame, grief), and replaced with living tissue (love, joy, peace). Healing requires much prayer, spiritual discipline and willingness to face the past and trust God for the future. Going through the stages of healing is important, and best done alongside others or within community.

- **Identify:** First we must try to correctly identify or name the wound. What exactly has hurt us? This can be difficult because we often repress unpleasant memories. It is a lie that simply not thinking about the hurt will make it go away. We must not minimize or excuse the offence, but clearly name the sin that occurred.
 - It may take some time to admit what happened, but speaking about it out loud with a trusted friend can help us see things accurately.
 - We must identify a guilty person or persons in order to extend forgiveness.
 - If you are unsure of what has hurt you in the past, it may help to make a diagram of your life in order to point out hurtful events.
 - Draw a line on a sheet of paper and divide it into sections for childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood, etc.
 - Identify major life events on the line.



- Draw highpoints and low points of your life with a line that curves up and down starting at childhood until now.
 - Determine what losses and hurts occurred that are unresolved and still cause pain.
- o Remember that God desires to heal you! Hold tightly to His promises. God will walk with you through your healing process.
 - Psalm 34:18
 - Psalm 147:3
 - Jeremiah 17:14
 - Isaiah 41:10
- **Grieve:** This is the normal emotional response to wounds, hurts or losses. Even Jesus was called a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3). When we allow ourselves to mourn what could otherwise have been, and to feel sorrow over the sin that has occurred, we enter a period of grieving. It may begin right after a trauma has occurred or many years later, but it is important to realize it is a temporary state. Grief is a healthy and necessary step in the healing process.
- o **Feel:** Allow yourself emotional response to the event. It may include anger, sorrow, self-pity, frustration, fear etc., and sometimes many tears.
 - o **Experience:** You may experience anxiety, confusion, denial, shock, loss of appetite or sleep, inability to control emotions, or even carry out everyday tasks during a time of intense grieving.
 - o **Take Care:** It is important in the grief process to take care of yourself; get enough sleep, eat properly, and ensure that you spend time with those you love. Do not isolate yourself from others because it will make grief worse.
 - o **Hope:** In your process of grieving, do not lose hope! Things will never be the way they once were, but life can be full of joy and meaningful again! Continually look to God. Even if short simple prayers are all you can pray, continue to do so.
- **Accept:** In order to move beyond grief, we must learn to accept the wound. Even when healed, scars may remain. Healing does not change what happened in the past. Acceptance isn't agreeing that the hurt *should have* happened, merely recognizing that it did.
- o **Write it Out:** If it helps to write out your hurts or losses, do so. Be content to leave these events in the past.
 - o Choose to dwell in the present and have your eyes set on the future. The past is not changeable, but what you have the power to change is your present and your future.
 - o Choose not to think of yourself as a victim any longer. Instead, think of yourself as a beloved child of God, victorious in Jesus! As long as you think of yourself as a victim, the hurt continues.



- o When you long for what is impossible, recognize that you are longing for eternity with God. Direct your hopes and longings to Him alone who can satisfy us.
- **Renew:** As you heal from your wounds, remember you may need to unlearn ways of acting and reacting. You may need to change your thoughts, your words, and your reactions.
 - o **Stop Dwelling and Retelling:** When we continually replay the events in our mind and speak about them over and over, that wound still has power to hurt us. Instead, we must choose to think about other things and speak about hope rather than despair.
 - o **Remember with Joy:** There is a time for sharing grief, but it is temporary. For those loved ones we have lost, we do not have to forget them, but rather think on the good memories we have of them.
 - o **Relearn:** To renew our thoughts and actions, we must spend time in His Word and allow His Spirit to change us. We must be active in giving our worries, anxieties, and hurtful memories to Christ.
 - o Consider these verses:
 - [Colossians 3:1-2](#)
 - [Romans 8:5-6](#)
 - [Philippians 4:8](#)
- **Restoration:** Once we have identified, grieved, accepted and renewed our minds and behaviors, we can seek restoration. This may involve extending forgiveness to the offender, or restoring what was lost or taken from us.
 - o **Freedom through Praise:** When we praise God for all that has happened in our life – good and bad – we acknowledge that God can use any situation to bring us closer to Him. There is tremendous freedom in learning to praise God in all things!
 - o **Freedom through Forgiveness:** If it is possible to offer forgiveness to your offenders, it will give you closure and honour God. Choose to set them free from the debt they owe you. Accept them without trying to change who they are. You do not have to accept further hurt, but you can change your expectations of who they can be.
 - o **Seek Reconciliation:** Reconciliation is the restoration of a broken relationship. It may take a long time to achieve, and may never be fully accomplished. In the case of having forgiven an enemy, reconciliation may never happen. But in the case of a broken relationship with a friend, it should be diligently sought.
- ❖ **Counseling Others with Past Trauma:** Just as we would see a physician for the healing of a physical ailment or wound, we sometimes need to seek the help of others for the healing of our emotional trauma. As a leader you may sometimes take on the role of a counselor; other times you may refer someone to a professional Christian counselor. God is able and willing to heal, but



we must recognize that some will require human help as well. Community is incredibly important for healing, as are trusted friends and counselors.

Counseling others can be a way to show compassion and see them come to a place of peace and healing; however, it is not an easy process. It will be different for each person, – but keep in mind the following points:

- **Your Role in Counseling:** You may not have specific training or experience in counseling others, but God can make you qualified for the task . Have you:
 - o Experienced the forgiveness of God for your sins?
 - o Felt a burden to care for and love other children of God?
 - o Received comfort from God in your own times of difficulty?
 - o Studied the Word of God diligently so you can rightly handle the truth?

Your role is not to 'fix' another person, but rather to direct them to God and His Word, and be there for them through the healing process as a friend, coach, and support. You are not responsible for their healing.

- **The Counseling Environment:** When speaking with someone about difficult past circumstances, choose a quiet environment, free of distractions, where they can be physically comfortable and feel safe. Allow for blocks of uninterrupted time where you can communicate freely. Keep a Bible, paper and pens handy. You may wish to provide tea or water, and tissues.
- **The Counseling Process:** Your role in counseling may be simply to ask questions and listen. You want to help them get to the root of their issues without accusations.
 - o Pray before counseling.
 - o Start with a friendly greeting, a warm smile and appropriate eye contact.
 - o Ask them what you can do to help them today, or what they would like to talk about.
 - o Listen carefully for what is being said and not said.
 - o Ask questions to find out the real root of the problem. Focus on truth.
 - o Ask general rather than leading questions. ("What was your childhood like" is preferable to "How did your father hurt you?")
 - o Explore the impact of events and people in their past by carefully asking questions.
 - o Use appropriate follow-up questions like: *What else happened? How did that make you feel? How does that affect you today? Can you tell me more about that?*
 - o Listen more instead of you talking or asking questions. Help them to rely on God and seek His truth in their situation.
 - o Demonstrate through the Scriptures how their needs can be met by God alone. Give verses for them to read and respond to.
 - o Help them create a plan of recovery. It will lessen their sense of hopelessness. This may involve confessing bitterness, anger, resentment and pride.
 - o Helping them through a time of healing may take several counseling sessions.



- **The Outcome of Counseling:** The goal of counselling is to help them rely on God and look to Him for ongoing healing. They do not need to rely on you forever, but you must pray for them. If their needs are greater than what you are equipped to handle, help them find a Christian counselor who can offer them more experienced and professional help.

- ❖ **When You Have Committed Sins Against Others:** Throughout this lesson we have focused on what to do if you have unhealed hurts in your life. Sometimes those wounds are caused by what you yourself have done to others. Sin committed against others can harm us and damage relationships, and it is important to grieve for that also.
 - **Take responsibility:** In order to move on from our past sin, we must agree with God that it was sin, and while there may have been influencing factors, we are guilty and responsible for our actions. This is a difficult first step!

 - **Know there is forgiveness in Christ:** All of your sins can be forgiven. Jesus' death on the cross was sufficient to cover every wrong you have committed. However, you must repent of the sin (stop doing it and regret it), confess it to God, and ask for His forgiveness. Receive this forgiveness and don't dwell on guilt any longer.
 - [1 John 1:9](#)
 - [Romans 8:1](#)
 - [Romans 5:1](#)
 - [Psalm 103:11-12](#)

 - **Recognize there are consequences:** Depending on the sin committed, there may be natural consequences to your actions (including broken relationships, lack of trust, loss of job, incarceration, divorce, or alienation from family). You must accept these consequences, even though you have forgiveness in Jesus.

 - **Ask for forgiveness and seek reconciliation:** If possible, come to the person you have wronged and ask for their forgiveness. Admit what you have done, tell them you have repented, and that you have sought forgiveness from God.
 - **If they refuse to forgive:** You cannot force anyone to forgive you. Pray for them. Pray that they will be released from their pain. Know that God has forgiven you, and that the forgiveness of others may take time.
 - **If they forgive:** Take steps to restore the relationship. You will have to demonstrate your trustworthiness and love to them, and eventually you may regain the relationship you once had.



DISCUSSION

- ❖ How would you explain to someone how to focus on forgiveness in Christ rather than on sins of the past?
- ❖ How can we control our thought life and why is it important to do so?
- ❖ How could your church be involved in a ministry of reconciliation, or helping people heal from their past wounds? What would such a ministry require? What would the outcome be for your church and community?
- ❖ Have you experienced stages of healing from a hurt? If you or any of your participants are comfortable sharing personally, it may help your group to understand this concept better!
- ❖ What is the role of professionals in counseling? When might it be necessary to seek more experienced help in your own life, or for someone you are helping?
- ❖ What resources has God given us to heal our past hurts? How do we know God cares about the wounded and broken-hearted?

PRAYER

Close the lesson in prayer. Pray that your participants would be set free from slavery to guilt, shame, anger, despair and grief. Pray that they will use this freedom to live lives of joy, peace and hope. Pray that they would be ministers of reconciliation, and find healing and solace in God. Pray that participants would recognize any hurts in their lives that they need to surrender to God. Pray that they would be renewed in their minds, conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, and restored to wholeness.