

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership
Leader's Guide

FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

LESSON 4: STEPS TO RECONCILIATION

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 4: STEPS TO RECONCILIATION

PURPOSE

This lesson outlines steps to reconciliation between two people or two groups in a community. We will examine the challenges faced in reconciliation, and the problem of offering forgiveness when the other party is not willing or present to accept it.

LEADER'S NOTE

We may be aware that we ought to forgive someone who has wronged us, or that we must ask for forgiveness for something we have done, but how do we actually begin that conversation? There are so many emotions involved, so much hurt and heartache! It can be difficult to revisit past issues, and it may seem simpler and safer just to leave them alone and pretend they didn't happen. But reconciliation models the Gospel, and offering forgiveness is a tremendous act of mercy which reflects the mercy of God. Our past hurts can be used for good when we take the necessary but difficult steps to reconcile. Consider situations that your participants can identify with based on issues and history of your community; consider role-playing or discussing the path to reconciliation for each situation. You may also wish to bring in a guest speaker who has undergone this process and can share what reconciliation has meant in their life. For additional stories, see the Lesson Essentials available for each lesson.

INTRODUCTION

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

- ❖ Do you believe a person can change their natural human instincts? Can a person who was previously hateful, evil or sinful become a better person? If so, how does this happen?
- ❖ What have you learned that has helped you have better relationships with others? Was there something you needed to repent of?
- ❖ When you experience conflict with your spouse, sibling, parent or friend, what is the greatest barrier to reconciliation?



STUDY

Instruct the group on the following points.

TEACH:

- ❖ **Repair and Restoration:** Sin hinders our fellowship with God. It also breaks bonds of love, friendship and family. The Gospel is all about reconciliation, bringing us who were estranged from God back into full fellowship with Him. When we are reconciled to someone who previously offended us, we are modeling God's love and forgiveness. The goal of reconciliation is for two parties to repair their broken relationship and be restored fully to one another again.
 - **Believing the Gospel:** We believe the Gospel when we trust in the power of Jesus Christ to cleanse us from sin and make us new. We also believe that God can free us from our guilt and past sins. Without this cleansing and change, reconciliation is not truly possible. Do you believe the Gospel has changed you? (Romans 1:6, 2 Corinthians 5:17)
 - **Reconciliation and Forgiveness are Different:** It is important to note the difference between reconciliation and forgiveness.
 - **Forgiveness takes one person:** We can forgive someone who does not ask for it, including someone who has died or for any reason is no longer in our life. Jesus asked God to forgive people who hurt Him and who were unrepentant of their behaviour (Luke 23:34). You too can forgive someone who is unrepentant, even though it is difficult. Forgiveness releases you from revenge, anger and hate, and is beneficial to you as well as the one you forgive.
 - **Reconciliation takes two people:** We can only be reconciled to someone who is repentant. This involves both parties agreeing about the offences that were committed, asking for or offering forgiveness, and then taking steps to restore the relationship. Reconciliation requires two things: forgiveness by the offended, and repentance by the offender. Reconciliation will gradually begin to develop, and even result in a fully restored friendship and trust.

TASK:

Ultimately the heart of the Gospel is God's powerful work to reconcile His children to Himself. Divide participants into small groups to read one of the sets of verses and discuss the answers that follow. There is one Scripture passage that is the same for each group.

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Romans 5:10-11 Luke 15:11-32	Colossians 1:21-23 Luke 15:11-32	Ephesians 2:12-19 Luke 15:11-32



Questions for the first Scripture passage:

What relationship was broken and in need of reconciliation?

Who was in a position to offer reconciliation, and by what means?

How does God accomplish reconciliation through us?

Questions for the Luke 15:11-32 passage:

Who is reconciled in this passage, and what had to happen for reconciliation to take place?

Do you identify more with the prodigal son, the father or the brother in this passage?

Where is repentance demonstrated in this story, and what does it accomplish?

TEACH:

- ❖ **When Reconciliation is Needed:** Healing a broken relationship takes time and work, and may even be painful. There are some important things the Bible teaches about broken relationships.
 - **Reconciliation displays the Gospel at work:** Jesus died on the cross in order to reconcile us to God. We can demonstrate God's reconciliation by repairing broken relationships. Consider what God's Word says about this:
 - 2 Corinthians 5:16-21
 - **We should seek reconciliation:** Because we have been given a ministry of reconciliation – to see that others are restored in relationship to God, we, not the offender, should be the one to initiate it. This is our role as peacemakers. Not being reconciled to someone actually hinders our ministry and relationship with God!
 - Matthew 5:23-26
 - Luke 17:3
 - **We should keep one another accountable:** If someone, especially a Christian brother or sister, sins against us in some extreme or immoral way, we have a responsibility to keep them accountable for their actions. Forgiveness does not mean being permissive of sin, but reconciliation requires repentance. In order for this to happen, we may need to point out the sin to them personally, and if they do not listen, then expose their error to church leaders. This must be done in love, and should follow the process outlined in the following verses: Matthew 18:15-17

ASK:

According to Matthew 7:1-5, what must we do first before confronting the sin of another person?

How can we be sure that we are not deceiving ourselves when examining our own actions and attitudes?

What will help us to see more clearly our own sins and shortcomings?

Describe confronting someone in a way that pleases God.



TEACH:

- ❖ **True Repentance:** While forgiving an offender can bring great relief to a damaged relationship, complete healing requires the offender to recognize his or her offence and repent of it. But we must be aware of both true and false repentance; only true repentance will restore trust and repair a relationship. It may take time and prayer for someone to come to repentance. The following are indicators that someone is experiencing true repentance:
 - **Own their Errors:** A truly repentant person will take responsibility for their sin, mistakes, and hurtful behaviour. They will understand specifically what it is they have done, and agree that it was wrong.
 - **Welcomes Accountability:** The truly repentant person will welcome the accountability of others in their life, the chastisement of godly people, and seek help in order not to reoffend.
 - **Ends Hurtful Behaviour:** The truly repentant person will not continue with hurtful behaviour. They may struggle breaking old habits, but will make a strong effort to stop.
 - **Does not Defend or Dismiss:** The truly repentant person (when the hurtful behaviour is mentioned) will not defend themselves, excuse their actions, or dismiss their behaviour. They are not resentful, but humble.
 - **Makes Restitution:** If possible, the truly repentant person will repay what was lost, not to undo what was done but to demonstrate their repentance. Sometimes this may involve serving a sentence if law enforcement judges it to be necessary. Or if someone has offended by openly and falsely accusing another person, they can make a public statement declaring their repentance. If there is an action that could help repair a relationship and restore what was lost, the repentant person will do it.
- ❖ **Steps for Reconciliation:** When there is an offence between two people, it is glorifying to God when it is mended, but reconciliation requires agreement about the sin and to be different going forward.

➤ **The following are possible steps in the reconciliation process:**

If You Have Hurt Another	
1	Admit your sin and wrongdoing.
2	Explain what has brought on a change of heart.
3	Ask for forgiveness.
4	Demonstrate repentance.
5	Make steps to rebuild the relationship.

If Someone Has Hurt You	
1	Approach them about their wrongdoing.



2	Explain how the offence has affected you.
3	Offer your forgiveness.
4	If they are repentant, accept their apology.
5	Make steps to rebuild the relationship.

- **Step 1:** Meeting in person is best, if possible. Agree on a neutral environment, free from distraction, where you can meet with the other person. Set a time and place to meet. Because no one is without sin, it is possible (and frequently true) that both parties have sinned against one another. When approaching someone for reconciliation, examine yourself humbly and ask God to show you if there is anything you must first apologize for.
 - **Step 2:** The offender must hear and understand why you are offering forgiveness. Help them appreciate the situation from your perspective, but remain calm and do not use this as an opportunity for anger, revenge or making them feel guilty. Use phrases such as, “When this happens, I feel...”, or, “The result of your actions was.... in my life”. Or if you have something to apologize for, explain by saying, “I now realize that what I did was wrong...”, or, “I know my actions must have hurt you”. This must be done in a gentle and loving manner.
 - **Step 3:** You may ask for or offer forgiveness at this stage – sometimes both! After forgiveness is granted, you should never bring up the offence again. You have given up the right to use this against the other person. It is not necessary to establish who had greater blame. Each person may have contributed to the situation.
 - **Step 4:** Repentance is demonstrated through contrition, honesty, humility and changed behaviour. If they offend again, it will demonstrate a lack of true repentance. In this situation, you can forgive, but reconciliation could be difficult.
 - **Step 5:** Trust needs to be re-established within the repaired relationship, requiring intentional actions. It is sometimes appropriate to set out rules for future interactions (non-violence, financial accountability, seeking treatment for substance abuse, no more extramarital affairs, etc.). The reconciliation process should clearly outline expectations in order to move forward. Sharing meals, working together, giving gifts to one another and serving one another all demonstrate faith in the restored relationship.
- ❖ **Working Through Hesitations:** Many of us may be hesitant to reconcile with someone who has hurt us. It is important to look at the root of hesitation and deal with it first, before extending forgiveness and grace to someone. And be honest with yourself – wounds occasionally need time to heal. Consider if any of these are behind your hesitancy to reconcile:
- **Fear of Being Hurt Again:** We must be honest about our fears, and give them over to God. It is natural to want to protect ourselves from further emotional or physical harm at the hands of another. But if an offender repents, we must not let our fear stand in the way of reconciliation. For a time there may need to be boundaries in the



relationship while trust is rebuilt. We must trust God rather than live in fear (Proverbs 18:10).

- **Disbelief that Someone Can Change:** If we refuse to believe that someone who once hurt us is capable of change, we are denying the power of God. We must pray for the offender, trust that God is able to change them, and be patient in the process (Luke 1:37).
- **Feelings of Anger or Hate:** Sometimes we become very attached to our anger and hatred. We may feel that in some way they protect us, or we use them as weapons to strike back. There is no room in the Christian's life for anger and hatred. Seek help from other believers to work through these negative feelings, and admit your sin to God (Luke 6:27).
- **Unwillingness to Let Go of Victim Identity:** When we see ourselves as a victim, we often adopt it as our identity. It may be difficult to let go of this.
 - When you see yourself as a victim, you do not see yourself as a person who has control over a situation, or with the ability to change your circumstances. Rather, your life is defined by what others do to you and the way they control you.
 - Victims seek attention, believing their victimhood makes them worthy of it.
 - Victims excuse themselves from responsibility for their actions or the situation they are in. They sometimes seek out a community of fellow sufferers in order to feel special.
 - Having a victim mentality is not the way God intends us to live! Recognize whether you think of yourself as a victim, and what you would have to do in order to reconcile with the offender. If a relationship between abuser and victim has persisted for some time, it's possible that you don't know any other way to interact. You will need the help of a community to build a healthy relationship and develop a new positive identity (2 Timothy 1:7).
- **Realization That it May Take More Time:** Depending on the depth of the wound, it may take a long time and the help of God and others to work through your hurt and be fully reconciled. It is important to realize that reconciliation is not easy – but it is honouring to God. It requires courage and faith! Is there someone you need to reconcile with today?



DISCUSSION

- ❖ Have you ever had someone ask for forgiveness for something you did not even know they had done? If someone approached you and offered forgiveness for something you don't remember doing, how would you respond?
- ❖ If someone you know has experienced physical abuse and trauma, what would you recommend they do in response to their offender?
- ❖ What are some practical things a person could do to restore the trust of someone they offended?
- ❖ How could you be a minister of reconciliation and help others become reconciled to one another and to God? In what ways are you already doing this? What is one new thing you could start doing?

PRAYER

Close the lesson in prayer. Pray that your participants would find forgiveness and reconciliation with one another, so that they would experience freedom. Pray that they would have love and compassion for their enemies in order to release them from debt, and extend mercy on those who repent. Pray that they would be ministers of reconciliation as they help the people they serve to restore broken relationships. Thank the Lord for His love and forgiveness that reconciled us to God.