

JOURNEY TO FREEDOM HANDBOOK**UNIT I Key 4****FORGIVENESS****Purpose of this Key:**

- 1) Recognize that when we are wronged, our sinful nature demands payment.
- 2) Recognize that Jesus' death on the cross was the payment for sin.
- 3) Recognize that forgiving others is a response to God's forgiveness of us, not another Law that we cannot obey.
- 4) Recognize that forgiveness means surrendering any desire to get revenge.
- 5) Recognize that forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation.
- 6) Recognize that the more we confess our own sins, the more easily we forgive others.
- 7) Learn to use memorized Scripture to block thoughts of revenge.
- 8) Recognize that anger is a phony attempt to gain feelings of power.
- 9) Learn to face pain and grieve losses, without becoming angry.

Matthew 6:12**Common responses:**

- 1) Most realize that if they do not forgive others, God will not forgive them.
- 2) Some realize that forgiving others and receiving God's forgiveness work together.
- 3) Many acknowledge that they should not hold grudges.
- 4) Some say that they cannot do this.
- 5) Some say that they need to forgive themselves.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Never use this verse to put anyone back under the Law.
- 2) Never criticize anyone for the difficulties they are having with forgiveness.
- 3) This verse tells us to confess hatred and revenge-seeking as sins, thereby giving forgiveness as we receive it.
- 4) When someone wrongs us, we feel as if he/she has robbed us and therefore owes us payment.

- 5) We seek payment through seeking revenge, fantasizing about revenge, taking out our anger on others, or feeling happy when something bad happens to the one who wronged us.
- 6) Jesus on the cross paid for the sins others committed against us as well as the sins we have committed (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- 7) The Father accepted His death as payment for our sins (Colossians 2:13-14), so we can accept His death as payment for the wrongs done to us.
- 8) Forgiveness does not mean that we trust the ones who wronged us or continue a relationship with them. It does not mean tolerating on-going abuse.
- 9) Forgiveness does mean that we surrender our desire for revenge.
- 10) The more we recognize how much we need forgiveness, the more easily we can forgive others.
- 11) While we appear righteous when we want to “make them realize” what they did to us, our wish is revenge-seeking in pious disguise. The Holy Spirit’s job is to bring conviction of sin.
- 12) When we repent of our own sins, we surrender our belief that we have a ‘right’ to get revenge.
- 13) Their need to repent lies between God and them, not them and us.
- 14) Forgiveness means that we pray for them to repent, so God can forgive them.
- 15) We humans have no forgiveness to give ourselves. We can only accept the total forgiveness offered through Christ.

Isaiah 53

Common responses:

- 1) Jesus humbled Himself when He went to the cross; forgiving others involves humbling ourselves.
- 2) I must stop condemning myself and others and accept the free gift.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) When someone wrongs us, we feel hurt, helpless, and humiliated.
- 2) We use anger to restore the sense of power that was taken away from us.

- 3) Anger only gives a false sense of power, never feels like enough, and can become addictive.
- 4) Jesus on the cross was hurt, helpless, and humiliated, and He did not have to be (Matthew 26:53).
- 5) He took not only our sins but also the hurt, helplessness, and humiliation that we feel when we are wronged. He truly bore our griefs and carried our sorrows.
- 6) When we are wronged, He knows exactly how we feel, because when He was on the cross, He permitted Himself to feel it.
- 7) On the cross, He identified with us; the more we identify with the suffering Christ, the more easily we can forgive.
- 8) Forgiveness sometimes involves grieving what we have been robbed of. We can grieve in the presence of Jesus, Who bore our griefs and carried our sorrows.
- 9) In His presence we can face the hurt, helplessness, and humiliation directly, without switching to anger in an effort to restore a feeling of power.
- 10) When we face the hurt, helplessness, and humiliation directly, without anger and in the presence of Jesus, we begin to gain a true sense of power made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).
- 11) Our faith in 2 Corinthians 12:9 is tested whenever we have someone to forgive.
- 12) When we forgive someone, their sins no longer lie between them and us. They must still answer to God for what they did (Romans 12:19-21).
- 13) True forgiveness means that we pray for them to repent and be saved.
- 14) When we pray the prayer that Jesus prayed from the cross (Luke 23:34), our will is aligned with God's will.

Matthew 18:21-35

Common responses:

- 1) Many realize that if we show mercy, we will receive mercy.
- 2) Many realize that if we do not forgive others, God will not forgive us.
- 3) Many realize that we are hypocrites if we want forgiveness for ourselves but will not give it to others.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) We are tempted to judge the unrighteous servant, but he is in all of us.
- 2) What was the unrighteous servant thinking? He was not thinking about the enormous debt that he no longer owed. He was thinking about what was owed to him.
- 3) Forgiveness involves keeping our focus on what Christ has done on our behalf, not on what others have done to us.
- 4) We can use memorized Scripture to block our thoughts about the wrongs done to us as well as our fantasies of revenge.
- 5) Forgiveness leads to blessings that we cannot foresee.
- 6) Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers (Genesis 39-45) led to the coming of Moses (Exodus 1-20), which led to the coming of Jesus (John 1:14-17), which led to redemption for many (Genesis 50:20).
- 7) Stephan's forgiveness led to the conversion of Saul/Paul (Acts 7:58-8:1, 22:19-21), who brought the Gospel to the Gentiles.
- 8) Sometimes people who have trouble forgiving do not believe that God has forgiven all of their sins. They believe that some of their sins are so bad that they are beyond the reach of God's forgiveness, or they may be hanging onto one sin that they do not want to give up.

Luke 15**Common responses:**

- 1) Regardless of our past, God will restore us.
- 2) God will forgive us if we repent and come back to Him.
- 3) God will welcome us back with open arms.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Most new Christians identify with the prodigal son, who needed to repent and come home.
- 2) Later, as the newness of conversion wears off and they assess the damage done to them, they might identify with the older brother.

- 3) Coins get lost through someone's carelessness, sheep get lost because they are foolish, but the prodigal sinned deliberately and maliciously.
- 4) He clearly recognized his problem.
- 5) The older brother could not recognize his problem. His self-righteousness alienated him from his father as much as the prodigal's sins had alienated him from his father.
- 6) In order to be able to join the party, he must also repent. His sin was work's righteousness.
- 7) Sometimes we have trouble forgiving others because we are conceited over our own virtue (Luke 18:9-14).
- 8) The older brother would have wished for the prodigal to be sent to the fields to work off his debt to the family. As his supervisor, the older brother could have made life miserable for the prodigal. The father's forgiveness takes away that thrill.
- 9) Forgiveness often involves surrendering the thrills of revenge-seeking (Romans 6:6-11).
- 10) Why did the elder brother never ask his Father for a goat with which to enjoy a meal with his friends? He seems to be too proud to ask his father for anything.
- 11) If he had asked the father for things, the father would have given them to him. He would have had less excuse to be resentful.
- 12) Sometimes forgiveness involves asking God to give us joyful relationships and experiences, giving thanks for these blessings, and thereby remaining humble.
- 13) Forgiveness involves surrendering our self-will and accepting God's will (Galatians 5:22-23).
- 14) Often the ones we need to forgive are themselves lost coins, lost sheep, and the Father's lost children.

1. On a scale of 1-10, how forgiving do you think you are (1 is the lowest, 10 is the highest)?

Common responses:

- 1) Ssa/ma/tx overcomers usually report very low numbers at this point.

- 2) Occasionally someone will report a high number, which may be accurate.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) This question will be repeated in future lessons, so look for the numbers to improve.
- 2) Never criticize a low number. Christian teaching on forgiveness often lectures victims on the consequences of failing to forgive, but fails to teach them how.
- 3) Threatening people who are already badly wounded will not help move them into forgiveness, but evidently many Christian teachers think such threats will be effective.
- 4) Possibly many Christians only pretend to forgive others, in order to avoid being criticized.
- 5) They need help to learn to forgive. They do not need to be criticized for their pain or tempted to fake forgiveness.
- 6) Be aware that the wrongs done to them may involve severe sexual, physical, and mental abuse, daily bullying in school or at home, gang-rape, forcible prostitution, torture during hideous satanic rituals, and other examples.
- 7) Commend any high numbers they may present, but be aware that they might be faking it to look good. As trust grows, they might reveal more hurts.
- 8) Assure them that as they grow in Christ, their ability to forgive will improve.
- 9) Assure them that since we cannot be perfected in this life, even our forgiveness will never be perfect.
- 10) Assure them that we could all improve at forgiveness.

2. What are some of the hurts in your life that you have not yet forgiven? Use the back of the paper if necessary.

Common responses:

- 1) Answers will vary. Many ssa/ma/tx people were sexually, physically, and emotionally abused by parents, parent substitutes, other authority figures, and other family members. Some were molested as children. Sometimes Catholic children were molested by priests. Often ssa/ma/tx males were bullied in school

- by other boys, accused of being homosexuals, and called derogatory names, and therefore came to believe that they were. There is a high rate of sexual abuse in the histories of lesbians. Lesbians often grew up in homes where females were devalued. Transsexual males often grew up in homes where boys were devalued and girls overly valued. Often there was a power imbalance between the parents; the parents disrespected each other and made the children allies in their conflict with each other.
- 2) Often their heterosexual siblings are experiencing other problems as a result of growing up in these environments. It is not clear why some children from these homes become ssa/ma/tx , why others grow up to be become abusers, and why others continue to be abuse victims.
 - 3) Some are still focused on their own sins and their need for forgiveness and are not focused on the wrongs done to them.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Unless you come from such a background yourself, never tell someone that you understand. While saying, “I understand,” is well-intentioned, you cannot understand unless you have had similar experiences.
- 2) Never minimize the wrongfulness of such abuse. What the abusers did was wrong. True forgiveness is never achieved by our pretending the abuse was okay.
- 3) If you have experienced abuse similar to theirs, you can share it if you can avoid upsetting them. The goal is to share what helped you overcome it.
- 4) Point them to John 10:10. The hurts they experienced were evidence of the darkness of this world. The thief killed, stole, and destroyed. Jesus is trying to give them abundant life.
- 5) Point them to Jeremiah 29:11 and Joel 2:25. Jesus went to the cross to redeem them, so they can re-build their lives His way.
- 6) Male sexual abuse victims may have experienced a pleasurable sexual reaction to the molestation, but often will not tell you. They may even relive the experience during erotic dreams, and as a result feel self-disgusted or even suicidal. Bring up the possibility that this may have happened to them, and give reassurance. Their

- reaction does not mean that they asked for it or deserved it, or that the molester was right to do it.
- 7) Give reassurance that even erotic dreams and nocturnal emissions based on the abuse are normal, not indications that there is something wrong with them.
 - 8) Male sexual abuse victims often become suicidal because of such dreams. They need to realize that this self-hatred and self-torment is from lies of the devil.
 - 9) If someone is struck in the nose, we do not condemn him/her for getting a nosebleed. A sexual abuse victim who had a sexual response to the stimulation should not condemn himself for that. The nerve endings only did what nerve endings were designed to do.
 - 10) He might even re-live the abuse experience during masturbation. The more his thoughts are taken captive to the Lordship of Christ, and the more consistently and persistently he blocks ungodly thoughts with memorized Scripture, the more likely he will be empowered to block these fantasies and have fewer such dreams.
 - 11) Female sexual abuse victims often cooperate out of fear, because the abuser has power in their lives. They need not feel ashamed for cooperating because of fear.

3. What makes forgiveness so hard?

Common responses:

- 1) The offender fails to repent, or the victim does not know if he/she is sincere.
- 2) The offence does not stop.
- 3) Forgiveness means facing pain.
- 4) Forgiveness means they will not be punished for what they did.
- 5) I cannot forget.
- 6) My sinful nature wants revenge.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Clearly state that what the offender did was wrong. Forgiveness must be based on the atonement of Jesus on the cross, not on minimizing what the offender did.
- 2) Abuse victims are often confused about whether the abusers were right or wrong in what they did. Help them gain clarity.

- 3) Focus their attention on the cross, where Jesus made compensation for the abuse. Our forgiveness leaves their sins between God and them; their sins no longer lie between them and us (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- 4) Forgiveness will mean facing painful memories, but do so in the presence of Jesus (Isaiah 53:4-5), Who bore our griefs and sorrows.
- 5) Emphasize that painful events often need to be faced a little at a time, not all at once. Overcomers should not push themselves too hard.
- 6) Some prefer to be alone, while others prefer someone to be there as they face their painful memories.
- 7) Continuing to feel pain does not mean that we have not forgiven, but in order to cause us torment, the Accuser of our souls might try to accuse us of not having forgiven. Broken relationships, by their very nature, are painful.
- 8) Nowhere in the Bible does it say that forgiveness means we must forget. Human memories are attached to the neurons in our brains, but we do not have to dwell on these memories.
- 9) Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. Reconciliation requires that the offender repent and express godly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:8-12).
- 10) Forgiveness does not mean tolerating on-going abuse (Matthew 18:15-17).
- 11) Forgiveness can be given freely, but trust must be earned (2 Corinthians 2:1-11).
- 12) Forgiveness means we become willing to love the offender. If we treat the offender with kindness, patience, etc. (I Corinthians 13:4-7), out of obedience to Christ, we can celebrate with Jesus.
- 13) If someone's sin caused messes in our lives, we can ask God to show us how to clean up those messes His way. Forgiveness often involves surrender of self-will to God's will.
- 14) When we pray for the offender's salvation, God is pleased with us and will reward us.

4. How can we have fear (respect and reverence) for God (Psalm 130:3-4)?

Common responses:

- 1) Most people comprehend that we respect and revere God because He forgives us as a free gift, though He did not have to.
- 2) Some comprehend that without God's mercy, no one would have a chance to be saved.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Be sure they understand that the word "fear" refers to the kind of respect a son has for a good father rather than the kind of fear a slave has for his owner. New Christians and people for whom English is a second language may need this explained to them.
- 2) These verses might be helpful to memorize for when they feel tempted to rehearse the wrongs done to them.
- 3) When we repent, we come before God with no merit of our own with which to influence Him in our favor. His favor is a free gift.
- 4) A holy, just, and sovereign God can do whatever He wants to with us sinners, and what He wants to do is give us His mercy.

5. What are some other reasons to have respect and reverence for God (Psalm 103:1-5)?**Common responses:**

- 1) We need to praise and worship God because He protects our lives.
- 2) He forgives, heals, loves, shows compassion, and works justice.
- 3) Some people have found that when they forgive others, their health improves, and they are sick less often.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) When we praise God for the forgiveness He has given us, we can more easily forgive others.
- 2) He not only forgives sins but also heals diseases. In our society, addictions are often called "diseases", and any sin is potentially addictive.
- 3) God can only heal our hurts when we are willing to accept His ways.
- 4) God replaces bad things in our lives with good things.

6. Why do we need wisdom in connection with the issues of ssa/ma/tx?**Common responses:**

- 1) Wisdom tells us that we can trust God to show us right from wrong.
- 2) Wisdom shows us how our thoughts lead us astray and how we can fix our lives.
- 3) We need wisdom to know how to fight temptation and remain faithful.
- 4) We need wisdom to confront the lie that ssa/ma/tx people are “born that way”.
- 5) Wisdom shows us how to be more Christ-like and loving.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) If we do not have God’s wisdom regarding these issues, we will have to rely on the world’s wisdom. The secular theories keep changing. They contradict each other and themselves.
- 2) Social and personal problems multiply when we do what is right in our own eyes (Judges 21:25).
- 3) Everyone’s experience is unique to that person; the Holy Spirit knows what lies to expose, in what sequence, and at what pace. He will deliver us in the best way possible if we accept His guidance.

7. How will wisdom help us want to forgive others (Matthew 6:14)?**Common responses:**

- 1) Most people comprehend that if we do not forgive others, God will not forgive us.
- 2) Some people realize that wisdom shows us how much we need forgiveness ourselves.
- 3) Wisdom shows us that un-forgiveness is self-destructive.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Only the Holy Spirit, doing His mighty work in our hearts, can show us how to forgive certain people.
- 2) Each person’s hurt is unique to that person. The Holy Spirit knows best how to lead and guide each person on his/her path to forgiveness.

- 3) When someone wrongs a vulnerable child, the hurt is a “teachable moment” during which lies are injected into the child’s mind. The lies still influence the person long after his/her circumstances have changed.
- 4) Forgiveness becomes easier when the lies are exposed and God’s truth is spoken against them.
- 5) We need godly wisdom to surrender the phony sense of power that anger brings.
- 6) Because forgiving others involves surrendering our self-will, we need godly wisdom.

8. What things have you learned about forgiveness?

Common responses:

- 1) Answers will vary. Most people acknowledge that they need to do it, have a lot of work to do, and will need time.
- 2) Many express that they are feeling overwhelmed with emotional reactions to painful memories.
- 3) Those who are most grateful for God’s mercy towards them do not find forgiveness to be hard.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) This Key gives people a lot of new information to think about, process, and apply to their lives. Changing one’s thinking and turning new insights to action will take time. Assure them that the issues of forgiveness will be re-visited in the next four Units. Forgiveness is often a process rather than an event.
- 2) Affirm any Biblical insights based on God’s mercy and Christ’s atonement.
- 3) Part of overcoming one’s own sins is giving forgiveness to others.
- 4) Keep the focus on Jesus, Who bore our griefs and sorrows, and Who is the Shepherd Who comforts hurting sheep.
- 5) Intervene if someone takes a legalistic approach to forgiveness. If we view forgiveness as a Law, we set ourselves up for failure because we cannot obey it.
- 6) Neither our own striving to earn our salvation nor our own striving to forgive others can succeed. In Christ alone we receive salvation and give forgiveness.

- 7) Give assurance that the pain they still feel does not mean that they have not forgiven. If they have surrendered their will to get revenge and are praying for the ones who wronged them, they are obeying God.

9. On a scale of 1-10, how victorious have you been lately? Please explain your answer.

(Victory is measured by how much you have overcome temptation.)

Common responses:

- 1) Answers will vary.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Encourage thanks and praise to God for any victory gained.
- 2) Commend even small victories, because even small victories may have been difficult.
- 3) Assure them that God is pleased even when we take baby steps in obedience to His will.
- 4) If someone has fallen into sin, do not criticize them. Nothing will be gained if they cannot be honest with you. After they have confessed it and accepted God's forgiveness (I John 1:7-9), encourage them to re-trace their steps and ask the Holy Spirit to give them insight into what weaknesses led to the fall.
- 5) Falling is not the problem; it is staying down when one has fallen. Slips into sin are usually not random; often something sets us up to fall.
- 6) If their numbers are low, and they report very little victory, remind them that they are just beginning.
- 7) Continue to encourage them to use memorized Scripture to block tempting and negative thoughts. Assure them that this will improve with practice.
- 8) If they sin less frequently than before, assure them that is a sign of God at work in their lives. Emphasize progress, not perfection.
- 9) If they view themselves as making very little progress, keep their focus on God's mercy, rather than their own failures. Beating themselves up accomplishes nothing; Jesus took the beating on their behalf.

- 10) If their numbers are high, you might tell them that more tests are likely in the future, but such concerns should not prevent them from enjoying their present victories.

10. On a scale of 1-10, how much memory work have you done?

Common responses:

- 1) Answers will vary. The number here often corresponds with the number in #9.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) If the number corresponds to their response to #9, point out the correlation.
- 2) Encourage any memorization, especially verses that speak of God's mercy and promises.
- 3) Verses that only condemn sin are not helpful; the most powerful verses give the consolation of the Gospel to the penitent sinner.
- 4) If they are having trouble memorizing, they can write down meaningful verses on paper and read them several times throughout the day. Some find making flashcards helpful.

11. Did you use any memorized Scripture to battle temptation lately? What was the result?

Common responses:

- 1) Answers will vary. This will often reflect the answers to #9 and #10.

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Encourage using Scripture to battle all temptations, sexual or otherwise. The more they use memorized Scripture to block negative thoughts and attitudes, the more easily they can block other temptations.
- 2) Commend any use of Scripture to battle temptation and encourage them to continue.

- 3) They may have had no significant temptation lately. While they should thank God for that, , more temptation will come sooner or later. They need to memorize in order to be prepared.
- 4) If they are not using Scripture to battle temptation, encourage them to confess their sin and start using their sword (Ephesians 6:17).

12. How is your spiritual life in general, how are your private devotions, and how are things at your church/fellowship group?

Common responses:

- 1) Answers will vary

Points to emphasize:

- 1) Encourage thanks and praise to God for whatever is going well.
- 2) Explore what is not going well and try to help them find out why.
- 3) Give encouragement and be patient as they sort out the many new ideas they have received in such a short time.
- 4) New habits of thought and action take time to learn. They may already be progressing as fast as possible.

Plan of Action (Read the description of Plans of Action and make your plans as specific as possible.

- 1) Affirm anything that is Biblical.
- 2) Be alert for any hidden legalism.
- 3) Counsel based on your knowledge, experience, and what you have learned from working with this person.
- 4) Give lots of encouragement. It is hard to change a lot of habits in a short period of time.

Additional points:

- 1) Be aware that as people begin to struggle with forgiveness issues, buried pain is re-activated, and the temptation to act out might become stronger.

- 2) When forgiveness issues are worked through successfully, some people begin to notice a lessening of their ssa/ma/tx feelings.
- 3) Be aware that forgiveness is not like flipping a light switch; it is more like peeling layers off an onion, and many tears are shed.
- 4) Work with people where they are at. Some experiences are too painful to talk about. Nothing will be gained by pushing anyone harder than they feel comfortable.
- 5) Sometimes it helps to take a break and pray together.
- 6) People sometimes talk about needing to forgive themselves for the wrongs they have done. The truth is that humans have no forgiveness to give themselves. What they really need is to totally accept God's forgiveness and stop beating up on themselves.
- 7) The conviction brought by the Holy Spirit and the torment caused by the devil often feel similar. However, the conviction of the Holy Spirit leads to repentance of sin and peace with God. The torment of the devil leads to greater and greater torment.
- 8) Painful and shameful memories of sexual or other abuse can result in suicidal thoughts. Seek help if the overcomer expresses suicidal ideas. Be available for love and support, but do not try to deal with a suicidal person on your own.