

Small Group Leader Discussion Guide

FORGIVENESS

Dr. Josh Willaford — October 5, 2025

Main Point 1: Forgiveness frees the offender and the forgiver.

Scripture: Matthew 18:21–22 (NIV)

- Peter’s question reveals a human desire to measure forgiveness, but Jesus responds with limitless grace - “seventy-seven times.”
- Forgiveness is not simply releasing the offender; it releases us from the burden of resentment, anger, and bitterness.

Discussion Questions:

- Why do you think Jesus gave such an extreme answer about how many times we should forgive?
- What are some of the emotional or spiritual burdens people carry when they hold onto unforgiveness?
- How have you experienced freedom personally through forgiving someone?

Follow-Up Prompt:

- What might it look like to walk in continual forgiveness rather than waiting until offense builds up?

Main Point 2: Forgiveness trusts God with the justice.

Scripture: Romans 12:17–21; 1 Peter 2:23

- Forgiveness doesn’t mean excusing sin or removing consequences - it means surrendering the right to be judge and jury.
- God alone executes justice perfectly; forgiveness is faith in His fairness.
- When we respond to evil with good, we overcome it instead of being overcome by it.

Discussion Questions:

- What’s the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?
- Why do you think it’s so difficult to trust God with justice when we’ve been wronged?
- How does Jesus’ example in 1 Peter 2:23 challenge the way we respond to offense?

Follow-Up Prompt:

Share a time when letting go of revenge brought you peace or perspective.

Main Point 3: Forgiveness is a process and a practice.

Scripture: Matthew 6:12

- Forgiveness may not happen instantly—it's often a journey of releasing someone to God over time.
- You can forgive without restoring full access or immediate reconciliation.
- Dr. Everett Worthington's REACH model offers a practical framework for walking through forgiveness:
 - **R:** Recall the hurt honestly.
 - **E:** Empathize with the one you're forgiving.
 - **A:** Altruistic gift—choose forgiveness as a gift.
 - **C:** Commit—write out your act of forgiveness.
 - **H:** Hold—remind yourself that you've released it.

Discussion Questions:

- Which step of the REACH model stands out to you as the hardest? Why?
- How does prayer help shape your heart toward someone you need to forgive?
- What boundaries can you set that allow you to forgive while maintaining wisdom and safety?

Follow-Up Prompt:

- What would it look like for you to take one step toward forgiveness this week?

Reflection and Prayer

- Reflect on an area or relationship where unforgiveness may still linger.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you trust God with justice and release offense fully.
- Pray together:

“Lord, thank You for forgiving us completely through Jesus. Help us to forgive others as You've forgiven us. Free our hearts from bitterness and teach us to walk in grace and peace. Amen.”