

The Guilt and Forgiveness Course Session 1



Time For Change Ministries, Guilt and Forgiveness course

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Session 1

Welcome and Introduction

1.1

Check in

5 mins

Welcome everyone and supply name labels, including for leaders. Ask each person to say their name and explain in one sentence why they are here ('curiosity', 'I want to learn' etc).

1.2

Introduction to the course

5 mins

Explain the course aims and session headings to the group and write them on flip-charts.

Course aims

1. To help you understand what guilt and forgiveness are.
 2. To help you learn what the Bible tells us about God's offer of forgiveness for you.
 3. To help you start to forgive yourself for things you have done.
 4. To help you start to forgive other people for things they have done to you.
- (We are not covering victim awareness or seeking forgiveness from our victims).

Session Headings

1. Welcome
2. Gospel overview
3. The sin of a lifetime (looking at King David)
4. The prayers of a guilty man seeking forgiveness (Psalms David wrote)
5. God's forgiveness
6. Forgiving ourselves
7. Forgiving others
8. Moving on

1.3

Ground rules

10 mins

Ask the group if they know what ground rules are. If they don't, explain that ground rules are rules the group sets together to keep everyone safe. Ask the group to tell you what ground rules they would like to put in place for this course, and write them on the flip-chart. If they are stuck, give them some suggestions, such as 'one voice', 'respect' etc.

You must include confidentiality and security rules

- Confidentiality – what is said in the room stays in the room (except for things we learn about Jesus).
 - But there are some things that the leaders have to break confidentiality over, for example, risk to self, risk to others, plans to escape etc. Ask the group not to tell you about things they haven't been convicted for – if they feel guilty about such things, they should either speak to a chaplain or tell the police.
- You may find your mood drops as you face guilt – please tell us if this is happening, so that we can support you and put the necessary procedures into place if there is a risk of harm.

Ask the group to initial the sheet, to show their agreement with the ground rules.

1.4

STICKERS

What is guilt?

5 mins

Give everyone a sticker, and ask them to write on it their answer to the question 'What is guilt?' and then stick their sticker on the flip-chart. When they are all done, read through all the answers.

Then explain that guilt is what we feel when we have done something that is wrong, and know that we are accountable for it.

1.5

GUILT ON A SCALE OF 1-10

How guilty do you feel about your crimes / other things you have done?

5 mins

Draw the scale of 0-10 (below) on the flip-chart. Give out stickers and ask the group and the leaders to write a number between 0&10 on their sticker that represents how much guilt they feel most of the time (0 is none, 10 is crushing guilt all the time).

When they are all done, turn the flip-chart round so people don't have any opportunity to see where others put themselves, and ask them to put their sticker by the number that they have written on it. When everyone is done, turn it back around so people can see what the group have said, without identifying each other. (It's written on stickers first so that you don't induce false guilt by people seeing where the rest of the group have put their stickers and changing their mind about their own level of guilt). Ask them to remember where they put their own sticker as we will come back to this sheet later in the course.

Explain that people may start to feel increased guilt during / after the course, as they start to open up emotionally to things that have happened in the past. Reassure the group that you are there if they need to talk to you and that the course is not aiming to make them feel worse.

Don't comment about specific situations, just make a general comment about the range of stickers being interesting.

Keep this sheet, as you will use it again in Session 8.

0

1

2

...

10

1.6

GROUP DISCUSSION

How or why do you expect doing this course will help you?

10 mins

Co-ordinate a discussion trying to get under the surface of why individuals are doing this particular course, without making them feel uncomfortable or 'on the spot'. Don't try to find out anything about personal guilt issues, it's too early to expect them to trust the group with their hearts.

1.7

SHOUT OUT

Why do people want to be forgiven?

10 mins

Ask the group why people want to be forgiven (people in general, not specifically the people in the room), and write their answers on the flip-chart. Don't try to unpack what they've said, you're just brainstorming at the moment.

When you're finished, it's worth explaining that we're not going to cover all these issues in the course!

1.8

STICKERS

What is forgiveness?

10 mins

Ask the group to answer the question 'What is forgiveness?' on a sticker, and stick them on the flip-chart. Make sure anyone who is not confident with reading or writing is supported by a leader or peer mentor.

Read through the stickers. Then give a very simple explanation of what forgiveness is:

- forgiveness is the act of forgiving
- to forgive someone is, basically
 - to decide to stop holding something against someone
 - to stop feeling resentment towards them for what they have done

- thus leaving the event in the past (although the consequences of the event may continue in the present and into the future).

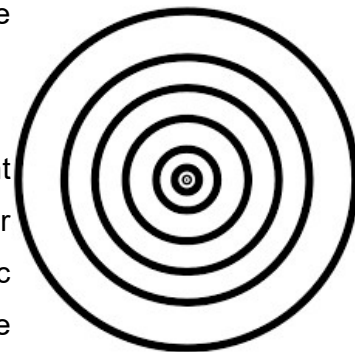
1.9

Ripple effect of not being forgiven and not forgiving

NB you need two flip-charts sheets prepared for this exercise – see below.

15 mins

Explain that the ripple effect is a situation where an action or event has multiple consequences, some of which were unexpected, like the ever-expanding ripples across water when a stone is dropped into it. The aim of this exercise is to work through the consequences of not being forgiven, and not forgiving, in the style of the ripple effect.



This can be represented in a diagram by writing the initial event in the middle of a page, and then writing names of people or events that were consequences of the initial event in concentric circles, working away from the initial event. Each circle represents the consequences of the previous circle.

(See p13 for an example of a completed ripple diagram).

Explain that James and Lee were best friends. James borrowed Lee's car and wrote it off. Lee finds he can't forgive James for this. Let the group think outside the box and make up more details for the story if that helps them to do the exercise.

First work through the ripple effect of what happens to James (the one who is unforgiven). Write 'James' in the middle of the first ripple diagram. Take care to focus on issues of lack of forgiveness, and not victim awareness or consequences of crime.

Examples of what might happen to James

- Ongoing guilt
- Loss of Lee's trust
- Can't move on
- Feels awkward around Lee now
- Lost a friend

- Feels angry with Lee for not forgiving him
- Lee is telling other people what happened and giving James a bad name
- Stress
- Anxiety / Depression
- etc

On a separate sheet, do the same for Lee – what might happen to Lee if he doesn't forgive James?

Examples of what might happen to Lee

- Holding a grudge
- Resentment
- Anger
- Things get out of proportion
- Lose the relationship
- Doesn't trust other people with his property
- etc

If the group are not very forthcoming, give some suggestions, but the aim is for them to speak, not for you to teach at this point.

Stick these sheets on the wall, so they can be seen during the course.

BREAK

1.10

TALK – Track 1

8 mins

We're going to think for a few minutes about why forgiveness is important. When someone does something that hurts us, we sometimes choose to hold onto that hurt and let it get bigger in our hearts. Sometimes we don't choose to do that, but it happens anyway, because the thing that person did was so bad. Whatever happens, the hurt doesn't go away, and it eats away at us.

We've already seen that forgiveness is the conscious act of deciding to let someone off the hook for something they did that hurt us, or hurt someone else. When we forgive someone, we make a conscious decision that that event, that thing that happened, is not going to occupy our thoughts and chew us up any more. More than that, we make a decision that we are not going to let that thing cause us to hold a grudge against that person any more, we're not going to let it make us bitter and angry, because we've decided to stop holding on to it, and we're going to let it go.

But why is forgiveness important? Have you ever considered what the world would be like if there was no forgiveness? Nobody would be able to trust anybody else, as we would always be thinking back to every single thing that other people had done to hurt us. There would be no possibility of loving anyone as we would all be too busy hating each other. We would all have to live on self-protective little islands - real ones or emotional ones. We would all be great big spiky balls of revenge and hurt and hate, with no hope of changing.

But a world that has forgiveness is a completely different world! A world with forgiveness is a world where people are able to move on, because they have let go of the things that happened in the past. It's a world where people can love each other, and can move past the hurts that we pick up along the way in relationships, and in life. A world with forgiveness is a world where there is peace, and where our hearts are not chewed up with hate, and our guts are not chewed up with anger and anxiety. A world with forgiveness is not a world where we can get off scot-free with anything, it's a world where crimes are punished, and sin has consequences, but we don't have to live in the shadow of the past. It's a world that we can choose to live in, or choose to live apart from. It's your choice, no-one else can make you choose to forgive.

Have you ever heard the story about the man who owned two dogs, and would fight them against each other, and every time he did, he would put his money on the winning dog? No-one could ever figure out how he knew which one was going to win, but he always got it right. He always backed the winning dog. Eventually someone asked him how he knew which dog was going to win each fight. He said, 'Simple. It's the one I've fed.'

And that's how it goes with us too. The attitudes and feelings in our hearts that we have fed, the anger or the compassion, the love or the hate, the grudges and resentments or the forgiveness, that's the dog that will win the fight. The one that will surface and affect how we

live our lives and how we relate to other people. Think about it for a minute. Which dog are you feeding at the moment? Might you be feeding the wrong dog?

What would happen if everyone was reminded every day for the rest of their lives about all the naughty things they did as a child, because their parents didn't know how to forgive? If every bad thing you have ever done, and every good thing that got taken the wrong way, was written on a stone, and put into a bag that you had to carry around for the rest of your life, how many stones would you have in your bag by now? Would you be able to lift it? I don't know about you, but I'd need a skip or two for mine.

You may think that no-one has ever forgiven you, but I'm sure they have. Think about children. Sometimes a little child will deliberately hurt their brother or sister. As a parent, what would you do? You would tell off the child that caused the harm, and then move on. And in order to move on, you have to forgive one of your children for hurting the other child. You wouldn't hold that incident against them, would you? So I'm sure your parents must have forgiven you, just as you have forgiven your brothers and sisters who hurt you.

And when you were a little boy, or a little girl, and you went outside and you were told not to get dirty, but you came back soaking wet and covered in mud, I bet you were allowed to go out to play again the next day? That could only happen if your parents, or whoever was looking after you at the time, had forgiven you, and decided to put it behind them, and move on.

That's what it means to forgive someone. To put the incident behind you, and move on. That sounds very easy, but you know as well as I do that it's sometimes very hard. And forgiving doesn't mean that there's no fall-out. Think back to the wet muddy clothes. You may have been forgiven, and allowed out again the next day, but someone had a pile of washing and ironing to do because you had been naughty the day before.

You may think that you've never forgiven anyone else. But I'm sure you have. If you've got little children, you must have forgiven them daily for this and that that they've done. I'm sure you haven't made them carry a bag of naughty-stones around – you probably told them off for whatever they did, and then got on with life, not holding anything against them.

Sadly, as we get older, forgiveness gets harder. The things we do wrong tend to get bigger,

with bigger fall-out, and get harder to forgive. We're not a child hitting our baby brother now, maybe we're throwing punches and hoping to do some damage. We're not just coming home muddy now, maybe we're coming home unfaithful. And you've done something that's landed you in prison. These things are much harder for someone to forgive, or for us to forgive ourselves for. But not impossible.

When you forgive someone, it means you are letting go of what happened. It means you don't want to let it come between you any more, you don't want to let that event chew you up and destroy you from the inside. Sometimes, you are the *only* person who benefits from forgiving someone, because the other person is not around to know you've finally done it. But *you* will always benefit from forgiving someone, and from forgiving yourself.

On this course, we're also going to find out why we need to be forgiven by God, what it means for God to forgive us, and how we can know that we are forgiven by God.

Forgiveness is life-changing. We all need to be forgiven, and to forgive. We would like to help you to seriously consider the possibility of taking this particular bull by the horns and giving it a go. We're not going to push you, it's up to you. But we hope you will be encouraged to take some steps and we'll be here to help you along the way.

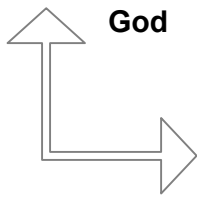
1.11

KEY VERSE

5 mins

'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find;
knock and the door will be opened to you.' (Luke 11 v 9)

Ask the group to identify the key words and underline them. Explain that the reason for using this verse as the key verse is to remind people that if they want to understand what the Bible says, and to be able to forgive themselves / others, and know God's forgiveness, God can and will do all these things in their life. You just need to ask, and expect an answer...



Forgiveness is found in two directions – vertical and horizontal. Vertically, forgiveness is from God and, as we will find out later, **People** this forgiveness is always available when we repent and ask God to forgive us.

Horizontal forgiveness is forgiving ourselves, forgiving others and being forgiven by others. We do not always receive this forgiveness, (but knowing God's forgiveness can help us to handle the lack of forgiveness from others).

1.12

SELF-DIRECTED

15 mins

Split your group into pairs or threes. Give each pair / three a sheet of questions and ask them to answer them together. When everyone is finished, come back into one group to download the answers together and make sure everyone has now heard the right answer. (Sheets can be downloaded www.tfcministries.org.uk/resources/bible-studies/topic-based/guilt-and-forgiveness-course-stuff/)

1. Read Exodus 2 v 11-15. Moses is one of the biggest characters in the Old Testament. But what was his criminal record like?

He was guilty of murder. He goes on the run because the king (Pharaoh) wants the death sentence for him.

2. Read Exodus 3 v 10-12. What did God say to Moses, 40 years later, and what must God have done for Moses during those 40 years?

Go back to Pharaoh (probably a different Pharaoh to the one in Exodus 2) and bring the Israelites (the people of Israel, about a million of them!!) out of Egypt. And I will be with you, Moses.

At some point in the 40 years, Moses must have been forgiven by God. Otherwise God would not have sent him to do this work.

3. Read Deuteronomy 34 v 10-12. In what way does the Bible remember Moses?

Not for his crime of murder, but for the prophet he became, who knew God face to face, worked miracles and led the people of Israel out of Egypt. This shows us that there is hope for us all! Obviously we aren't all going to do what Moses did, but we can all know God's forgiveness and live a life of peace with God.

1.13
BIBLE STUDY

15 mins

For this, and all subsequent Bible studies, split your group into smaller groups, with at least one leader for every 4 participants. Make sure each leader has access to the answers! Participant studies can be downloaded www.tfcministries.org.uk/resources/bible-studies/topic-based/guilt-and-forgiveness-course-stuff/

1. If you had to list the most important things to pray about each day, what would you include?

2. Read Luke 11 v 1-4. What things does Jesus say we should pray about?

- *Recognise God as our Father*
- *Honour God's name*
- *The coming Kingdom of God*
- *Provision*
- *Forgiveness from God (as we forgive other people)*
- *Against temptation (God doesn't tempt us – the prayer is for strength not to give in to temptation from the devil)*

3. What does Jesus assume we are doing, in v4?

Forgiving other people (and sinning).

4. Why do you think Jesus wants us to forgive other people?

Don't try to come to a conclusion – just let the group brainstorm.

5. What do you think this prayer tells us about Jesus' priorities for us?

It's only a 6 point prayer, so these 6 points must be very important priorities! Jesus expects us to pray for forgiveness and to forgive other people. These things must be very important to Him.

6. How do you feel about Jesus expecting us to forgive other people? Why?

Bear in mind that Jesus gave this prayer to believers. He's therefore saying He expects believers to forgive one another (this doesn't make it an easy thing to do or something that you can always do immediately, and you may need to do it more than once – it's a journey...). Don't stretch it out of context to apply to those who do not trust Jesus, as they do not know Jesus' forgiveness.

1.14

MEMORY VERSE

5 mins

'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.' (Luke 11 v 9)

Take this time to learn the verse and the reference, together as a group. The easiest way to learn a memory verse is to break it down – this one breaks easily into 3 sections.

1.15

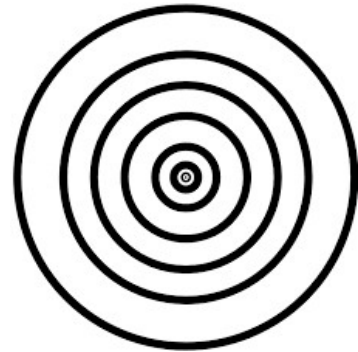
SUMMARY

5 mins

Ask the group what they have learned in this session and write it on a flip-chart with this picture drawn on it. This is the picture for the session and will be used in future session recaps.

Make sure you include:

- Forgiveness is letting go of the past and letting go of the grudges we hold because of the past.
- The ripple effect of lack of forgiveness.
- Ask, seek, knock



1.16

CHECK OUT

5 mins

As the group they found the session, and if they feel safe to go back to the cell. Make sure you tell appropriate staff about anyone who raises concerns.

1.17

DEBRIEF LEADERS

When the group have gone, sit down with all the leaders and spend some time evaluating the session, what worked, what didn't and how you would do it better next time. Take notes, or you will forget by next time! Make sure all the leaders feel safe to go home, and give an opportunity for each individual to speak, and raise any concerns they may have about individuals. Pass on any information that concerns you as a team to chaplains / wing staff.