

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership Study 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.

The Study Guide is intended for an individual to look deeper into a specific lesson on their own. The lessons can be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials, such as the video and audio productions found on www.discipleshipessentials.org.



FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

LESSON 4: STEPS TO RECONCILIATION

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

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.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

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.

GETTING STARTED

1. 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?

2. When you experience conflict with your spouse, sibling, parent or friend, what is the greatest barrier to reconciliation?



STUDY

❖ **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? In what ways?

➤ Read 2 Corinthians 5:17 : How does God intend the Gospel to change us?

➤ **Reconciliation and Forgiveness are Different:** It is important to note the difference between reconciliation and forgiveness.

o How did Jesus respond to those who killed him, and were unrepentant of their actions? Read Luke 23:34.

o **Forgiveness takes one person:** Like Jesus, 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. You too can forgive someone who is unrepentant. Forgiveness releases you from revenge, anger and hate, and is beneficial to you as well as the one you forgive.

o **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.

- **The Gospel is Reconciliation:** Ultimately the heart of the Gospel is God’s powerful work to reconcile His children to Himself.

Read Luke 15:11-32 and answer the following questions:

<i>What relationship was broken and in need of reconciliation?</i>	
<i>Who is reconciled in this passage, and what had to happen for reconciliation to take place?</i>	
<i>Do you identify more with the prodigal son, the father or the brother in this passage?</i>	
<i>Where is repentance demonstrated in this story, and what does it accomplish?</i>	
<i>What do you learn from Jesus teaching on reconciliation?</i>	

- ❖ **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. Read [2 Corinthians 5:16-21](#). What did God do so that we could be reconciled to Him? What are we to do in response?

- **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. Read [Matthew 5:23-26](#) and [Luke 17:3](#). What is the result on our service to God if we do not seek reconciliation with others?

- **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.
- Read [Matthew 7:1-5](#) and answer the following questions:

<i>what must we do first before confronting the sin of another person?</i>	
<i>How can we be sure that we are not deceiving ourselves when examining our own actions and attitudes?</i>	
<i>What will help us to see more clearly our own sins and shortcomings?</i>	



<i>Describe confronting someone in a way that pleases God.</i>	
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❖ **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 can name what 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 an effort to stop.
- Does not Defend or Dismiss: The truly repentant person will not defend their past, 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.
- What else would indicate that someone was truly repentant?



❖ **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 talk. It may be necessary to apologize to one another.
- **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”. If you have something to apologize for, explain by saying, “I now realize that what I did was wrong...”, or, “I know my actions 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.



- What practical activities may help restore a relationship? (Consider gifts, shared meals, serving, etc.). Think of what helps you begin to trust someone again.

❖ **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. What does God’s word say to us about our security and not living in fear? Read [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. Remind yourself of [Luke 1:37](#) when you have difficulty believing someone could change.
- **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. Why are anger and hate sins? Read [Luke 6:27](#) and write down your response:



- **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. The problem with labeling yourself as a victim is:
 - 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, and rather blame their offender. 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!

SUMMARY

- ❖ Sin hinders our fellowship with God, and it also breaks relationships of friendship, family and community. The Gospel is all about reconciliation.
- ❖ Reconciliation with others is a demonstration of the meaning of the Gospel and can be used by God to bring others to faith.
- ❖ Reconciliation requires two parties, and true repentance. The repentant person will demonstrate their repentance by their actions.
- ❖ We may have many hesitations when reconciling with others – but God's Word answers every one of these. We must believe that God has power to change people, and let go of our own identity as a victim.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Is there someone you need to begin the process of reconciliation with? What is standing in your way, and where will you begin?

2. 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?

3. If someone you know has experienced physical abuse and trauma, what would you recommend they do in response to their offender?