

# Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life

## “Forgiving” Learning Activities

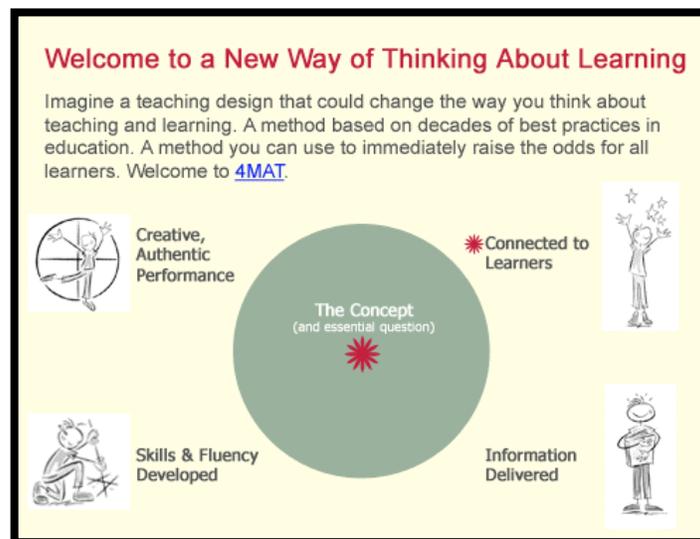
(LifelongFaith Associates)

Review “Educating for Christian Practices” for a guide to designing a learning plan for Christian practices.

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## Educating for Christian Practices using the 4MAT Learning Process



In **Quadrant One** (Connect to Learners) the union of elements creates personal meaning, the way we question the value of new learning by connecting it to ourselves. The question to be answered is “Why?” Why is this of value to me? Why do I sense the need to know this? *This is never telling, this is something that happens, something that intrigues them (a problem to solve), or connects to them (a situation that has real meaning in their lives), or touches them in a way that links to their humanity.*

In **Quadrant Two** (Information Delivery) the union of elements creates conceptualized content, structuring knowledge into significant chunks that form the essence, the coherence, and the wonder of new ideas. The question to be answered is “What?” What is out there to be known? What do the experts know about this? What is the nature of the knowledge I am pursuing?

In **Quadrant Three** (Skill and Fluency Development) the union of elements creates usefulness (and the more immediate the better), the transferability into one's life, problem solving with the learning. The question to be answered is "How?" How does this work? Will this streamline my tasks? How will this be of use in my life? *This is where learners take the learning and do something with it, something that has meaning for them. This is where relevance is demonstrated.*

In **Quadrant Four** (Creative and Authentic Performance), the union of elements creates creative integration, the way we adapt the learning into something new and unique. The question to be answered is "What If?" If I use this in my own way, what will happen? What can I create and how will that creation expand, enhance, and maybe even transform the world I know? *The world "per-form" means to form through and that is the essence of this step. It represents the merging of the learning and the learner.*

McCarthy emphasizes that knowledge must be used. It must operate in one's life. And because all human beings are unique, we use and then integrate learning in our own inimitable, incomparable ways. What we learn is transformed into a particular use, a distinct way of doing, a matchless refinement of a method, a unique understanding. It is transformed. It becomes for us. It is in the transformation that real understanding happens.

#### 4 MAT References

- Website: [www.aboutlearning.com](http://www.aboutlearning.com)
- *Teaching Around the 4MAT Cycle – Designing Instructive for Diverse Learners with Diverse Learning Styles*. Bernice McCarthy and Dennis McCarthy. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2006.
- *About Teaching: 4MAT in the Classroom*. Bernice McCarthy. Wauconda, IL: About Learning, 2000.
- *About Teaching Companion: The 4MAT Implementation Workbook*. Bernice McCarthy and Dennis McCarthy. Wauconda, IL: About Learning, 2003.

### Examples of Methods for Each Stage of the Process

#### Quadrant 1. Connecting to the Learner

##### ■ Why do learners need to know this?

- Actual case studies
- Stories (audio, video, illustrated)
- Personal storytelling
- Direct experience / field trip
- Simulated experience or game
- TV-style game show
- Interactive dialogue
- Personal reflection/journal
- Feature film segment
- Media presentation (PowerPoint): images and music
- Dramatic presentations
- Personal reflection tool/worksheet
- Quiz
- Self-assessment or inventory
- Prayer or ritual experience
- Witness presentations

## Quadrant 2. Delivering Information

### ■ What is it that we are teaching the learners?

- Video presentation
- Audio presentation
- PowerPoint presentation with content and images/music
- Guided reading and research
- Interviewing experts
- Demonstration
- Prayer or ritual experience
- Lecture
- Panel presentation
- Study groups: read and analyze/reflect on selecting readings, and present findings in a small group or to the large group
- Project-centered learning: develop a project that involves study, creative activity, and presentation of the project
- Debate
- Inquiry-oriented discussion
- Learning tournament

## Quadrant 3. Developing Skills and Fluency

### ■ How will the learners use it in their lives?

- Case study demonstrating how to use the information
- In-session practice activities and exercises (specific to the content of the session)
- Mentoring
- Role play / skill practice
- Field work
- Simulations
- In-field observations
- Demonstrations
- Panel presentations
- Compare and contrast activities
- Creative writing activity, e.g., learners rewrite Scripture stories or hymns in contemporary language and situations
- Presentations by learners of a project
- Creative activity: learners create an art project, song/music video, video or PowerPoint presentation, dramatic presentation, advertisement/commercial,

## Quadrant 4. Creative and Authentic Performance

### ■ What will the learners become and do as a result of the learning experience?

- Conduct a demonstration
- Write a report, article, or story describing performance to share with others
- Create action plans
- Create a photo or video documentary of practice
- Field trip / mission trip
- Participate in a church ministry (within the church or in the wider community)
- Keep a journal or log of performance efforts
- Get involved in an action learning project (e.g., service project, teaching others, leading an activity).

## 4MAT and the Living Well Process

Each chapter in *Living Well* is developed around five movements:

1. **Yearning** taps into our hunger for living well by addressing a basic area of human need through the real-life stories of people who seek meaning and purpose for their lives through a particular practice.
2. **Reflecting** gives you, whether individually or with your household, an opportunity to become aware of how you experience the basic human need and hunger for the Christian practice in your own life, and how you may already be living this practice.

3. **Exploring** presents the biblical teaching on the practice, how the practice addresses our basic need and hungers, and why the practice is important for living a Christian life.
4. **Living** provides you with a variety of tools – activities, ideas, and strategies – that you can use to integrate each Christian practice into your daily life.
5. **Praying** concludes the chapter by offering God thanks and praise, and asking for God’s help.

Here is an application of the 4MAT learning cycle to teaching Christian practices to a large group (families, multiple generations, or adults) using the 5-part process of each *Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life* chapter.

## **Quadrant 1**

### **Part 1. *Yearning: The Hunger for the Practice***

- Illustrating the hunger for the Christian practice in story, music, film, and/or current events.

### **Part 2. *Reflecting: Reflection on the Hunger***

- Guiding the individual or family in identifying how they see the hunger in their own lives and world.
- Helping people become aware of how they already engage in this practice, and the things that distort or hinder the practice.

## **Quadrant 2**

### **Part 3. *Exploring: The Christian Practice***

- Grounding the Christian practice in the Bible by describing how the biblical story(s) deepens our understanding of the Christian practice.
- Describing what people today, and throughout history, actually do when they are engaged well in a particular practice – people or communities that live the practice with exceptional grace and skill.
- Connecting the Christian practice to human needs and hungers. Identifying how and why it is important to living a meaningful life. Describing the benefits of living the Christian practice – for the person, family, and for the community and world.

## **Quadrant 3**

### **Part 4. *Living: Application of the Christian Practice to Daily Life***

- Giving people tools – activities, ideas, resources – for living the Christian practice in their daily lives – at home, at work, at school, and in the world.
- Showing people how to make the Christian practice part of everyday life.
- Guiding people in performing the Christian practice and then reflecting on it.

## **Quadrant 4**

### **Part 4. *Living: Application of the Christian Practice to Daily Life***

### **Part 5. *Praying: Prayer for the Practice***

- Entering more deeply into the practice through prayer and reflection.
- Offering God thanks and praise, and asking for God’s help in living the practice.

# **Sample Program Design for the Christian Practice of Forgiving**

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To illustrate how these five elements are incorporated in a learning resource, here is an outline of a large group program using the “Forgiving” chapter from *Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life* and additional learning activities and resources.

## **Advanced Preparation**

Several video presentations are recommended in this session. Please review the study guide to determine which videos you will use.

Copy and distribute the following handout: *Forgiveness Quiz: Why Should We Forgive?*

During the session, children can use the Forgiving activities in the *Living Well Children’s Workbook*.

Be sure to check out the variety of resources at the **Campaign for Love and Forgiveness**, a project of the Fetzer Institute, at [www.loveandforgive.org](http://www.loveandforgive.org). Launched in 2006, the Campaign for Love & Forgiveness uses PBS documentaries, community activities, online resources, and networking opportunities to encourage reflection and conversation about how love and forgiveness can effect meaningful change in individuals and society. Through community conversations, the campaign aims to create a meaningful national dialogue that will bring about positive changes for individuals, their relationships, and their communities.

## **Suggested Setting**

- Organize the participants into table groups.
- Decorate the table appropriately and use a placemat or table tent to present the evening program.
- Have all of the learning materials on the table.
- Include a blessing or prayer at the tables for all participants.

## **Quadrant 1. Connecting to the Learner: The Experience of Forgiving**

### **1. Yearning for Forgiveness – Stories**

Begin the session by reading the two opening stories on pages 6.2–6.3 in *Living Well: “Mending Tears”* and “Darkness in a Relationship” and/or select other stories about the need for forgiveness in our daily lives. It can be read to the group by a good storyteller or presented by several people taking different parts in the stories. Invite the participants to think about the challenges of forgiving and how these stories connect with their own experience.

### **2. Reflecting on Our Experience of Forgiveness**

Introduce the reflection activity by sharing with the group “Our Need for Forgiveness” on page 6.4 of *Living Well*.

Invite the participants to reflect on the following questions and then share their responses to the questions with their table group. (Families can develop one or two stories if they wish.) This is a storytelling experience so remind people to give each other time to share their story without

interruptions or discussion. Create a placement, table tent, handout, or PowerPoint presentation with the questions and quotes so that everyone can see them.

- Tell the story of one of your most vivid experiences of forgiveness.
- How is forgiveness a part of your daily life?
- How do you benefit by being a forgiving person?

### 3. Forgiveness Quiz

Ask each person (or household) to complete the Forgiveness Quiz: “Why Should We Forgive?” Give them several minutes to complete the quiz. (The quiz has been developed from the work of Robert Enright, summarized on page 6.5 of *Living Well*.)

Discuss the quiz by using a continuum activity:

1. Make a line across the meeting room using masking tape
2. Divide the line into four sections: place the #1 at one end and the #4 at the other end, with the #2 and #3 in middle
3. Take each of the items, one by one, and ask people to move to the # on the line which reflects their answer to the item
4. Ask people to give reasons why they chose their response, begin at the ends of the continuum and then move to the center responses

At the conclusion of the final question, invite participants to share their reflections on the experience. Ask them: What did they learn about forgiveness from the activity?

Conclude this section of the session with reflections from page 6.6 in *Living Well*. Use a PowerPoint presentation to name the key points and identify the “first steps toward change” in the box on page 6.6.

## Quadrant 2. Delivering Information: Exploring the Christian Practice of Forgiving

### 1. The Challenge of the Christian Practice of Forgiving

To introduce the challenge of forgiving show the video NOOMA 007 *Luggage* by Rob Bell or NOOMA 010 *Lump* by Rob Bell (order from [www.nooma.com](http://www.nooma.com)). *Luggage* is better for an adolescent-adult audience. Be sure to preview both DVDs to select the one that would work best with you audience.

*Luggage* - NOOMA 070 by Rob Bell  
DVD 13 minutes 2004

English with subtitles in French, German, Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese, and Spanish  
Includes as 32-page discussion book [\$10 from [www.nooma.com](http://www.nooma.com) + \$3 shipping]

*Maybe a friend turned their back on you. Maybe someone you loved betrayed you. We all have wounds and we end up carrying around these things that people have done to us for weeks, months, and sometimes even years. It isn't always easy to forgive these people and after a while these hurts can get really heavy. So the only way to feel better seems to be somehow getting back at the people that hurt us, to get revenge. But does revenge ever truly satisfy? Maybe forgiving isn't something you do for someone else to let them off the hook. Maybe forgiveness is about you. God didn't create you to carry these wounds around. God created you to be free.*

*Lump* - NOOMA 010 by Rob Bell

DVD 13 minutes 2004

English with subtitles in French, German, Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese, and Spanish

Includes a 32-page discussion book

\$10 from [www.nooma.com](http://www.nooma.com) (\$3 shipping)

*A lot of us have done things in our lives that we're ashamed of. Some are small things, and some of us have really big and devastating things. Some of us even have things that people close to us don't know about. Personal junk that we keep to ourselves so we don't have to deal with it. Because we don't know how to deal with it, do we? We're afraid that if we try it's just going to make everything worse. But no matter how big our junk is, no matter how much what we've done has impacted the way other people feel about us or how we feel about ourselves, it hasn't changed how God feels about us. God loves us, he always has and always will, and there's nothing we can do to change that.*

After the video presentation invite the participants, at table groups, to share their emotional response to what they have experienced and then what the video taught them about forgiveness and the challenging of forgiving others.

## **2. Exploring the Christian Practice of Forgiving**

The “Exploring” section presents Biblical teaching on forgiveness and is organized into five parts:

1. Forgiving Involves Courage (Story of Joseph in Genesis 45)
2. Forgiving Involves Mercy (Story of the Unforgiving Servant in Luke 18)
3. Forgiving Involves Faith and Love (Story of the Sinful Woman in Luke 7)
4. Forgiving Involves Restoring Relationships (Story of Prodigal Son in Luke 15)
5. The Way of Forgiveness (Matthew 5)

Here are several ways to explore the Biblical teachings on forgiveness.

### **Option 1. Read and Report**

Assign each table group one of the five sections and ask them to prepare a short presentation for the whole group (a read and report activity). Groups can develop a creative presentation (art, music, drama, etc.) for the whole group on their Scripture passage. (If you have more than 5 groups, assign multiple groups the same section.)

### **Option 2. Rewrite a Bible Story**

Assign each table group one of the five sections and ask them to read and rewrite the Bible story/passage for today's world, using a contemporary setting or forgiveness issue. Then have each group present their rewritten Bible passage. Here are a variety of ways to re-write a Bible story:

- Rewrite a Bible story or teaching using a contemporary setting or issue, and a contemporary style.
- Rewrite a Bible story from a first person point of view, describing the events as though you were there participating. Conclude the story with a dialogue between Jesus and yourself, discussing what happened.
- Rewrite a Gospel story as an eyewitness account of something Jesus did or as an interview script of a person who met Jesus (e.g., a person Jesus healed). Rewrite an Old Testament story as an eyewitness account.
- Rewrite a Bible story from a particular point of view, e.g., the different characters in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

- Rewrite a Bible story using creative methods such as storyboards for a TV show or a movie, a TV newscast, a commercial, and/or a newspaper or magazine story.
- Rewrite a Bible story using a letter format. Tell people to think of the Bible as God's letter to them. Read the passage and then ask them to respond by writing their reflections on God's Word in the form of a prayer. Ask them to use a letter format (Dear Jesus... or Dear God...) and include what they learned from reading the Bible story, how they will try to live what God has said, and what they need from God now so they can live what God has asked them to do.

### **Option 3. Dramatize a Bible Story or Passage**

Assign each table group one of the five sections and ask them to create a dramatic enactment of their Bible story, using a contemporary setting or forgiveness issue. People can do this in silence by simply acting out the passage or act the story while someone is narrating or assign different parts of the story to individual actors. They can also rewrite the story in contemporary form and act it out.

### **Option 4. Create a Forgiveness Advertisement**

Create an ad to present a Bible story in contemporary language and setting. Groups can use a variety of advertising methods (a 30 second TV or radio ad, a song, an ad in a magazine, poster advertisement, a billboard). They should write the content for an advertisement (e.g., a script for a commercial or magazine ad); identify or create artwork, symbol, images, photos to accompany the content; develop the final product; and then present it to the group. Here are several suggestions for creating an ad:

1. *Focus the Ad:* In short phrases clearly identify what you want to communicate.
2. *Select the Advertising Approach:* Think about all the types of advertisements in magazines and on the radio and television. Select your approach.
3. *Design the Ad:* Combine your content or message with your advertising method to create your unique promotion.

### **Film Option**

As a way to conclude the exploration of the Christian practice of forgiving, show the video: *Prodigal Sons – Modern Parables: Living in the Kingdom of God* (Modern Parables) followed by a discussion of the meaning and application of the Parable of the Prodigal Son for life today.

*Prodigal Sons – Modern Parables: Living in the Kingdom of God*

DVD 21 minutes English [\$24.95 from [www.modernparables.com](http://www.modernparables.com)]

Study Guide and Leader's Guide Online resources at [www.modernparables.com](http://www.modernparables.com)

*Modern Parables* is an original film-based Bible study curriculum on Jesus' parables. It uses short films of the parables combined with teaching by pastors and in-depth study materials to create an entirely new learning experience. *Modern Parables* seeks to re-create the emotional immediacy that Jesus' first century audience felt when hearing the parables. It does this by using some of the best parable scholarship and exploring it through creative filmmaking. The gut-level understanding made possible by the films is intended to drive listeners into a deeper understanding of the Bible.

### **3. Exploring the Christian Practice of Forgiving**

After each group has made their presentation, ask table groups to discuss the following questions:

- What did you discover about the importance of forgiveness in Jesus' ministry?
- Why was forgiveness so central to Jesus' ministry?

- What are the implications of Jesus words and actions for us today?

Conclude this section of the session with reflections from page 6.12 in *Living Well*. Use a PowerPoint presentation to name the key points of the “path toward forgiveness.” Invite the participants to reflect on the question: “Which of the insights really speak to you about the meaning of forgiveness?” and then discuss their reflections with their table group.

## **Quadrant 3. Developing Skills and Fluency: Ways to Live the Christian Practice of Forgiving**

### **1. Film: The Power of Forgiveness**

To illustrate the practice of forgiving in action show two segments from the video *The Power of Forgiveness* by Martin Doblmeier: “The Amish” and “Paths to Forgiveness. Order from [www.journeyfilms.com](http://www.journeyfilms.com).

*The Power of Forgiveness* by Martin Doblmeier  
 DVD 78 minutes Divided into individual stories/sections English  
 Online guides for community conversations available at [www.journeyfilms.com](http://www.journeyfilms.com).  
 \$24.95 from [www.journeyfilms.com](http://www.journeyfilms.com) (\$5 shipping)  
 Additional Resources: [www.thepowerofforgiveness.com](http://www.thepowerofforgiveness.com)

*The Power of Forgiveness* explores recent research into the psychological and physical effects of forgiveness on individuals and within relationships under a wide variety of conditions and translates it into a popular, accessible documentary film for national public television. It includes feature stories on the Amish, the 9/11 tragedy and peace-building in Northern Ireland, along with interviews with renowned Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel, best-selling authors Thomas Moore and Marianne Williamson and others. The film also explores the role forgiveness holds in various faiths traditions. It provides an honest look at the intensity of anger and grief that human nature is heir to. We see in the film that there are transgressions people find themselves unwilling or unable to forgive. Through character-driven stories the film shows the role forgiveness can play in alleviating anger and grief and the physical, mental and spiritual benefits that come with it.

Follow the film presentation with a table group discussion about the power of forgiveness. Invite people to reflect on questions, such as:

- What was your emotional response to what you say in the two stories?
- Why did forgiveness work in these two situations? What practices made forgiveness work?
- What do the two stories teach us about the practice of forgiving? What are the implications for how you practice forgiving? How can use the insights from the two stories in your own life?

### **2. Developing the Practice of Forgiving**

Invite people at table groups to develop a list of “Ten Ways to Forgive” based on their learning. This is advice they would give others to live the Christian practice of forgiving. Have each group write their “Ten Ways to Forgive” on a sheet of newsprint. When they have completed their work, ask each group to share several items from their list and then post the newsprint on the wall for all to see.

Present an overview of ideas in “How Forgiveness Can Grow and Flourish” and “Suggestions for Developing the Practice of Forgiveness?” on pages 6.13–6.15 in *Living Well*. Use a PowerPoint

presentation to share the key ideas found in the chapter. Offer examples and illustrations of each key point.

## Additional Learning Activities

### 1. Role Play of Forgiveness Situations

Role playing is one of the most useful methods to practice skills. Conduct a *before* (need for forgiveness) and *after* role play (using forgiveness ideas in chapter).

### 2. Forgiveness Panel

Develop a panel of “forgiveness practice mentors” who can present personal witness to the power of forgiveness and a variety of ways to live the practice in daily life.

### 3. Demonstration of Practicing Forgiveness

Conduct a demonstration of resolving a conflict positively so that the participants can see the Christian practice in real-life settings, e.g., at home, work, parent-child relationships, etc. Use the ideas on pages 6.14 – 15 in the *Living Well* to create a demonstration that is conducted by the teaching team and/or invite “practice mentors” in the church or community to demonstrate concrete ways that they live the practice. A demonstration shows people the “how to” of living a Christian practice. Follow-up the demonstration with questions such as:

- What did you learn about the Christian practice from this demonstration?
- How can you use what you learned from this demonstration in your own life?
- What do you need to practice some more before doing this yourself?
- What type of help would you like so that you can live this practice in your life?

### 4. Activity: The Costs and Benefits of Forgiveness

Think of a situation in your life where you find it hard to forgive or are struggling to forgive. Now use the questions below and your responses to assess the potential impact on you if you choose to forgive in this situation. (A worksheet is included for your use.)

#### Costs: If I don't forgive the person:

- I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when I think of the person and the situation.
- The effects on my physical health are \_\_\_\_\_.
- I think about the person and the situation \_\_\_all the time \_\_\_often \_\_\_sometimes \_\_\_never.
- I believe that the person deliberately intended to hurt me through his or her action and did not have any other reason to do what he or she did. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
- I feel like I'm the only person this has happened to. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
- I find it hard to move on with my life. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
- It is difficult for me to make good decisions because of the presence of that person/situation in my life. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
- I seek opportunities to tell other people about the person/situation as I see it. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

#### Potential Benefits: If I forgive the person, I will:

- Stop blaming the other person and be able to spend time on activities that move my life forward. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
- Take responsibility for the part I played in the situation. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
- Change my expectations for other people's behavior so that I don't take future situations personally. Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
- Learn strategies and skills that make me better able to cope with future hurts. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
- Stop focusing so much on the situation/person. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

- Feel a physical sense of relief. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
- Find peace. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
- Become a more forgiving person in the future. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

## **Quadrant 4. Demonstrating Creative and Authentic Performance**

### **1. Practice Forgiveness in Daily Life**

Give each household (individuals, couples, or families with children/teens) several minutes to review the ideas from the “Living” section of the “Forgiving” chapter and ask them to identify specific ways that they can strengthen their practice of forgiveness in daily life – at home, at work, at school, etc.

Here is a simple process of moving from idea to action. Give people a worksheet or piece of paper to create their action plan.

1. List three actions you would like to take to live the Christian practice of Forgiving in your daily life/family life.
2. Choose the action that you would like to do first.
3. List the potential roadblocks to implementing this action.
4. Develop strategies for overcoming these roadblocks.
5. Describe in detail the action you will undertake and the steps you will take to ensure that it will happen.

Another way to move from idea to action is to ask each household to develop a list of “Five Commandments (or Guidelines) for Forgiving” that they can post on the refrigerator or other prominent place in the house and that will become the “gold standard” for how they will practice forgiveness at home. Give each household a piece of paper to write their “commandments.” Then remind them to post it prominently in their house.

### **2. Writing a Letter to Someone You Are Struggling to Forgive**

Conclude the learning activities by asking each person to write a letter to someone he or she is struggling to forgive using the suggestions on page 6.15 in *Living Well*. Participants can send this to the person or decide to meet them and share the contents of their letter. Provide guidance to the group by presenting the information on page 6.15 in *Living Well* on a PowerPoint slide or asking people to review the suggestions for themselves.

### **3. Closing Prayer Experience**

Conclude in prayer using the prayer on page 6.16 and/or the additional prayer resources below. You may want to consider conducting a forgiveness prayer service to conclude.

#### **Prayer 1**

Let us become very quiet so that we may experience the presence of Jesus here with us and within our hearts. (allow a few moments of quiet)

Jesus, you said that where two or more are gathered in your name, you are present in their midst. We thank you for being with us and ask you to bless us. Help us to open our hearts and minds so that we can hear what you have to tell us about asking for and giving forgiveness. Amen.

## Prayer 2

### Opening Prayer

God, our Father, we know that you want us to love each other. We try to be kind and loving with others but sometimes things go wrong. We need your help. Please forgive us when we fail and help us to be forgiving of others.

### Scripture Reading

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, if my brother keeps on sinning against me, how many times do I have to forgive him? Seven times? No, not seven times", answered Jesus, "but seventy times seven." (Matthew 18:21-22)

### Prayer Reflection

Seventy-times-seven times. How many times do you think that is?

That is certainly a lot of times to be forgiven.

Is it easy to forgive over and over again?

Is there anyone who forgives you over and over again?

Is it your mom or dad?

Or your sister or brother?

Is it your husband or wife?

Is it a special friend?

When we have done something wrong, how do we know that we have been forgiven?

Sometimes others tell us that we have been forgiven; sometimes they scold us or become angry, but they usually end up holding us in their arms.

God is like those people who forgive us over and over again. God waits for us with open arms and asks us to do the same for one another.

### Our Father

Let us join hands and pray the Lord's Prayer together asking God to forgive us and to help us be forgiving people.

## Prayer 3

### Opening Prayer:

Lord God, take fire and burn away our guilt.

Take water and wash away the hurts we have caused your people.

Take hot sunlight and dry the tears of those we have hurt.

Heal their wounded souls, minds, and bodies.

Take love and forgiveness and root them in our hearts.

Take our imperfect prayers and purify them so that we mean what we pray.

Amen.

### Scripture Reading:

Matthew 18: 21-23

### Litany of Forgiveness:

I forgive my mother and father

for not being perfect

for neglecting me because of their own problems

for not loving me enough

I forgive my brothers and sisters	for all the competition for taking me for granted for not loving me enough
I forgive myself	for my selfishness for the stupid things I did in the past for not loving me enough
I forgive my son and daughter	for not being exactly like me for learning the hard way for not loving me enough
I forgive my spouse	for unreal expectations for not helping me when I needed it for not loving me enough
I forgive God	for not making me perfect for not making everyone just like me for giving me free will that I often abuse

I forgive anyone who may have physically, emotionally, or spiritually hurt me.  
I ask God to forgive me as much as I forgive others.  
I promise God to try to live peacefully and to create a community of love and forgiveness.  
Amen.

# Additional Learning Activities

## Quadrant 1. Connecting to the Learner

### Case Studies

Use newspaper or magazine stories that present the hunger for forgiveness. It might be a story that illustrates the need for forgiveness in our community and world or of the demonstration of forgiveness. Read, mime, or act out the story for the group.

### Film

Show a TV or movie clip on forgiving, for example from *Dead Man Walking*, which presents the hunger for forgiveness.

### “Top Ten List”

Have groups or families a Top Ten List of what’s hard about forgiving someone or reasons why we should forgive. Write lists on newsprint and post them around the room. Discuss what people have developed.

## Quadrant 2. Delivering Information

### Activity: Parable of the Lost Son

#### Opening

Ask if anyone can recall stories Jesus told about finding lost things. Lead them to remembering the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost or Prodigal Son. All three parables tell of the joy of finding what was lost. In the Parable of the Lost Son, the sheep and the coin are replaced by a human being.

#### Read the Scripture Story

Read the Parable slowly from Luke 15:11-32.

#### Presentation

Point out the son’s recognition of having failed, his turning to the father and the father’s joyful and complete response of forgiveness and acceptance. Repeat the words, “Father, I have sinned.” The son’s sorrow enabled him to receive the father’s love. If the son had not taken the risk of going to his father, the father would have waited in vain and his love would have been unreturned. Point out the love of the father that waits, embraces, and celebrates shepherd and the woman become our Father in heaven. It might be necessary to point out that working with pigs was sinking to the lowest level and represented the son’s totally cutting himself off from the father. Explain also the importance of the father’s running out to meet the son.

#### Reflection Activity

1. Have participants take a sheet of newsprint and draw a line down the middle of the sheet.
2. Label one side “Father” and the other side “Son.”
3. Tell the group that you are going to read the parable again. Working in their family or table groups, they are to listen carefully and:
  - a) Write the action words of the story in the appropriate column for Father or Son.
  - b) Put a plus (+) sign for positive actions and a minus (-) for negative actions of each.
  - c) The finished lists should look like this:

**Father**

Divided +  
Caught sight of +  
Ran out +  
Threw arms around +  
Kissed +  
Dressed the son  
Killed calf +  
Feasts +  
Celebrates +

**Son**

"Give me" -  
set off -  
takes -  
squandered -  
spent it all -  
hired to feed pigs -  
came to his senses +  
thinks, I have sinned +  
goes to father +  
Repents, I have sinned +

4. When the lists are complete, ask the participants what they notice on their sheets (the father was always ready and forgiving) and lead them through these questions:
  - a) How many positive actions and how many negative actions did you write for each? Point out that the father has no negative actions. God is constantly waiting, constantly giving, constantly ready to embrace us.
  - b) When did forgiveness occur? The father's forgiveness was always present. The son could receive it when he realized his errors and was sorry. We all have to go through this process of realizing our mistakes and expressing regret.
  
5. At their tables, ask participants to discuss:
  - a) Can you relate to the father in this story? To the son? How?
  - b) What do you think the father and son were thinking and feeling?
  - c) Do any of these thoughts and feelings relate to the symptoms that forgiveness can relieve found in the *Forgiving* chapter:
    - Feeling so wounded that you want revenge
    - Brooding over petty grievances
    - Feeling guilty and covering it with anger
    - Worry that it will happen again
    - Bitterness and stubbornness permeating your life
    - Every-growing need to be right
  - d) What does Jesus teach us in this story about asking for and giving forgiveness?
  
6. When all have had a chance to discuss, take comments to the large group pointing out that the third question gives us the ideal: We must always be ready to forgive and not afraid to ask for forgiveness. We are human, however, and will fail. Tell the group that we are all too prone to wallow in self-pity, anger, and revenge. However, asking for forgiveness and forgiving will transform our hearts and relieve the symptoms above that can cause spiritual, psychological, and physical illness. In the next segment, we will practice asking for and giving forgiveness.

# Why Should We Forgive?

**Rate your agreement with the following statements.**  
*(1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree)*

1   2   3   4	1. You forgive to quiet your angry feelings.
1   2   3   4	2. Forgiveness changes destructive thoughts into quieter, more healthy thoughts.
1   2   3   4	3. As you forgive, you want to act more civilly toward the one who hurt you.
1   2   3   4	4. Forgiveness of one person helps you interact better with others. Perhaps your anger with someone at work has spilled over to your relationship with your children. Forgiving that person would be a gift to your children.
1   2   3   4	5. Forgiveness can improve your relationship with the one who hurt you.
1   2   3   4	6. Your forgiveness actually can help the one who hurt you see his or her unfairness and take steps to stop it. Your forgiving can enhance the character of the one who hurt you.
1   2   3   4	7. You forgive because God asks you to do so. You forgive as an act of love toward God.
1   2   3   4	8. Forgiveness, as an act of kindness and love toward the one who hurt you, is a moral good regardless of how the other is responding to you. Loving others while protecting yourself from harm is a morally good thing to do.

# The Costs and Benefits of Forgiveness

Think of a situation in your life where you find it hard to forgive or are struggling to forgive. Now use the questions below and your responses to assess the potential impact on you if you choose to forgive in this situation.

## Costs: If I don't forgive the person:

- I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when I think of the person and the situation.
- The effects on my physical health are\_\_\_\_\_.
- I think about the person and the situation \_\_\_all the time \_\_\_often \_\_\_ sometimes \_\_\_never.
- I believe that the person deliberately intended to hurt me through his or her action and did not have any other reason to do what he or she did. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
- I feel like I'm the only person this has happened to. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
- I find it hard to move on with my life. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
- It is difficult for me to make good decisions because of the presence of that person/situation in my life. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
- I seek opportunities to tell other people about the person/situation as I see it. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

## Potential Benefits: If I forgive the person, I will:

- Stop blaming the other person and be able to spend time on activities that move my life forward. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
- Take responsibility for the part I played in the situation. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
- Change my expectations for other people's behavior so that I don't take future situations personally. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
- Learn strategies and skills that make me better able to cope with future hurts. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
- Stop focusing so much on the situation/person. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
- Feel a physical sense of relief. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
- Find peace. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
- Become a more forgiving person in the future. Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

# Resources for the Christian Practice of Forgiving

**Website: Campaign for Love and Forgiveness** ([www.loveandforgive.org](http://www.loveandforgive.org))

A project of the Fetzer Institute, the Campaign for Love & Forgiveness uses PBS documentaries, community activities, online resources, and networking opportunities to encourage reflection and conversation about how love and forgiveness can effect meaningful change in individuals and society. Through community conversations, the campaign aims to create a meaningful national dialogue that will bring about positive changes for individuals, their relationships, and their communities. The campaign was created as an outgrowth of the work of the Fetzer Institute to foster the awareness of the power of love and forgiveness in the emerging global community. It was specifically designed to support, promote, and augment messages of love and forgiveness in three documentary films the Institute is funding.

*Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy.* Donald B. Kraybill, Steven M. Nolt, and David L. Weaver-Zercher. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007.

*Amish Grace* explores the Amish response to the October 2006 murder and wounding of 10 girls. Before the sun had set on that awful October day, members of the Amish community brought words of forgiveness to the family of the one who had slain their children. *Amish Grace* explores the many questions this story raises about the religious beliefs and habits that led the Amish to forgive so quickly. In a world where religion spawns so much violence and vengeance, the surprising act of Amish forgiveness begs for deeper consideration.

*Calm Surrender: Walking the Path of Forgiveness.* Kent Nerburn. Novato, CA: New World Library. 2002.

This lyrical Midwestern writer has a knack for storytelling and extracting wisdom from the ordinary precincts of everyday life. His doctorate in religion and art coupled with his love of Native American lore adds firepower to his spiritual perspective. This down-to-earth volume on forgiveness has a natural feel to it and is peppered with accounts of real people facing steep challenges. Nerburn writes about forgiving ourselves, dealing with small slights, handling the limitations in our lives, letting anger and rage go with “a gentle almost invisible touch,” cultivating the seed of hope, embodying forgiveness, and seeing this spiritual practice as love put in action. Whether musing on his father’s goodness, his mother’s disappointments, his mother-in-law’s pain, the betrayal of Native Americans in Minnesota, or the grief of a mother over the death of her young son, Nerburn returns again and again to forgiveness as “a habit of the heart, an inclination of the spirit, a way of living our lives in homage to all the good choices and decisions we make each day.” This helpful and healing work about walking the hard road of forgiveness celebrates the triumph of the human spirit from start to finish. And equally important for Nerburn is the grace of God, a catalyst to compassionate living.

*Facing Forgiveness: A Catholic’s Guide to Letting Go of Anger and Welcoming Reconciliation.* Loughlan Sofield, Carroll Juliano, and Bishop Gregory M. Aymond. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2007.

Out of the wealth of their shared experience, authors Sofield, Juliano, and Aymond have fashioned an inviting exploration of the process of forgiveness that blends compelling personal narrative, wise spiritual guidance, and sound practical suggestions. Written with Catholics in mind, this simple primer is designed to encourage the first steps in the process of forgiving with over twenty-five stories of real people who found their way to forgiveness or sometimes who choose not to forgive. As readers look into the faces of the wounded people profiled in this book they recognize forgiveness is indeed possible.

*Forgiveness: Following Jesus into Radical Loving.* Paula Huston. Orleans, MA: Paraclete Press, 2008.

Are you able to forgive those who have hurt you? If you find it difficult to forgive, this book is your encouragement. If you're having trouble accepting forgiveness for something you have done, this is your inspiration. With honesty, writing about her own failings, Paula Huston examines the intellectual, psychological, social, and spiritual meanings of forgiveness. She asks tough questions and then offers possible solutions, drawing a portrait of a truly forgiving person. "One of Jesus' most mind-boggling declarations is that we who hope to follow him must first be willing to forgive the people who have hurt us. Not only does this injunction show up at the heart of the prayer he offers to his disciples ("Give us this day our daily bread...") but he restates it as a requirement for salvation: "If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions." (Mt. 6:11-15) "He also tells us that if we wish to live in relationship with God, we must first seek forgiveness from those we've hurt: "Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift." (Mt. 5:23-24). Our damaged relationships with other people, especially when we are responsible for that damage, have a direct effect on our friendship with God."

*The Forgiveness Book.* Alice Camille and Paul Boudreau. Chicago: ACTA Publications, 2008.

What is forgiveness? Why is it so hard to forgive? In *The Forgiveness Book: A Catholic Approach*, award-winning authors Alice Camille and Paul Boudreau address these questions and many more by thoroughly examining what Scripture has to say about those who "trespass against us," and what it takes to accomplish the difficult act of forgiveness—all from a distinctly Catholic point of view. *The Forgiveness Book* asks tough questions and prayerfully investigates issues such as: Why should we forgive? What to do with sin? How do we accept forgiveness? and the power of forgiveness. The Appendix includes an examination of conscience, prayers of forgiveness, Bible verses on forgiveness, important books on forgiveness, and a list of films that focus on forgiveness.

*Forgiveness is a Choice: A Step-by-Step Process for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope.* Robert Enright. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001.

*Forgiveness Is a Choice* is a self-help book for people who have been deeply hurt by another and caught in a vortex of anger, depression, and resentment. As a creator of the first scientifically proven forgiveness program in the country, Robert D. Enright shows how forgiveness can reduce anxiety and depression while increasing self-esteem and hopefulness toward one's future. This groundbreaking work demonstrates how forgiveness, approached in the correct manner, benefits the forgiver far more than the forgiven. Filled with wisdom and warm encouragement, the book leads the reader on a path that will bring clarity and peace. Enright is careful to distinguish forgiveness from "pseudoforgiveness" and to reassure readers that forgiveness does not mean accepting continued abuse or even reconciling with the offender. Rather, by giving the gift of forgiveness, readers are encouraged to confront and let go of their pain in order to regain their lives.

*No Future Without Forgiveness.* Desmond Tutu. New York: Doubleday/Image Books, 1999.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984, was called out of retirement in 1995 by President Nelson Mandela to serve as chairman of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). To heal the nation during its transition from despotism to democracy, it was necessary to look the beast of apartheid in the eye so that it would never rear up its monstrous head and fury again. It was decided that TRC would operate under the umbrella of restorative rather than retributive justice: Victims of human rights violations would be given a chance to tell their stories and to rehabilitate their civil and human dignity. TRC

would grant amnesty to those confessing their crimes. The Archbishop discusses the challenges, setbacks, and inner workings of the TRC process and offers excerpts from the victims and the perpetrators of apartheid. He writes: "To forgive is indeed the best form of self-interest since anger, resentment, and revenge are corrosive of that 'summum bonum,' the greatest good." Here is a sober and clear-sighted example of spiritual politics at its best.

*The Power of Forgiveness*. Kenneth Briggs. (Based on a film by Martin Doblmeier) Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

This volume examines the mysteries of forgiveness. Companion to the Journey Film documentary of the same title, the book focuses on the personal struggles with betrayal, loss, grief, confusion that give rise to the need for mercy and pardon. Forgiveness is portrayed as a healing force that occupies a central place in religious traditions and whose benefits are being noted by social-scientific research. The book probes deeply how we can freshly engage the elusive quality of forgiveness. It also shows how forgiveness and reconciliation can transform the personal, social, political, and cultural scripts that plague us.

*Radical Forgiveness*. Antoinette Bosco. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009.

Antoinette Bosco lost one son to suicide and later another son and his wife to the hands of a murderer. Her life since has been a dramatic journey to radical forgiveness and inner peace. In *Radical Forgiveness* she shares with us what she has learned about life's most difficult, and most healing, virtue. "Few people, thank God," she writes, "must come to terms with life issues like these. But all of us must deal on a regular basis with thoughts about people we feel have hurt us, abandoned us, spoken badly about us, damaged our reputations, manipulated, provoked, or just plain annoyed us. They can be parents, relatives, friends, bosses, employees, or strangers." *Radical Forgiveness* brings us freedom from the awful, angry, unforgiving thoughts that gnaw at our consciousness, burn us, haunt us, and won't let us go until we let them go.

*Reconciliation*. Robert Morneau. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007.

A wise teacher, Bishop Robert Morneau, sheds new light on a sacrament that can bring us face to face with the merciful Christ. Chapters include: The Mystery of God's Mercy, The Mystery of the Human Person, The Context for Reconciliation, The Mystery of Sin, Principles of Reconciliation, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

*The Return of the Prodigal Son*. Henri Nouwen. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

A chance encounter with a reproduction of Rembrandt's "The Return of the Prodigal Son" catapulted Henri Nouwen on a long spiritual adventure. In this book he shares the deeply personal and resonant meditation that led him to discover the place where God has chosen to dwell. Nouwen probes the several movements of the parable: the father's restoration of sonship, the elder son's vengefulness, and the father's compassion. The themes of homecoming, affirmation, and reconciliation will be newly discovered by all who have known loneliness, dejection, jealousy, or anger.