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# FORGIVE TO LIVE

PART SIX



**PERSONAL  
FORGIVENESS**  
WHEN YOU ARE YOUR  
OWN WORST ENEMY



Forgive to Live® Workbook

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## TEN PRINCIPLES OF FORGIVENESS

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*Forgiveness begins when you ...*

1. Accept that life is not fair and that others may play by a different set of rules than you do.
2. Stop blaming others for your circumstances.
3. Understand that you cannot change the person who hurt you; you can change only yourself.
4. Acknowledge the anger and hurt that some unpleasant event is causing you.
5. Re-frame your story of hurt—your “grievance story”—by placing the hurtful events in a broader context than your current point of view.
6. Recognise that only you can make the choice to forgive.
7. Shift your view of the offender as the one with all the power to seeing that person as weak and acting out of their own unresolved hurts and struggles.
8. Intentionally move from victim to victor as you begin to tap into your inner strengths and abilities.
9. Understand that forgiveness will take time and cannot be rushed.
10. Take responsibility for your life and your future.

*If you want to live, at some point you must choose to forgive.*





# PERSONAL FORGIVENESS

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*When you are your  
own worst enemy*



— CASE STUDY —

## Q *Patricia's Story*

Patricia did her best to be the perfect mother and wife. She gave up her professional career to support her husband. Patricia was always available to attend any of her husband's work-related functions.

Together they had two wonderful boys. Patricia devoted herself to her children. Given how attentive Patricia was to everyone else's needs, you might believe that everyone lived happily ever after. But they didn't.

Patricia's husband spent endless hours at work, leaving Patricia alone to raise the kids. Patricia was overprotective and needed to know everything her boys did. Some of her concerns were appropriate, but she could become overbearing. Her children both loved her and resented her at the same time, while her husband simply became more and more distant.

As the kids grew up, one developed a drug problem and the youngest became a mummy's boy who lived at home without a job. Not the perfect family Patricia expected!

Patricia blamed herself for all her children's problems, while at the same time, she harbored anger toward her husband for not being around more to help with the children. Patricia obsessively focused on the things she did wrong. Maybe she hadn't let her boys play enough with the other boys or maybe she pushed too hard for her kids to do better in school. If only she had been more encouraging rather than so critical!

Patricia found that when things went wrong, she would blame only herself. Her guilt and shame over her failures in life began to overwhelm her. The one thing she could not do, yet the one thing she most needed to do, was to forgive herself.



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## 💡 WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

*God may forgive your sins,  
but if you don't, your nervous  
system won't.*

The biggest barrier to self-forgiveness may be your own resistance to it. It's not simply that you feel bad because you know you've done wrong. Now, however, you wrap yourself in your own guilt, as if it were a comfy blanket.

And while your 'guilt blanket' may be destroying your life, you continue to hold on to it for reasons you may not fully understand.





Yet forgiving yourself, while difficult, is absolutely essential. Suicide, eating disorders, substance abuse, and depression all are linked to the inability to forgive oneself.

Perhaps you can justify forgiving others, yet you find no justification for forgiving yourself. Perhaps you believe you must pay some steep price, some form of lifelong penance for your wrongdoing. And so you hold on to your guilt and self-condemnation.

Not forgiving yourself for your mistakes can be considered a form of pride. Whenever you hold yourself to a different set of rules, a higher set of standards than you do for others, pride is the reason. When you can forgive others but not yourself, you are in effect saying that you are less capable of making a poor decision than others. You are somehow wiser, better prepared, and more careful than others, so you are without excuse and

therefore should not forgive yourself. Such logic is absurd, but it is more common than you may expect.

Some may even try to use their bad feelings to ward off the consequences of their actions. Such individuals wrap their ‘guilt blanket’ tightly around themselves and say, “Look how terribly I am suffering! I don’t deserve any more difficulty than this.” Instead of taking responsibility for what they’ve done by trying to repair the damage or make things right, they unconsciously decide to punish themselves by feeling miserable for the rest of their lives. But this does nothing to make the person wronged feel better . . . and it certainly will not help you.

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*Instead of dwelling on the past,  
focus on the present and prepare for  
the future.*

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Unfortunately, the decision to feel miserable for the rest of your life can have tragic consequences, and not always in obvious ways. Misery loves company. If you keep beating yourself up, then the person who tries to help you is going to get beat up too. It's inevitable. Anyone who wallows in guilt is going to become more withdrawn, more critical, and less open than normal. So whoever's around—your spouse, your children, your parents, or your friends—is going to suffer right along with you.

Forgiving yourself means letting go of what you are holding against yourself so that you can move on. It is the decision to set yourself free. It's exhausting to harbour hatred toward yourself. Every bit of energy you give to your regrets robs you of the energy you could use to improve your life.

Life is full of choices, and every choice you make will either move you in a positive direction or rob you of the opportunity to be your best. Forgiveness is a choice that takes courage and strength, and it gives you the opportunity to become an overcomer rather than remaining a victim of your own self-defeating thoughts and feelings.



So what can you do to start your journey toward self-forgiveness? Consider a few things you can try when your guilt is based on something you did wrong.

1. **NAME THE OFFENCE:** Naming the offence begins the forgiveness process. It allows you to break down the overwhelming, jumbled feelings into manageable parts. Ask yourself, “Am I feeling this way because the outcome makes me feel bad, or am I feeling this way because I am to blame for my actions?” By asking these kinds of questions, you can assess what you did and get a little emotional distance from the event.



*Avoid talking about your wrongdoings and how bad a person you are around other people. They may come to believe you.*

2. SHARE IT WITH SOMEONE YOU TRUST:

Articulate the specific wrong you committed and the harm it caused. Tell a couple of trusted individuals about what you did, looking to them for support, care, and advice. Sharing reminds us that everyone makes mistakes. It is easy to think you are all alone and unique in your suffering, but this only makes healing more difficult.

3. KNOW WHAT YOU WANT: You may not necessarily want to reconcile with the person you hurt; you may want only to get rid of the guilt by making things right. Or you may desire to rebuild the damaged relationship. Be clear from the start about what you hope to achieve so you can know where you are going and if you are getting there.

4. REDUCE UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS:

Most of us have a set of unconscious rules hovering in the back of our minds about how we expect ourselves to behave. But those rules, many of which we've absorbed in childhood, are not always realistic. Challenge your self-imposed rules and discard those that don't make sense.

5. IDENTIFY THE HURT: Realise that the hurt feelings and accompanying guilty thoughts you feel whenever you think of your offence are what's making you feel bad. It's your reaction to it today that's causing a problem, and that is

not determined by the past, but by the choices you make right now. Will you choose to relive the guilt or will you choose to forgive?

6. DON'T DWELL ON IT: It's common to fall into self-inflicted despair when you make a mistake. We spend more time worrying than mending, more time and energy thinking about the things we can't change than the things we can. Replaying what you did, over and over again in your head, isn't going to help you or the person you hurt. It just makes you feel bad. So every time you catch yourself dwelling on your faults, stop and refocus your attention on something more useful you can do that will make a difference.

7. SAY YOU'RE SORRY: When you can't forgive yourself because of something you've done, sometimes all it takes is a sincere apology to make things right. Apologies are most effective if made in person. But if that's not possible, consider writing out your apology. You can decide later if you want to send the note, if that's even possible.

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*Do good rather than feel bad.*

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8. **MAKE IT RIGHT:** Just as you probably wouldn't forgive someone else until they have made it up to you in some way, so you may need to make things right before you can forgive yourself. So how do you know when you've adequately paid your dues? Receiving forgiveness from the other person is usually a good sign that your efforts are adequate, but it's ultimately up to you to decide when you've done enough to right a wrong. If you can't repay the debt, then do something helpful or be kind in some way to those you have hurt. Even if the person you hurt is dead or otherwise absent from your life, you can still make up by providing kindness to someone else.

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*One forgives others to the degree that one forgives oneself.*

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9. **LET PEOPLE IN:** When we mess up, we either run away from friends and family or we seek their support. While running away may appear to be the best option for many reasons, it should be only temporary. Alienating ourselves from others when our wounds are still fresh usually leads to scars that go long and deep. We need people to rely on, especially friends and family. We need to have shoulders, ears, minds, and hearts to lean on, listen, and understand us. We benefit by people close to us as they help us muster the strength to put ourselves back together when we can't muster it on our own. Forgiving yourself is also important for those in your sphere of influence. Hurting people hurt others. The longer you avoid forgiving yourself, the longer you allow yourself to harbour the feelings that you deserve to suffer for what you did, the more explosive you will become, and the more likely you are to hurt those around you.



10. UNDERSTAND THAT YOUR MISTAKES  
DO NOT DEFINE YOU:

No one has ever gone through life without messing up something. Mistakes are normal, a part of life. You are not perfect, and if you ever think you are, you are setting yourself up for failure. You will never be perfect, so stop trying. But you can do your best, and when you believe that is good enough, then you will feel less guilty about your shortcomings. The key is to know that your life is getting better. What you need today is the courage to keep trying and to keep moving forward toward a brighter future.



So far we have dealt with guilt that has some basis in fact. But for many, this is not the real problem: for lying beneath guilt is its cousin, shame. Feeling bad when you did something wrong is natural, and even useful. Without it, where would you find the motivation to do better next time? But not all bad feelings are beneficial.

While guilt is an appropriate response when you have done something wrong, shame, on the other hand, is based not on what you have done wrong but on what others say is wrong about you. And believing those messages can devastate you, as you can do nothing to right this ship. If left unchecked, shame will erode your self-worth.



Shame causes you to feel inferior, inadequate, or bad about who you are, versus what you did. Shame isn't constructive. Instead of enhancing empathy and self improvement, it has the opposite effect. It leads to greater self-deprivation. Feeling like you're a bad person at your core can undermine any efforts to change, as change may not seem possible to someone crippled by shame. People often judge themselves based upon the blame or false accusations coming from others, which over time, they believe to be true. And over time, shame will erode self-worth.

Once you suffer from low self-esteem, it's common to take the blame for others' behaviours and for their low view of you. A spouse, for example, might accept her husband's blame and feel guilty for his drinking problem. Victims of abuse or sexual assault frequently feel guilt and shame, even though they were the victims and not the perpetrators. Those initiating a divorce often feel guilty, even if their partner's actions largely caused their marital problem. Because you struggle to accept yourself does not mean everyone else does, too. Healthy people can accept you as less than perfect because they accept themselves on the same terms.





Remember that you are no better or worse than anybody else. As the saying goes, “We all put our pants on one leg at a time.” While your struggles seem obvious to you, you probably know far less about the struggles of others. The truth is that we all have hills to climb and valleys to walk through. The key is to refuse to do it alone or to believe you are all alone with your difficulties. If you need to forgive yourself, then the best time to start is now. And if you need additional help, don’t hesitate to reach out to a friend or a professional so you can let go and move on.

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*Accept that failures do not make you a bad person.*

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## REVIEWING WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

*Our friends are those who know  
their own faults well enough to  
forgive ours.*

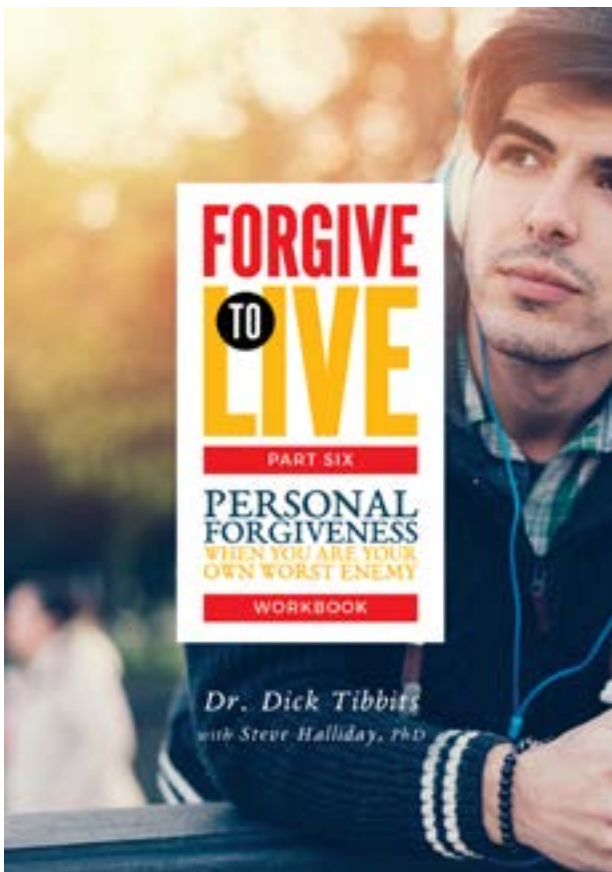
Patricia has a decision to make that she may not even realise she has. She either needs to forgive herself or continue to suffer. The choice is hers.

If you were Patricia's friend, how would you help her understand her choices? The following discussion questions will help you clarify how you might help Patricia.

1. Do you believe Patricia is suffering from guilt or shame? Explain your answer.
  
2. If Patricia were your friend, how would you approach her to talk about self-forgiveness? Who would you begin the conversation?
  
3. What rules or expectations from others do you think Patricia has retained that she is imposing on herself?
  
4. We can always blame ourselves for something if we look hard enough. Would you focus on Patricia's behaviour or would you focus on the messages she is telling herself about herself? Explain the difference.
  
5. Who is Patricia hurting by holding on to her beliefs? Who else? In what ways?

Thanks for completing these Review questions in Part 6 of the Forgive to Live booklet.

If you would like to discuss your Review answers with one of our Hope Channel Community Managers please email [discover@hopechannel.com](mailto:discover@hopechannel.com) or call 1300 300 389.



## FURTHER REFLECTION

Throughout this topic, you've had the opportunity to reflect on a specific case study and reflect on what it means to choose to forgive.

We have explored what it means to forgive yourself, and find freedom from past mistakes so that you can focus on making better choices for your future.

Through the accompanying workbook, you will now have the chance to take what you've just read and apply it to your own story so that you can experience the real difference forgiveness can make in your own life.

*The workbook is for your own personal use - and we encourage you to use it in order to get the most benefit from this series.*





## *Epilogue*

# A JOURNEY WITH DEEP REWARDS

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In this series I have intentionally taken you down a path of personal forgiveness, as if there were no other realities than your own healing and well-being.

But there are other realities. While personal forgiveness is the first step, it is not the last. I chose to focus on personal forgiveness in this book for three reasons.

First, it is the dimension of forgiveness over which you have the most control. It does not depend upon anyone else, so this kind of forgiveness has the best chance of actually happening.

Second, personal forgiveness provides you with the most immediate benefits that will affirm your efforts.

Finally, the benefits of personal forgiveness are the easiest to measure.

In many ways, however, personal forgiveness is only the starting place for the other dimensions of forgiveness. Realising that we all start at different places and with different belief systems, I have attempted to make forgiveness as relevant to every individual as I could.

But I must emphasise that forgiveness is ultimately a spiritual experience. I cannot discuss meaning and purpose in life without moving into the spiritual realm. I believe we are all spiritual creatures who seek meaning and purpose in life. We are not content merely to eat, sleep, and mate like the rest of the animal kingdom. No, we are creatures of meaning. We think beyond visible constructs. We long to be a part of something greater than ourselves. This is what makes us spiritual.

Most people first experienced forgiveness when they received God's forgiveness of their sins. A few years ago in America, you could hardly watch a sporting event without seeing someone in the crowd holding up a poster that read simply "John 3:16." That well-known text from the Bible reminded millions of individuals that while we were yet sinners, God forgave us—in fact, His Son died for us—so that we could be free from the chains of our past, so that we could be forgiven. The perspective offered by that single verse from Scripture frames reality in the largest context possible: today's daily choices do indeed have eternal consequences.

While you may or may not consider yourself religious, you are spiritual, and spiritual individuals recognise that they are no longer chained to their past. Spiritual people also understand that they have the opportunity and the ability to live for tomorrow. They see eternal significance in the temporal and thus have the broadest frame of reference in which to place their life. Spiritual individuals live each day in the context of a greater purpose in life.

Spiritual individuals also understand that living with an eye toward possibilities is much more rewarding than living preoccupied with one's problems. They can't understand why anyone would choose to remain trapped in the troubles of their yesterdays when a whole lifetime of dazzling tomorrows beckons. So, through forgiveness, these spiritual individuals let go and move on. You can, too.

## YOUR JOURNEY AHEAD

As eighteenth-century Dutch physician Paul Boese once said, "Forgiveness does not change the past, but it does enlarge the future." It is my hope that, as a result of completing this workbook, your life will become more rewarding, your health improved, and your future brighter. Forgiveness is a journey—and the deeper the wounds, the longer the journey. But it is a journey that offers significant rewards along the way. As you travel the pathway of forgiveness, think about the following words that speak deeply of the spiritual life:

*The only effective response to the past is forgiveness, the only effective response to the present is love, and the only effective response to the future is hope. Continue your journey of forgiveness today—and each and every day into the future. You can live the forgiving life. You can forgive to live!*

# FORGIVE TO LIVE

## God's forgiveness

"To err is human, to forgive divine." - Alexander Pope.

Why is there so much hurt, pain and brokenness in the world? Does it have to be this way?

We've seen the impact forgiveness can bring to our relationships and our emotional health.

Now - imagine the **peace and healing** that comes from the **forgiveness that God alone can provide**.

You don't have to imagine it, because you can experience it for yourself in this next series as we explore what the Bible tells us about forgiveness and God's incredible love for you.

To continue your forgiveness journey and receive your first God's Forgiveness booklet in this **free series**, email [discover@hopechannel.com](mailto:discover@hopechannel.com) or get in touch via the contact details below.

We also offer other **FREE** resources on topics including:

- 📖 Health & wellbeing
- 📖 Bible & prophecy
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- 🔍 Archaeology
- 🕒 History
- ♥ Spirituality

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Congratulations on completing the Forgive to Live series.

If you've found this series helpful, we invite you to try the Forgive to Live companion series, God's Forgiveness, or one of our other courses on topics including relationships, parenting, health and spirituality.

Visit [hopechannel.com/learn](http://hopechannel.com/learn) to browse courses, or get in touch via the contact details below if you'd like to speak to a HopeChannel Community Manager who can help you select your next course.



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