

*Dr. Dick Tibbits  
with Steve Halliday, PhD*

# **FORGIVE TO LIVE**

PART FOUR



**REFRAMING  
THE PAST**  
THE PAST EXISTS  
ONLY IN YOUR MEMORY



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.*



# REFRAMING THE PAST

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*The past exists  
only in your  
memory*



— CASE STUDY —

## Q *Sally's Story*

Sally grew up in a good home, and when she married Jeff, she tried to be the perfect wife. But it seemed as if nothing she did was good enough. Jeff ignored her, and the two of them seemed to live in separate worlds.

One day when Sally returned earlier than expected from visiting her mother, she found another woman in her home with Jeff. Furious, Sally kicked her cheating husband out of the house.

But Sally had no idea how to deal with this loss. For years, her life revolved around that terrible evening and what Jeff had put her through. So, rather than moving on with her life, she took every opportunity to tell all her friends what a terrible person Jeff was—that is, the few friends she had left. People who knew Sally tried to avoid her and her bitterness, as if she were wearing a necklace of the most potent garlic. And the temporary satisfaction Sally obtained from talking about no-good Jeff provided little relief from the misery of her wounded existence.

Meanwhile, Jeff had gone on with his life, remarried, and of course had no interest in staying in touch with Sally. This further infuriated Sally, so she would occasionally send Jeff a letter letting him (and anyone else who might read the letter) know what a terrible man he was. After a time, the letters started coming back with the notation “Return to sender. Addressee unknown.”

Tragically, Sally remained imprisoned by her anger and totally unaware that she was choosing to remain trapped by her miserable story.



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## 💡 WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

*It all depends on how we look at things, and not on how things are in themselves.*

— Carl Jung

Every time I tell people they can change the story of their past (their grievance story), I can anticipate this reaction: “What do you mean, change my story? That is impossible! I know exactly what happened. Are you saying that I should tell myself a lie in order to forgive? Listen, I cannot change the facts; a fact is a fact.”

Let me assert as plainly as I can that forgiveness does not change the facts, nor does it want to. It simply changes my perspective with regard to the facts.



Remember that the goal of forgiveness is not to forget, but to remember in a different way. I have learned that perceptions are reality, often even more than reality itself. So the good news is that we can change our perceptions. The way we change our perceptions is explained through a process called reframing. Reframing does not mean changing the facts; it means changing the focus of your attention from a single event to the larger picture, thus changing your perception of the facts.

Your view of life depends on your point of view or your frame of reference. You literally shape how you see others and the world in which you live by your frame of reference. You have heard it said that some people see life through rose-coloured glasses. That is a way of expressing the fact that life is coloured by your point of view.

When I served on a jury once, I felt amazed at how differently the prosecuting lawyer and defense lawyer expressed what had happened. While they both agreed on the facts, we as a jury heard two very different stories. Depending on which lawyer you believed, you could come to the opposite conclusion, based on the same facts.

Given that I view life from my frame of reference, picture the process of framing like this: when you look at a painting on the wall, what you see is shaped by the frame that surrounds the picture.

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*Forgiveness is the way to work through your problems rather than to walk around them. Forgiveness heals the hurt rather than hiding it.*

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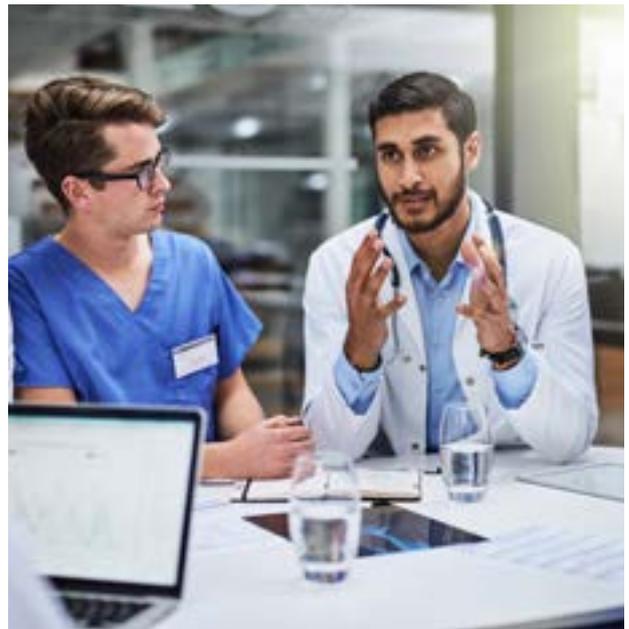
*Forgiveness does not change what happened; forgiveness changes how I see things and what they mean to me.*

The artist can focus you on a single flower, or open the world for you to see the whole forest. A frame around a picture helps to focus your attention on what the artist believes is most important in that picture.

We do the same thing when we frame a story. You can focus on a single event or put the same story in a larger context for a totally different point of view. When someone has hurt us, we tend to frame the picture as small as possible. All we can see is the single event that caused us so much pain. Your whole world can be framed by that single event. When you frame something, you pick those facts that reinforce your point of view and then fill your picture with all the wrong that person has ever done to you.

You may have observed this happening in real time when someone feels upset with you. They think of everything you have ever done wrong in the past and bring it up in the present to paint a terrible picture of how they see you. They selectively remember, for it is impossible to remember everything that has ever happened. When we get upset, we select only the bad things to remember. In effect, we choose our memories.

Small-frame people tend to focus almost exclusively on the faults of others, while large-frame people see the big picture. Let me illustrate this from my own experience.



As a hospital administrator, I would often have to resolve conflicts, choosing between what was in the best interest of the hospital and what was in the best interest of the physician treating the patient. We could argue endlessly about the correct course of action, but we would be hard pressed to come to a conclusion, because we both viewed the solution for our respective positions and accompanying incentives. The only effective way to reframe the discussion was to take it up to the next higher level.



Was there a principle that stood above our current discussion that we could agree on? Most often, that would be the purpose of our respective professions which, in this instance, was to care for the patient. From that higher level, we could return to the problem at hand and ask the question, “What solution will best serve the patient?” If we were honest about this, we often came to the right answer. This is a practical way of reframing by enlarging the frame of reference.

When you focus exclusively on the hurt the other person caused you, you easily frame the picture with one thing: how terrible the other person is. You then share your frame of reference with everyone you can so they, too, will see that person exactly as you do. The problem with this is that while the facts are true, the frame of reference is distorted. It shows only part of the picture. Forgiving is simply easier when you have the whole picture, or at least a larger piece of the picture.



One way to demonstrate this truth is to consider a person you currently do not like. This same person may have been at one time your good friend or even someone you fell in love with. When you focused exclusively on the person's good points, you saw only good in that person. Now that he or she has hurt you, you focus exclusively on their faults, and you no longer like the individual. This is how the same person in your grievance story who was once your good friend has now become your worst enemy. It also explains how your worst enemy can be someone else's best friend. We all see what we look for.

How you see a person will be determined by what you look for in that person. What you see is what you frame in your picture. The victim and the offender will frame the same event in two different ways. Victims will frame their story as if the offence is still continuing, whereas the offender will describe the event as over and done with. The victim will maximise the negative impact of the unwanted event, whereas the offender will minimise the significance of the event.



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*For I have also learned from experience that the greater part of our happiness or misery depends upon our disposition and not upon our circumstances.*

— *Martha Washington*

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*With forgiveness, your life is no longer defined by your past.*



These distortions will produce two entirely different stories. Each story is framed from a particular point of view.

By having a more complete picture, you can change your focus from the problem toward a possible solution. Through the process of reframing, we literally change our past. Forgiveness changes your past by changing how you recall your past.

Keep in mind that reframing is not a single act that you do only one time. It is a process of continual reframing. If reframing the story seven times does not work, be prepared to reframe your story seventy times seven.

When the story you now tell yourself becomes sufficiently altered from the story you always told yourself, then you have in effect reframed your past. This profound truth is based on the fact that your past exists only in your mind's memory. With enough alterations, you will have a completely different story that will affect you in a totally different way. The facts will not change, but your perspective does. Practice putting your past in the past, where it belongs, so you can live a different life in the present. In this way, forgiveness heals the hurt, rather than hiding it.



And “letting go” means letting go of your old grievance story and replacing it with a new, more accurate story. You don’t lie to yourself; you don’t pretend that the event wasn’t important or didn’t hurt. But reframing your story by placing it in a better perspective will take away its power over your life. By making it more accurate, you will lessen its ability to continually hurt you.

As you begin the process of reframing your grievance story, keep in mind three crucial truths that underlie the possibility of forgiveness:

- You **cannot** change the past.
- You **cannot** change the person who hurt you.
- You **can** change yourself.



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## REVIEWING WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

*When a humble person looks in the mirror, he or she recognises the absurdity of saying that someone is unworthy or undeserving of forgiveness.*

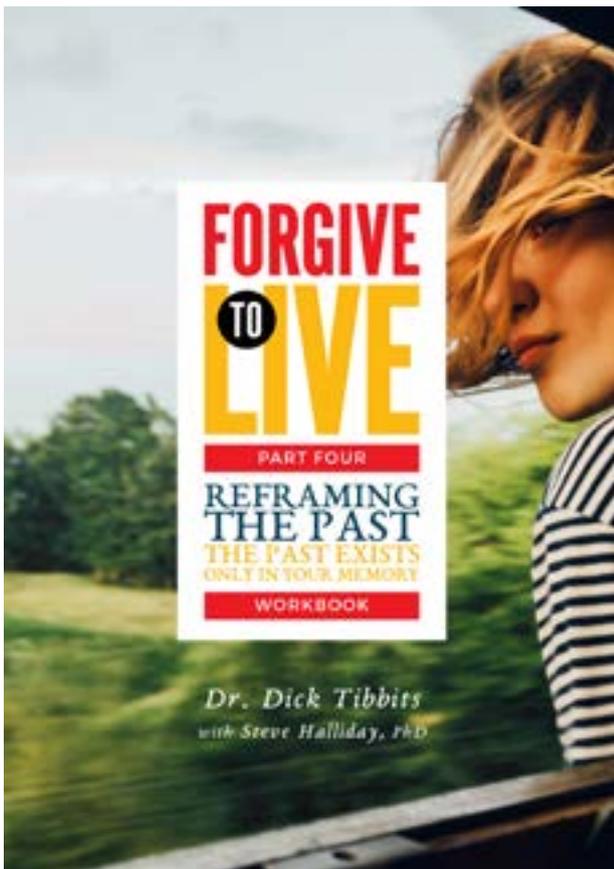
With the help of a program on forgiveness, Sally eventually recognised that her consistent focus on the hurtful behavior of her ex-husband injured only herself. In fact, the only life she was destroying was her own.

Sally realised that she could continue to believe that her life was miserable because Jeff had made it that way, or she could let that old story go and find happiness in the new and healthier life made possible by forgiveness.



Thanks for completing these Review questions in Part 4 of the Forgive to Live booklet.

If you would like to discuss your Review answers with one of our Hope Channel Community Managers and/or continue your forgiveness journey by receiving Part 5, please email [discover@hopechannel.com](mailto:discover@hopechannel.com) or call 1300 300 389.



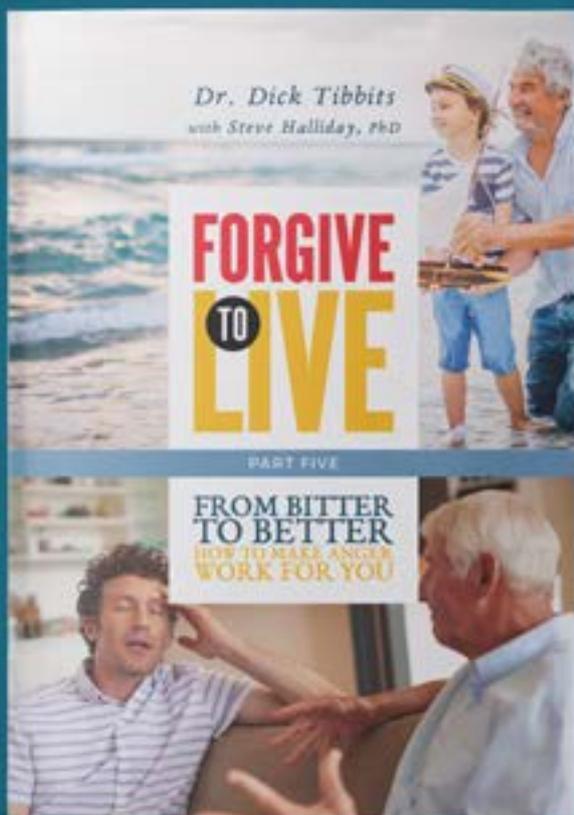
## FURTHER REFLECTION

Throughout this topic, you've had the opportunity to consider the power the past - and our memories of the past - can have on our present and our future. Our reality is shaped by the stories we tell ourselves. What sort of stories are you focusing on?

While reflecting on Sally's story, perhaps you may have thought of a situation or hurt in your life that you have been holding onto. Perhaps you've been telling others - and yourself - a grievance story that could benefit from being reframed and considered from a different perspective.

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.*



## PART 5: FROM BITTER TO BETTER

Anger is one of the most misunderstood emotions. You can own your anger by acknowledging your emotions and not letting bitterness take over. Learn how to break free from the resentment trap in Part 5 of the Forgive to Live series. Email or call HopeChannel to receive your copy and to continue in your forgiveness journey.



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✉ [discover@hopechannel.com](mailto:discover@hopechannel.com)

☎ 1300 300 389

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