JOURNEY TO FORGIVENESS



Discover your own journey of forgiveness in the company of fellow travelers. This 12 module course will inspire and challenge you to experience the freedom and joy that forgiveness brings and make you a channel of blessing to others.



JOURNEY TO FORGIVENESS - WELCOME

The world is broken and so is the church. Unfortunately, even though it is not supposed to be that way, the church is divided on the same fault lines that divide the world; ethnically, culturally, linguistically, socio-economically and politically. This is especially true in the diaspora churches in the context of existing or post national ethnic conflict where often, the body of Christ harms the witness of the gospel by being divided along ethnic and/or cultural lines. Humanely speaking there is a valid reason for this divide: the "other" is responsible for human atrocities perpetrated on "me or us" and until justice is done, I cannot come to terms with my oppressor.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus showed and modeled a way forward. Romans 5: 7 says "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us". How is this possible? It is, through the wonderful agency of forgiveness, a means that God has given us too, to bring healing and reconciliation to ourselves and our fellow human beings. Forgiveness breaks through the pain and hurt and leaves us free to love, even the worst of our enemies, just as Jesus did with us. It frees us to leave our natural cultural biases and connect with other Christians at a kingdom level, the one that Jesus ushered in when He declared "the Kingdom is at hand"; the kingdom where we have the power to "love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us," (Matthew 5:44).

This is our call to the body of Christ in the world; to live as Kingdom people, forgiven and forgiving one another so that the world will take notice and be irresistibly drawn to Jesus, our King. Sri Lanka4given is honoured to share a tool that helps the church, the visible body of Christ, undertake that journey to forgiveness. The tool is a 12 module Bible study that takes an individual through his or her own journey of forgiveness in the company of a supportive small group with the hoped for outcome that individuals will be freed to forgive and live as God intended them to, content and overflowing with joy. And yes, it deals with all those questions we posed above, about justice and punishment and more. The 12 modules are to be studied regularly (weekly or fortnightly) with a mid-term full day or overnight retreat included where groups will spend more time in prayer and sharing. It will use a book "Grace and forgiveness" by Rev John and Carol Arnott as an accompanying text.

Enjoy the journey,

Chris Pullenayegem

On behalf of SL4Given

CONTENTS
JOURNEY TO FORGIVENESS - WELCOME
MODULE 1 – GETTING STARTED
MODULE 2 - WHY JUSTICE ?7
MODULE 3 - THE GIFT OF GRACE ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
MODULE 4 - FORGIVENESS - IS IT AN OPTION ? ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
MODULE 5 - WEEKEND SESSION I - LETTING GO ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
MODULE 6 - WEEKEND SESSION II - FORGIVENESS & RECONCILIATION10
MODULE 7 - BARRIERS TO FORGIVENESS ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
MODULE 8 – FORGIVENESS: MARATHON NOT A SPRINT14
MODULE 9 - WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE FORGIVE? ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
MODULE 10 - WHICH CULTURE: NATURAL OR KINGDOM? ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
MODULE 11 - AMBASSADORS OF RECONCILIATION
MODULE 12 AND ONE LAST THING; FORGIVING MYSELF
ADDITIONAL READINGS21
APPENDIX A1 –FREED TO FORGIVE: SOME BIBLICAL PRIORITIES – BY DR. AJITH FERNANDO
APPENDIX A2- A STORY OF FORGIVENESS – BY RAGHU BALACHANDRAN
APPENDIX A3 – MEMORIES DON'T MATURE BY REV.PEGGY KENNEDY
APPENDIX A4 – HOW TO MOVE FROM FORGIVENESS TO RECONCILIATION – BY STEVE CORNELL
APPENDIX A5 – A RESEARCH STUDY – NATHAN R. FRISE AND MARK R.MCMINN – GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY 21
APPENDIX A6 – QUOTES ON FORGIVENESS
APPENDIX A7 – ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS

MODULE 1 – GETTING STARTED

Welcome as you undertake a journey; towards receiving and giving forgiveness. Others in this group will journey with you and be there for you. You will have the following resources to facilitate your journey: the book "Grace and forgiveness" by John and Carol Arnott, study manual on forgiveness, journal, DVD (for group use). Have a great trip!

Warm up

Introduce yourself. Find an object in the room that illustrates what strength/gift you bring to the group. Share it with the group.

Share a time when you *learnt* something that changed your attitude and/or behavior. Share the "why" with the person next to you.

How adults learn¹

Respect- Teacher/facilitator actions show respect for the experience and knowledge adults bring, and is observed and felt by the learners. All participants show respect for each other, including respect for their opinions and treat differences as learning opportunities.

Immediacy – "How soon can I use this" –during an event and in a learners own setting

Relevance – Leaners will learn faster and more permanently that which is significant to them and to their present lives

We retain...
20% of what we hear
40% of what we see and hear
80% of what we see, hear and DO

Safety – People need to feel safe and challenged – hold the opposites. Participants need to know and feel that they are not being judged when they share.

Engagement – People learn more when they are actively involved, doing what they are learning

Inclusion – Without inclusion, a learning group is fragmented. With inclusion, a learner is moved to collaborate and open to learning.

¹ Adapted from "Learning to teach; learning to listen" by Jane Vella

<u>Task:</u> Which ONE factor engages you most? Explain your choice to the group. What questions do you have?

Transformational learning

Read the following on transformational learning. Circle what you see is most important to you. We will hear all your responses.

We learn best in a community of support, safety and challenge. The teacher/facilitator is accountable for the content, design and fulfilling a teachers responsibilities. He or she is responsible TO the learners, not FOR the learners; they are adults and are responsible for themselves. Learners must take responsibility for doing what they say they would and holding themselves accountable to at least one other. In the end, teaching should translate to learning and learning should result in change. In Matthew 7: 24, Jesus says "therefore everyone who hears my words and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on rock....". This is the transformational change that the Bible requires. This is the change that this course hopes for as an outcome.



Transformational learning happens when knowledge, application (practice) and accountability intersect.

Task: What did you circle and why?

Group covenant

On a sheet of newsprint, write down what you would commit to as a group, to make this an effective learning environment and experience. Below is a sample covenant with a few suggestions. Your leader will transpose this on a sheet (A4) and hand them to you for your signatures. You will each be given copy of the signed covenant for your folder.

OUR COVENANT (Sample)

We covenant that we will:

- Attend all meetings except due to unavoidable circumstances
- Begin and end on time
- Respect our differences
- If necessary to disagree, do so respectfully, treating the other with dignity
- Complete our assignments on time
- Confidentiality
- Other...

Group signatures:

We sign this covenant knowing that we are committing ourselves and voluntarily making ourselves accountable to each other for our learning and the fruit that the Holy Spirit will produce in us.

Name Signature

Signature

For discussion: How much should we share? How vulnerable do we need to make ourselves?

What is journaling?

Journaling is the discipline of keeping a written (or electronic) record of your thoughts and ideas on a regular basis. It helps organize our thoughts, remember them, forces us to take time out alone, get perspective and a lot more. Through this course we encourage you to maintain a journal and constantly refer to it and share from it as well.

Encouragement: Read the book with pen and highlighter in hand. Circle, highlight, underline... and write key thoughts in your journal.



Read the sections 'How adults learn" and "Transformational learning" again. Write (in your journal) a time when at least ONE of these principles were not observed and led to a lack of learning. Reflecting on the experience, what would you have hoped to have been done differently?

- 1. Read up to Page 22 of the book "Grace and forgiveness" by Arnott
- 2. Underline/circle any thoughts on these pages that strike you or need clarification on. Write any accompanying thoughts on your journal. Come prepared to share these with the group

MODULE 2 - WHY JUSTICE ?

Warm up:

What image comes to mind when you hear the word "justice"? Share it with a partner.

Check on/share assignment

Assignment (Arnott's book): Share one thought that struck you and one thought that you need clarified from last week's assignment item (2).

What does the rest of the group have to add?

The issue of justice

Page 17: Justice is a good, necessary principle that exists in the world....We need to understand justice and why it has to exist before we can really appreciate mercy. ...

The Bible teaches us that justice is an essential part of the character of God. Just as much

Page 18: Why did Jesus have to die? ... They don't uderstand that the cross was God executing justice for the sin of mankind; i.e. YOU. Behind the agony that Jesus endured on the cross was the impeccable, uncompromising, exacting, perfect justice of a loving God.

Task: How else could God have dealt with our sin? Discuss the pros and cons of what you suggest.

Task: Why is justice important? What would be some of the outcomes of a world without justice? Can you provide examples?

Could you find examples in the Old Testament that talks about justice? On a sheet of newsprint, write the heading "Justice" and write down all that you have shared. Make a poster of your thoughts on "Justice".

Justice has a price tag attached to it. Loss of freedom (i.e. being put in jail), loss of life (execution), an "eye for an eye", and so on. The punishment for my sin also has a cost; eternal separation from God. Rom 3: 23: For all have sinned and fallen short of Gods glory and Rom 6:23 (a) The wages (price to be paid for) of sin is death...(which is eternal separation from God).

So, logically speaking, all of us should be dead, for eternity! We have sinned and therefore, if justice was to be executed, we don't deserve to be alive.

The courtroom

Imagine this scenario. You are the presiding judge. Your son has been charged with murder and is brought before you. The jury finds him guilty. Now you are required to pass judgement (sentence the criminal). What options do you have?

Name these options and the likely consequences of each one.

Options	Consequences

God's courtroom

God is the "just and fair" judge. I stand before Him as a sinner. He cannot ignore sin; it must be punished. So, He passes judgement: Rom 6:23(a) The punishment for sin is death... Final, no negotiation. I stand condemned with death. But wait, God is also a God of mercy, compassion and love. That's his character too. So, He leaves the bench (as judge), comes down to where I am (the criminal), puts out His hands to be handcuffed and is taken away, INSTEAD of me! Amazing love; I go free: He takes my place and dies for me. *Jn 3:16 God so loved the world that He gave His only Son (Himself), that whoever believes in Him (accepts the gift of a substituted sacrifice) will live for eternity.*

Go through that courtroom drama in your mind for a while. You are the criminal before God, awaiting judgment. Think of Jesus leaving His seat as a judge, coming down and holding out his hands to the guard saying "take me instead".

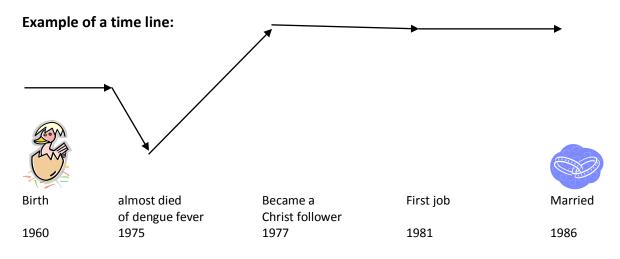
Task: Share with the group how you would have **FELT** at that time. What **THOUGHTS** would have been racing through your mind? What would you have wanted to **DO** at that time?

Pray as a group. If it's possible, get on your knees and tell God aloud how you feel and think about Him exchanging His life for yours.



Assignment:

- 1. Read pages 23 -36 of the book "Grace and Forgiveness"
- 2. Begin to pray that God will show you someone to whom you could relate the "courtroom" scene: a relative, friend, colleague, ... and then share it with that person. Make sure you journal his or her reaction to that story and come prepared to share your findings with the group.
- 3. In your journal draw a chronological "time line" of your life and note significant events/happenings at different points on that line. Be creative and prepared to share this with the group at the weekend retreat together.



MODULE 6 - WEEKEND SESSION II – FORGIVENESS & RECONCILIATION

Task 1:

Read the following and circle anything that resonates with you and underline what challenges you. Share them with the group.

The Ministry of Forgiveness in a Praxis of Reconciliation Robert Schreiter, C.PP.S.

(Excerpt)

Forgiveness: Obstacles and Misconceptions

In order to engage in a ministry of helping victims of human rights violations come to forgiveness, (or deal with our own unforgiveness - added) it is important to begin by looking at why forgiveness is so difficult, and to clear up some misconceptions about what forgiveness really is. Forgiveness—especially for severe violations of human rights—is difficult because our very humanity has been violated. The worst acts of violence affect the most fundamental dimensions of who we are. Our capacity to trust, to build relationships with others, and our very right to life itself are sinned against, in violence. We are treated as less than the human beings we truly are. By threatening to destroy our very capacity to trust, to build and sustain relationships, violence undermines the resources we need to regain our humanity. Forgiveness deals with memory, with our identity, and our ability to move to a different place in our lives. All of these are endangered by the violence we have experienced. In that violence we are treated as less than human beings, as people who do not nourish and cherish relationships, who love and are loved by others. We are made into objects upon which violence wreaks its destructive force.

To be able to forgive is to regain the humanity that has been wrested away from us. Forgiveness is the act of a restored human person. Christians believe that it is God—the author of our humanity—who brings this restoration about in his grace. We believe that this restoration is made possible by the fact that God's own Son entered into the full dimension of our humanity, and himself experienced violence and death. He has opened the way to forgiveness and reconciliation for us by treading the same path that has been so painful for us, thereby "making peace"—as St. Paul says in the Letter to the Colossians—"by the blood of his cross." (1:20)

In order to be able to understand this great transforming act of God, we need to be able to move beyond some common misconceptions about forgiveness. These misconceptions get in the way of helping people come to forgiveness.

The first is that *forgiveness requires forgetting about the past*. This misconception is

enshrined in a saying one often hears among Christians: "Forgive and forget." The intention behind this saying is that we should put behind us entirely whatever wrongdoing happened in the past, and live now in such a way that is as though it never happened. While this might seem like a laudable idea, there are two things very wrong with it. *First* of all, to ask victims to forget terrible events that have changed their lives forever is to make them victims once again. Forgetting in effect tells victims that what happened to them was not as bad as they think, or they are not important enough that such attention should be paid to them. That is why forgetting amounts to make them victims yet again.

Second, "forgive and forget" is nowhere in the Bible. Jesus stresses the importance of forgiveness throughout his ministry. But that should not be confused with asking people to forget what happened to them.

When we forgive, we do not forget. Rather, we remember in a different way. Forgiving is about gaining a new relationship to the deeds of the past and the people who perpetrated them. It means being able to see the wrongdoers as more than wrongdoers utterly identified with their deed. It is about being able to see them as human beings as well—weak, misguided, confused or caught themselves in terrible things from their own past.

This is not to condone their actions, but simply to point to the fact that the motivation and the person behind those atrocities can be mixed up. Forgiveness is about establishing a new relationship to the past, not trying to forget or erase that past.

This is an important insight, because in so-called national processes of reconciliation, victims are frequently asked to forget what has happened to them and put the past behind them. The call to do this comes most often from the wrongdoers themselves or those who failed to act on behalf of victims during the time of violence. Such forgetting is a denial of the humanity of victims. Forgiveness is learning to relate to the deeds of the past—and those who did them—in a way that removes their toxic quality.

Another reason that asking victims or their survivors to forget the past is wrong has to do with those who died in the violence. To forget the deaths of the innocent is to dishonor the dead. It is to cut off our relation with them. This is a reason why people instinctively react again any forgiveness that forgets what has been done. This instinct is a correct and deeply human one. We cannot forget those who died wrongly in the violence of the past. We have a duty to honor and remember them. How we are to remember and honor them will be taken up below in the discussion of the praxis of forgiveness.

A second misconception about forgiveness is that *forgiving means not punishing the wrongdoers or seeking reparation for victims*. The widespread use of impunity as a tool in national reconciliation in effect does this. It denies justice to victims. If justice is ultimately about right relationships in which all are recognized as human beings and children of God, then foregoing justice by impunity can never be seen as doing justice or promoting reconciliation. While it is often not possible to seek out and deal with every wrongdoer, the punishment of those who directed the violence can be an important part of national healing. Offering some measure of reparations for victims is a clear

acknowledgement of the wrongdoing of the past, as well as a pledge to prevent such wrongdoing in the future.

A third and final misconception about forgiveness is that *Christians must forgive immediately and totally*. This misconception grows out of how we understand Jesus' command to forgive completely. That certainly is the charge that Jesus has given us, but to expect that we can achieve that instantly is a potential denial of our humanity. The effects of violence and violation insinuate themselves into our lives and our relationships in such a way that we often are unable to unravel their grasp upon us. Usually coming to terms with traumatic events takes long periods of time to uncover and heal. Sometimes when we think we are beyond the event, something provokes in us anger or fear that we did not know was still within us.

The fact that healing of the human heart often takes a long time means that we must respect this fact in the process of forgiveness. Psychologists have suggested that there are at least four stages in the act of forgiveness: (1) acknowledging that we have been violated and dealing with the feelings that arise from this; (2) deciding that we want to forgive rather than continue to harbor resentment; (3) doing the emotional and spiritual work needed to work through resentment and the restructuring of our relationships; and (4) engaging in the act of forgiveness. If healing is about restoring our humanity, then we must honour this process of the healing of the human heart.

We can take our cue here from Jesus himself. In the account of his crucifixion in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus' first words on the cross are: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." (23:34) These words are ordinarily interpreted as Jesus forgiving his executioners. But if we look more closely we notice that Jesus is asking God to forgive them. Jesus is still in the midst of his suffering; to forgive the executioners for a deed that is not yet completed is not to take Jesus' suffering seriously. What we have instead, I believe, is what was seen as the second stage of forgiveness just outlined: Jesus decides that he wants to forgive, but cannot yet forgive something that has not yet been completely done.

I have found that this can be a great consolation for those who are struggling to forgive, but feel that they are being unfaithful disciples of Jesus because they cannot yet forgive. In this passage in Luke's Gospel, we find Jesus in the very human condition we ourselves share. Forgiveness is a process of healing; it is not just the final act itself. If we can help people move beyond these three misconceptions—that forgiveness is about forgetting, that it requires foregoing the punishment of wrongdoers, that it must be instant and complete—then we can help them embrace what forgiveness really is: a changed relationship with the past that both acknowledges what has been done and allows for the restoration of the humanity of the victims.

Task 2

What new concepts did you learn about forgiveness? Discuss these in the group. How does this relate to victims of conflict on a community/national level?

Task 3

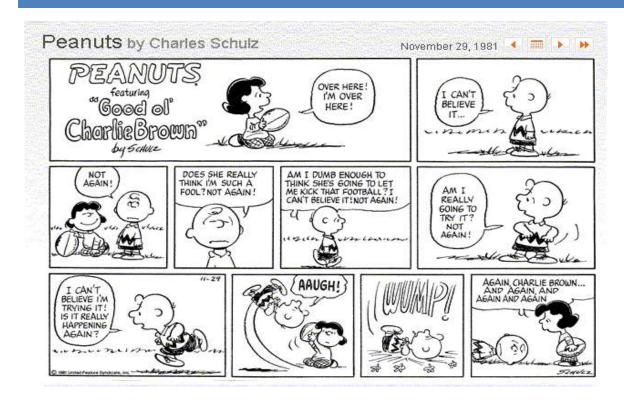
Think of a person you know (or a family/group) who has been a victim of violence. How would you communicate what you have learned so far to him/her/them in a way that makes sense? What encouragement would you offer? What barriers could you anticipate?



1. How does unforgiveness show? Write down as many ways as you can think of, in your journal.

Going deeper: Read some of the stories of forgiveness in the book "Why forgive" by J.C. Arnold

MODULE 8 – FORGIVENESS: MARATHON NOT A SPRINT



Warm up:

Think of a time when you refused to forgive someone. How did it show; emotionally, physically..? Share this with one other and we will hear samples in the larger group.

Task 1

Consider the following scenario.

Pedro was paralyzed from his waist down as a result of a driving accident involving a drunk driver. A month after the accident and because of his faith, Pedro chose to forgive the driver Mark (who escaped with minor injuries) when he visited him in hospital. It was a genuine act of forgiveness. Now, six months after the accident, as Pedro (31 yrs) motors around in his wheelchair in his parents' house and watches his nephews play, or has to call his mother each time he needs to reach for his clothes in the closet, Pedro experiences feelings of animosity and anger towards Mark and even God. Pedro quickly tries to put aside thoughts of "what if he had been more careful" or "how did God allow this to happen to me?" but finds that they don't go

away quickly. At church he hears sermons of forgiveness and tries to block negative thoughts but has a hard time doing so. His new sense of loss (mobility, job/ministry, independence, etc.) seems to make it harder to forgive than when he was on that hospital bed.

Q - How do you know you have forgiven if it still hurts?

Discuss this question in the group.

Read Matthew 18: 21-22 ²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" ²² Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. (*Note: this is just before Jesus related the parable of the unmerciful servant*)

Question - What relevance does this passage have to your discussion on Pedro?

Review the parable that follows (unmerciful servant) and **write** down the principle that Jesus was trying to communicate through this statement i.e. "seventy seven times".

Task 2

Think of a hurt that keeps coming back to mind, even though you think you have dealt with it and forgiven those who hurt you. Answer the following questions:

- 1. What thoughts keep recurring?
- 2. What feelings get aroused when this happens?
- 3. How have you dealt with these thoughts and emotions so far?

Write your reflections in your journal and share your response to #3 above, with one other in the group.

Task 3

Recall the excerpt from the "Ministry of Forgiveness in a Praxis of Reconciliation" by Robert Schreiter, C.PP.S found in Module 6.

Mark yourself "X" on the following continuums

Remembering the past

Remember ------ Remember as it was

Forgiveness as a process of healing

Open wound ------ Healed holistically

Share this with the group. How do you want the group to help you move to the right?

Additional resources: Read Rev. Peggy Kennedy's reflections on "Memories don't mature – part 2 (repeating for giveness)" - Appendix A3.



Assignment:

Read pages 41 -47 of the book "Grace and Forgiveness". Note/highlight the thoughts that speak to you.

Think of someone you know who is struggling to forgive. **Pray** and ask God to give you an opportunity to approach that person to open a discussion on forgiveness. Share your own journey so far and use your creativity, wisdom and the promptings of the Holy Spirit to guide you into this sensitive area of the other. Journal your experience and be prepared to share them.

MODULE 11 - AMBASSADORS OF RECONCILIATION

Warm up

Share some of your findings in your assignments with one other. What surprised you? What challenged you?

Task 1 - Ambassadors

Consider the following:

If we are a part of Gods Kingdom, we really cannot be citizens of this temporal world and its culture. Gods Kingdom is eternal and counter-cultural to our natural culture. It follows then that we are here in this world only as ambassadors, for a short while. Ambassadors are citizens of one country, representing that country and living in another. We are therefore a part of the Kingdom diplomatic corps, bound by Kingdom laws, executing a Kingdom purpose and bringing in a new Kingdom culture. What a privilege!

• In what ways does this challenge you? Share your response with the group and state (write in your journal) *three* specific ways this truth would be evidenced in your life in the future.

Task 2 – Reconciliation

Discuss the following questions:

Is "genuine" reconciliation possible without forgiveness? Give reasons for your answers.

What are the differences between forgiveness and reconciliation? Write these on a T - chart.

What would be the pre-conditions for genuine reconciliation to take place? Compare your answers with Appendix A4.



Assignment:

- Next week will be our last module. Using a time line, trace your journey over the past ten weeks. Mark significant points of learning, questions, high and low points etc. Be prepared to share your "journey of forgiveness" with the group.
- Complete the "Learning checklist" and come prepared to share your responses
- Are there questions (on forgiveness) that remain unanswered or are there any areas of confusion that you need clarification on? Note these in your journal and bring them to the group next week.

MODULE 12 - AND ONE LAST THING; FORGIVING MYSELF

Warm up

Take time to share your "journey of forgiveness" with the whole group, especially the times that you learned a truth and that learning led to change. Stop often to pray of each other and celebrate Gods work in your lives.

Share your responses to the "learning checklist" that you completed as part of your assignment.

Forgiving myself

Consider the following:

"Often forgiving myself is the hardest of all tasks. And, this is the only instance when "reconciliation" becomes mandatory if I want to live in peace with myself and the world. Part of this difficulty is the fact that I know my own heart, thoughts and weaknesses and how they work together to bring out the worst in me. To forgive myself I need to step outside myself and see me as God sees me; broken, weak, unworthy but a precious, special child of His. And so, I need to forgive and reconcile myself to the fact that although I am unworthy and weak, I am still someone who needs to be treated as a person who needs to be forgiven for the wrongs I have committed. Only when I am able to offer forgiveness to myself will I be released from the "chains" that hold me back from "loving my neighbour as myself".

Task 1

What is your response to the above?

Take a moment to ask yourself if there is anything that you have not forgiven yourself for. You don't need to share it but if you feel the freedom to, do so.

Task 2

What questions do you still have concerning forgiveness? Share them with the group and seek their wisdom. Note the ones that you did not find suitable responses to.

Task 3

Do you feel that others need to experience what you did through this study? In what ways can you influence your spheres of influence to take this course? Name some possibilities and next steps.

Closing:

Write your name on the card that you have been given. When your leader prompts you, pass it to the person on your left. Now on the card that you have been given by the person on your right, write ONE positive attribute that you know to be true about the person whose name appears on the car and ONE thing that you commit to praying for that person. Once the full round is completed and you get your card back, celebrate!

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Additional readings in the form of Appendices (as summarized below), are provided in a separate document and are also available in electronic format.

APPENDIX A1 -FREED TO FORGIVE: SOME BIBLICAL PRIORITIES - BY DR. AJITH FERNANDO

APPENDIX A2- A STORY OF FORGIVENESS - BY RAGHU BALACHANDRAN

APPENDIX A3 - MEMORIES DON'T MATURE BY REV.PEGGY KENNEDY

APPENDIX A4 – HOW TO MOVE FROM FORGIVENESS TO RECONCILIATION – BY STEVE CORNELL

APPENDIX A5 – A RESEARCH STUDY – NATHAN R. FRISE AND MARK R.MCMINN – GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

APPENDIX A6 - QUOTES ON FORGIVENESS

APPENDIX A7 - ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS

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