

Steps to Follow to Forgive Yourself*Bruce Wilkinson, D.D.**Experience: Founder of Teach Every Nation*

My goodness, we have talked about so many emotional issues; that probably a year could go by in a normal person's life, and they wouldn't have this many emotional things happen to them. I want to thank you for processing, and for forgiving, and for keeping your heart open, and for not running away, but staying here and forgiving.

Session #8 has to do with Steps to Follow to Forgive Yourself.

I have a passage under my introduction here with the Apostle Peter. Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" --He wasn't lying, and he wasn't being proud. Look at the next sentence -- And so said all the disciples. They were committed to Christ and would have died for Him. Then he began -- later on; this is verses later when this actually came true -- Then he began to curse -- Peter did -- and swear, saying, "I do not know the Man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So he went out and wept bitterly.

I want you ask you a question. If the Roman soldier had come in with a spear, when Christ said, 'you're going to deny me', and said to Peter, "I'm going to throw this spear right through your heart unless you deny Christ", what will have Peter said? Thrust it through. This was loyalty -- so much so he would have died for Jesus. He'd already traded everything he had in his life for Jesus. So when he turns around, and before he knows it, he's denying Him not once -- not even realizing he did; denying it twice -- didn't realize it was two in a row because it was hidden from him; deny him a third time -- didn't even realize it was a third time; and then he did hear that rooster, and then God permitted him to remember. You talk about a challenging moment to forgive.

I daresay there's probably not too many of us in this room that have something harder than that to forgive. But when he saw Jesus -- oh, man -- the shame that he had to have inside of him.

And what's the first thing that Jesus said? "Do you love Me?" Oh, that must have been a spear. Because, if he'd have loved Him, he would never have denied Him. "Then feed my sheep." "Well, why would you ever want me to be back in ministry? You saw that I did." "No, no, Peter, I forgave you for that. But will you forgive yourself enough to go back in? Peter, do you love Me?" "Lord, of course you know I do." "Then go back in."

What's the linkage here? Until we forgive ourselves, we'll never fulfill the destiny God has for us. We won't. Isn't it interesting that Jesus, who knew exactly what Peter did, forgave Peter so much that he wanted him immediately back in the ministry? Until you and I forgive ourselves for what we have done, you'll always withhold yourself and really not trust yourself or trust God. So let me lead you through those same 3 parts as we did in Forgiving Other People.

Part 1: The Preparation to Forgive Yourself

Number 1. How do you prepare to Forgive Yourself?

Preparation 1: Remember this? Decide you are going to forgive yourself today.

All right, I'm going to ask you that same question. So, how many of you are going to forgive yourself today? How many of you can't think of anything you need to forgive yourself for? There's a couple of you. Good. I want to do something for you. I want you to say this as a group, and everybody say this out loud, "Before God, I have forgiven myself for everything." Because probably you've got some things that just came to your mind.

Number 2, preparation 2, List the wounds that you caused others that wounded you too because of what you did to them.

The sentence beneath it: "I hereby ask God to reveal to me those wounds I caused in other people's lives that may have wounded me as well. Please lead me to those areas You want me to forgive myself."

So, who is a person that you wounded? That's Box 1. What did you do to them? How do you feel about what you did? So take a minute. I want you to list the person that you wounded, that also wounded you.

Preparation #3: List the wounds that you did to yourself.

You didn't affect somebody else directly; you did it to you.

"I also ask God to reveal to me those wounds I cause to myself either through mistakes or through sins. Please lead me to those areas You want me to forgive myself."

So, what did you do that wounded yourself? And how do you feel about that? Go ahead and fill that out as the music is in the background.

How many have ever made an awfully big mistake with at least one of your children? How many times have you heard yourself talking about that? When you hear yourself repeatedly talking about that, what does that show you about what's inside? You've not forgiven yourself for what you did, and you live in regret. And because the wound is there, you have all kinds of other emotions -- like that Slide we talked about-- that is about you. It's judging you. You have self-hatred for what you did to your child. And most parents don't purposefully try to hurt their children. They make honest mistakes that affect and do hurt their kids. Not only do you have to ask for forgiveness of your kids... I did; all three of my children, of course. How can you be a parent and not? And my wife many times, but also myself for what I did. Never meaning to, but still did it.

And some of those things could be regrets that I take with me to my grave. If it's a regret I take to my grave, I've not forgiven myself. And I have those traits then of resentment, and of bitterness, and of slander towards myself, and vengeance, and self-hatred. I need to open my heart to myself. I am a person; just like you are a person. And when you fully forgive yourself, and you're okay with the fact of what you did, you are free of some big things in your life. This is where a lot of people have addictions they can't seem to break -- addictions to food, addictions to pornography, addictions to alcohol, addictions to drugs.

Not all of it, but much of it is from unforgiveness, and unforgiveness toward yourself. And because that pain that goes from unforgiveness to anger to bitterness to slander to resentment to hatred to vengeance is against you, then you think, "I need to suffer more for what I did", because you have vengeance. Vengeance means 'I'll make you pay for what you did'. Well, guess who's making you pay? You. You are. And the truth of it is, no one I've ever read, or heard about, or talked about, ever said they took out vengeance enough. It's an addiction. You never say, "I'll make myself pay for it for one more week", and then that's it. There's no end to this.

And because, when you have vengeance, you have other reasons to have self-hatred; you find yourself over reacting somewhere, and then you have more self-hatred and more vengeance, and that vengeance comes against you, and the vengeance causes pain, you sabotage yourself, and you need comfort then because there's so much pain. Now watch this.

When the need for comfort is so strong, because you keep hurting yourself in one way or another, guess what we look for? Something to give us some comfort. What gives us comfort? The easiest is called sin. You drown yourself in alcohol to get what? Comfort. You go get involved in pornography, for what? Comfort. You go have sex with somebody you shouldn't be, for what? Comfort. When you realize what's driving you to those things is self-hatred and vengeance, and when those things are gone, what's pushing you? Nothing. And until you stop this, and you forgive, the torment will continue; and it's self torment.

I want to make one more point here. When I realized this myself, it just shocked me. When I don't forgive myself, I go through these things that bring about torment in my life, and vengeance in my life, and I hurt myself with the decisions that I do, or the sins that I commit, is this necessary? If I'd have forgiven myself here, would I have done any of these things? No. I wouldn't have vengeance.

All this is unnecessary, wasteful suffering. Whoa! It's unnecessary. Because if I had willfully hurt you, and God sees it and He says, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay", so guess what God does to me? He disciplines me, and He doesn't want my help. Therefore, when I think I won't forgive myself, and I keep going down this alley, I add all the suffering that comes from going down this slide, and God's in heaven saying, "What are you doing? This is a waste of time. Why are you suffering? I already disciplined you." Do you know how much of our suffering is totally stupid – stupid? All right. Let's go on to the next section in our workbook.

Part 2: The Process of Forgiving Yourself

Number 1: Open your heart in order to forgive yourself.

I want you to turn to the person next to you -- after you write down the word Open -- I want you to hold up your workbook, and I want you to read that sentence to the person next to you, and have them read that to you. Go ahead.

Step #2: Extend compassion to yourself as a person. Extend

compassion to yourself as a person. Extend compassion to yourself as a person.

What I would like to do is I'd like the ladies, in unison, to read that to the rest of us. Ladies, go ahead. "I am not perfect." Hold it; I want you to slow down. I want you to mean what you are saying. Don't read it. Mean it. "I am not perfect and make mistakes."

[Women read statement]

Well we ended that period right there, didn't we? Okay, men, let's read that again. Here we go. "I am not perfect." Come on men. "I am not perfect." Wait, wait, come on men. Wait, wait, wait, really? Men...men think we are perfect. Okay, here we go. "I am not perfect and make mistakes, and commit sins like everyone else. I choose to obey Christ and love myself enough to permit myself to grant mercy, grace, and compassion to myself. I accept reality and no longer deny what I did or deny my need to forgive myself."

Now what I want you to do in a moment is select the greatest wound, one of them, that you committed to yourself -- you either did it to somebody else or you did it to yourself -- write down what was going on in your life at that time, and extend compassion by giving yourself grace and mercy.

So on the left side, just the top box, what did you do that wounded you so much? And describe your compassion to yourself. What was going on? What were you trying to do? Go ahead.

We're going to do something that you probably have never done before. I'm going to ask you in a moment to stand up, and find somebody of the opposite sex. So if you're a man, find a woman. You can't know the woman. So it needs to be somebody you've not met before, or a stranger. In a minute, here's what I want you to do. I want you to tell another person of how you're being kind to yourself. The point is for you to tell another human being how you are showing compassion to yourself. I want the man to go first. And then I want the woman to go back -- don't tell him what you did; just talk about your compassion. And when you're listening, make sure you hear compassion. Like I stopped you and said, "Slow down. You're not really meaning that." And help the person...help the person extend compassion. Everybody on your feet; find somebody from the opposite gender that you don't know. Men go first.

Okay, if you'd just all kind of have a seat, we need to move on to the next point. What happened to you just now as you expressed

compassion to yourself to another human being? How did that feel, ladies? It was nice, wasn't it? It's so seldom we are ever kind to ourselves. Especially if you grew up in a demanding home that your parents were hard on you, you had a hard time being kind to yourself.

Do you know the most forgiving people are the people that are kind to themselves? Do unto others as you do unto yourself. If you can't give compassion to you, you won't be very good at giving compassion to somebody else. So when I'm trying to help somebody forgive themselves, and they were stumbling over extending compassion, I'll start doing that for them, and stating affirmative comments to them that are heart to heart. Not head to head; you extend compassion from your heart. It's not uncommon for people to start crying in the third sentence, because so seldom does somebody show compassion to each other.

Step 3. Number 3: Release yourself from your Heart-Prison and set yourself free.

Let's read that sentence beneath it. Ready? "I hereby officially open the doors of my Heart-prison and let myself free. I no longer hold myself in contempt for what I did. I accept reality, and no longer deny what I did or judge myself for it." What's one thing you all did that you let yourself out of today? Come on. Prison. But what's one thing that you did? Say again?

[Audience member] Forgive yourself.

Forgive yourself. For what? Who can share one thing that's not too personal? What did you forgive yourself for? Being hard on yourself. Yes sir. What else? Trying too hard. Being a perfectionist. You never can succeed that way. What else? Not going after what you really wanted in life. Many people have regret over that.

I want you to close your eyes, and let's try this picture part one more time. I'll read it to you, if you don't mind closing your eyes.

[3.1] Number 1. Picture yourself standing outside...you're outside of your Heart-prison.

[3.2] Then picture yourself looking inside the bars, and seeing yourself locked inside the cage of prison bars at the same time.

[3.3] Picture yourself on the outside of the prison door expressing your compassion to yourself through the bars,

“I know you didn’t mean to do that. I know your heart is good. I know this really has brought pain to you.”

[3.4] 4. Picture yourself opening the door, unlocking it, and saying to yourself, “I release myself fully for what I did”.

[3.5] Let yourself out; then do something very unusual -- picture yourself feeling wonderful freedom as you embrace yourself.

[3.6] Picture yourself weeping with regret for what you did, but joyful that you’re finally free; that you’re no longer in your own Heart-Prison. Amen.

Step #4. How many of you felt that? Let me see. Yeah, it’s wonderful. It’s true. It’s true. Sometimes just picture...like the New Testament says, “Set your mind on things that are above”. He’s asking you to imagine. That’s what we just did. We just imagined.

Step 4: You know this one. Forgive yourself for each sin, mistake, and wound.

Remember -- beneath that -- that forgiveness includes both setting yourself free from your Heart Prison, and then forgiving yourself for each wound. So let’s try to get that wound in your mind. I’m going to have... I’ll just read it out loud with you all at one time. When we get to the place where there’s XX’s, you have to say your own thing. Got it? Nice and slowly. Here we go.

I choose to forgive myself for the wounds I caused to others, and the wounds that I cause to myself. Whether I made a terrible mistake or committed a major sin, I choose to forgive myself completely for what I did. I accept reality, and I allow myself to heal completely. I forgive myself for wounding, either yourself or somebody else, by doing what? I forgive myself for wounding myself when I -- whatever you did to yourself. Yeah, are you forgiving? Yeah. I watched you forgive. I can actually see you forgive. It’s a pleasure. I’m glad you’re in the front row.

Now, there may be some other things you need to forgive yourself for. When you feel refreshed in the next few days, and you can get alone by yourself in a quiet place, sit down and think through this, “What else do I need to forgive myself for?”

When I was almost done with this course, my son came out to the back porch, where I was working for weeks, and he sat down, and

we began to talk, and he said, “I think, dad, you haven’t forgiven such and such”. It was a group of people. I said, “Oh, yeah, but I did”. He said, “Dad, I don’t think you did all the way. I think the Lord just kind of let me know to encourage you about that.” I said, “Well, let me try to see if that’s right. Maybe it is right. I thought that I had.” So I said to God, “Before God, I have forgiven everyone of everything. Oh, no, I didn’t. You’re right son.” And I stopped right on the spot, right on the back porch with my son listening, because we’re very close, and I said, “I hereby open my heart. I hereby open the prison gates of a whole bunch of people, a group. I hereby forgive them; and I started naming the things out loud. I hereby bless them.” And I said to my son, “Oh, Dave, look at this. It’s the first time I’ve used my own list in this order, and it worked again. Look at this. This is great.” And gave a big hug to Dave. Why? Why am I sharing that? This is how it’s meant to be. It’s meant to be right now that you love forgiving... you love forgiving -- not you run away from it.

Step #5: Apologize and make restoration to those who need it.

This is kind of an added point. You need to help other people forgive you that you hurt. So, we read this beneath it: I will no longer avoid talking about the things I did that wounded other people. I will no longer avoid it. I will apologize and ask their forgiveness, as I have already forgiven myself. If I have stolen or misused something, I will restore, if possible, to their satisfaction. What’s the big word that means satisfied? Propitiation. Ready? Through my humility of asking for forgiveness, I will help the people I’ve wounded to forgive me and release me from any and all debt, and trespasses I committed. If you need to, get on your knees in front of somebody and beg them to forgive you. Humble yourself.

Part 3: Peace from Forgiving Yourself

The prayer is to Confess...confess your sins to God and ask Him to bless you abundantly.

Who would like to come on up here and read this sentence, this prayer, out loud on behalf of all of us? Can any of you -- somebody who feels comfortable – just come stand next to me? Oh good. Come on up and stand next to me. What’s your first name? Nice to see you. I want us to pray this prayer with her; but not say anything, and not bow our heads, and not close our eyes. So just come stand right next to me, if you don’t mind. Come over here. So, you’ll have to read it nice and loud for us. Your heart is

pounding, I understand.

[audience member reads] Dear God, I confess to You my sins of unforgiveness toward myself, anger, bitterness against myself, slander, resentment, self-hatred, and the desire of vengeance to make myself pay for what I've done. I accept the fact that Christ paid for my sins; and God has disciplined me for them. I now realize I have suffered needlessly by practicing vengeance upon myself for my sins and mistakes. My self-inflicted suffering was worthless suffering, and was not the will of God. Please forgive me and cleanse me...

BW: Say that one more time.

[AM] Please forgive me.

BW: One more time.

[AM] Please forgive me, and cleanse me from all unrighteousness. Please bless me in all areas of my life. .

BW: Come on, ask Him to bless you. Come on. Come on.

[AM] Please bless me.

BW: More. More. More because you're worthy, come on.

[AM] Please bless me in all areas of my life as I no longer have unforgiveness in my life. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

BW: Oh, let's give her a hand. That was wonderful. Oh my. Oh my.

Do you think God heard that prayer? Do you realize He is free to bless you when you no longer have torment, and He is no longer irritated with all those unforgiveness sins? You have every right to come and say, "Dear God, I've been sick. Please heal me. My finances aren't working. Please...please come and fix it for me." And you have every right, with a clear conscience, to say to God, "God, pour out Your blessing upon me."

Conclusion

Now when you're done forgiving yourself, go back to that conclusion because you need to use the Validator there -- Before God, I have forgiven myself for everything. Use the Forgiveness Validator to check to make sure there aren't any remaining

unforgiveness toward yourself -- you don't want torment to continue. The Holy Spirit may bring other things to your mind, and He will, that you will need to forgive yourself.

So go through the same process, and then repeat the Forgiveness Validator again, and say to God again, "Before God, I've forgiven myself for everything", until you have complete peace and no other wound is brought to your mind. That's how you know your torment has been fully cancelled.

What a day! For all of you who are all across Africa, and eventually around the world, who see this course, may you become a man and a woman who loves to forgive. Regardless of how unfair it may be, or how traumatic it may be, or how painful it may be what somebody did to you or that you did something to yourself, that you forever remember the words of Jesus, "So, likewise, My Father will do to you if you do not forgive your brother each of his trespasses from your heart".

May you never again need to know the issue of torment; never again have self-hatred or hatred towards somebody else; never again have vengeance towards yourself or to somebody else; and that you realize you are free. You're free to ask God to take vengeance, and you're free to ask God not to take vengeance; and never forget one isn't better than the other. You have complete freedom.

Somebody said to me in the hallway, before I came in for this last session, "Wouldn't it be something if a country did this together -- if all the past was really forgiven, and all the blame of the past is gone? There would be no vengeance. There would be no more hatred. There could be true love and respect one toward another rather than generations going by with this continuing." Was not this Mandela's dream? It needs to be my dream. It needs to be your dream. May this course be the tool that you need in your family, in your business, in your church, in your home, to be a family that has got abundance of joy because there is no unforgiveness.

Well, it's hard to believe that we've come to the end of this life-changing, transformative course. And before we turn everything off, I wanted to just spend a minute or two just one-on-one, sharing from my heart to your heart. Teach Every Nation exists for one reason – to be of personal service to you. I know that you must realize that already, because you've already experienced this life-changing and enlightening course. Because every course that TEN makes has you in mind, and how to encourage you to experience the next breakthrough that God may desire for you.

We've done some research with many pastors and asked them this question, "What percentage of your church do you think have unforgiveness?" Do you know what the overwhelming answer is from pastors from all different backgrounds? Between 95% and 100% have unforgiveness in my church. Do you realize what the pastors are saying? – that nearly everyone in my church struggles with this issue of unforgiveness. We've got to do something about that, don't you think?

I mean, if you're a pastor, or a church leader, or a bishop, an elder, a deacon, a Sunday school teacher, or a youth leader, what can you do to set people free? You can...you can rise up, make a difference – a big difference. And for some of you, who have been looking for a personal ministry and you can't seem to quite find it, why don't you become a Forgiveness Champion? Why not, and use this course to have a major ministry in the lives of other people? Why don't you invite your family, your friends, your neighbors, your coworkers, into your home, and show it on your TV, or show it on your computer? -- and then the conversation will just take off. You won't have to be, you know, a famous teacher or anything. You just be you. And everybody talks about this topic once the door is opened. And I promise you God wants... No, no, no, He desperately wants people to forgive.

And, therefore, if you do this for Him, He's going to come alongside of you in remarkable ways, and you're going to set people free – really.

So, all of us at Teach Every Nation, our global team, would love to hear your stories. You know, we do this for you. And what makes our day is when we hear from you of your own story of personal forgiveness, of forgiving somebody else, or of forgiving yourself. And I would love to hear you, a Forgiveness Champion, that goes around and makes a big difference -- so, go get a team around you. And then go to our website – teacheverynation.org, forward slash, my story – teacheverynation.org/my-story, and then write your story to us. Tell us. It will make all the difference to us, to our creative team, to all the people that work every day praying, laboring, "How can we serve the people even more effectively?"

You know, what happens in your life makes the sun shine in ours.