



FORGIVENESS

*Reclaiming Its Power in a Culture
of Outrage and Fear*

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in a Culture of Outrage

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Dr. Amy Orr-Ewing

A 6-Session Study Guide

WELCOME

Thank you for joining this journey.

I wrote Forgiveness: Reclaiming Its Power because I believe forgiveness is one of the most important and most misunderstood ideas in our world today. We are living in a time where harm is deeply felt and widely recognised, yet we often struggle to find a way forward that leads to healing rather than division.

This series comes from a desire to explore whether forgiveness might offer a better path, one that takes both justice and pain seriously, while still opening the possibility of restoration.

I also want to acknowledge, from the outset, that forgiveness is not easy. For many of us, it touches places of real hurt, loss, and complexity. This is not about offering quick answers or easy solutions, but about creating space to reflect honestly, at your own pace.

My hope is that, through these sessions, you will find a deeper understanding of forgiveness and perhaps begin to experience something of its power in your own life.

- Amy



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to be used alongside the book and the video series, either individually or in a small group setting. Each session follows a simple rhythm to help you engage with the content in a way that is both thoughtful and practical.

For Each Session

1

Read

Begin by reading the relevant chapter from the book. This grounds you in the theme and prepares you to engage more deeply.

2

Watch

Watch the video for that session. This introduces the key ideas and helps bring the content to life.

3

Read the Key Idea

Each session includes a short summary to help you focus on the main theme. This is not meant to cover everything, but to highlight what matters most.

4

Discuss

Use the discussion questions to explore the topic together. You don't need to answer every question - choose the ones that resonate most with your group.

5

Reflect

Take a moment of quiet to consider how the session connects to your own life. There is no pressure to share unless you feel comfortable.

6

Pray

Close by praying together. The prayer provided is a guide - feel free to adapt it or pray in your own words.

Using This Guide In a Group

- Keep the atmosphere relaxed and open
- Listen well and avoid rushing to respond
- Allow space for different perspectives
- No one is required to share more than they are ready to

Some sessions may touch on personal or sensitive experiences. It's important to create a space where people feel safe and respected.

Using This Guide Individually

You can also use this guide on your own:

- Read the relevant chapter
- Watch the video
- Read the key idea
- Journal your responses to the questions
- Take time to reflect and pray

Go at your own pace and revisit sessions if needed.

A Final Note

Forgiveness is not a quick or easy process. This guide is not about rushing to answers, but about creating space to think, reflect, and begin a journey.

SESSION 1

FORGIVENESS:

A RADICAL POSSIBILITY FOR A GREAT HUMAN NEED

Exploring why every vision of human identity points toward our need for redemption.

Reading

- Introduction
- Chapter 1: Forgiveness as a Radical Possibility for a Great Human Need.

Watch the Video



Opening Question

When you hear the word "forgiveness," what is your gut reaction? Relief? Resistance? Fear? Curiosity?

Key Idea

How we understand who we are shapes how we think about forgiveness. If we see ourselves as just biological beings, then ideas like guilt and forgiveness can feel insignificant. If we see life mainly in terms of power, forgiveness can seem like weakness. And in a fragmented, digital world, forgiveness often feels rare or unnecessary.

But the Christian view offers something different: that we are made in the image of God, with inherent value and dignity. This means that harm truly matters - but so does the possibility of redemption. Our deep longing for second chances points to something real, and forgiveness becomes not just an idea, but a meaningful and necessary part of being human.

Reflection & Discussion

- Which view of identity do you see most around you - people as biological, driven by power, or something more? How does that shape how we think about forgiveness?
- Have you ever experienced forgiveness being used as a power play - either withheld or demanded? What did that feel like?
- Why do you think we're so drawn to stories of redemption (in films, sports, or real life)?
- What difference would it make to your daily life if you truly believed you are made in the image of God?

Going Deeper (optional)

Chapter 1 explores why humans long for redemption and how different views of identity shape our understanding of forgiveness. Reflect on the idea of Imago Dei (Genesis 1:27) — what it means to be made in the image of God, and why this gives both victim and perpetrator inherent worth.

Prayer

Lord, we confess that we do not always know what we are. We have reduced ourselves to biochemistry, to power, to performance. But you have made us in your image - sacred, beloved, accountable, and redeemable. Give us the courage to believe that. Give us the humility to receive your forgiveness. And give us the grace to begin extending it to others. Amen.

SESSION 2

FORGIVENESS:

A CHALLENGE TO A PUNITIVE WORLD

Exploring how justice and mercy meet in a world addicted to outrage

Reading

- Chapter 2: Forgiveness as a Welcome Challenge to a Punitive World

Watch the Video



Opening Question

Think of a recent moment when you witnessed cancel culture, online shaming, or public outrage. What was your reaction? Did it feel like justice?

Key Idea

We live in a culture that takes harm seriously but has lost any coherent story for how a person who has done wrong can atone, make amends, and begin again. Modern thinking has increasingly shaped identity around power and grievance, where individuals and groups are defined by their experience of oppression. In this world, forgiveness feels dangerous, it appears to loosen grievance, and grievance has become power.

But this is not only a problem on one side. Cancel culture and identity politics on the left, and cruelty culture and reactionary nationalism on the right, are mirror images of the same problem. Both operate through outrage. Both are allergic to humility. And neither has space for redemption.

The Christian vision offers something genuinely different. It does not minimise harm - it intensifies its significance, insisting that wrongdoing fractures something sacred. But it refuses to let punishment have the final word. At the cross, justice is not ignored but fulfilled. The price for harm is actually paid. Forgiveness becomes possible not because harm was small, but because the cost was carried by Christ.

Reflection & Discussion

- Have you ever felt that forgiving someone would mean letting them off the hook? Where does that instinct come from?
- Have you seen or experienced situations where someone was publicly judged or excluded? What impact did it have?
- What do you think is the difference between justice and revenge?
- What might it look like in real life to hold both justice and mercy together?

Going Deeper (optional)

As you read Chapter 3, consider how the cross brings justice and mercy together, making forgiveness possible.

Why do you think both punitive culture and cruelty culture struggle to offer redemption?

Reflect on how the cross does not ignore harm, but fulfils it.

Prayer

Lord, we live in a world full of real harm and real injustice. We confess that we sometimes mistake outrage for justice, and punishment for healing. Give us the courage to take harm seriously without becoming captive to vengeance. Help us to believe that justice belongs to you - and that because it does, we can be free. Amen.

SESSION 3

BIBLICAL FORGIVENESS

Exploring what it actually costs to forgive and why it's worth it

Reading

- Chapter 4: Forgiveness as an Embodied Gift Lived Out in Reality

Watch the Video



Opening Question

Is there someone in your life you have said you forgave, but still feel hurt or resentment toward? What makes forgiveness feel incomplete?

Key Idea

Forgiveness is not simply a feeling but a decision and a practice. Jesus describes wrongdoing as a debt, and to forgive is to absorb the cost rather than passing it on. This does not mean pretending harm did not happen, but choosing not to be defined by it. Often, forgiveness begins as a decision before it becomes a feeling, and it may need to be revisited over time. It is also something that is lived out in real, tangible ways, not just held internally.

At the same time, forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation, which requires trust and mutual participation. Forgiveness allows us to release our claim to revenge, while still taking harm seriously.

Reflection & Discussion

- Have you ever tried to forgive someone but found your feelings didn't change? What was that experience like?
- What helps you understand forgiveness as a decision rather than an emotion?
- What do you think it means to "absorb the cost" of what someone has done?
- How is forgiveness different from reconciliation in your experience?

Going Deeper (optional)

Identify what you feel is "owed" to you (an apology, justice, acknowledgment). Then ask yourself: Do I want to keep holding this debt, or am I willing to release it? Reflect on what each choice would mean for you.

Separate forgiveness and reconciliation in your mind. Decide what forgiveness might look like internally, and independently decide what level of relationship (if any) you want going forward.

Prayer

Lord, forgiveness is harder than we thought. Help us to choose it even when we don't feel it. Help us to act it even when our hearts are cold. Give us the will to release what we are tempted to hold on to, and the trust to believe that justice is yours. We ask for your grace - not because the wrong was small, but because your grace is greater. Amen.

SESSION 4

FORGIVENESS

A HEALER FOR TRAUMA AND ANXIETY

Understanding why forgiveness must never be forced and what genuine healing actually looks like

Reading

- Chapter 5: Forgiveness as a Healer Acquainted with Trauma

Watch the Video



Opening Question

Have you ever felt pressure to forgive before you were ready? What did that feel like?

Key Idea

Forgiveness must never be forced, especially in situations of deep pain or trauma. Trauma is not only about what happened, but how it is carried within us, often in ways that affect both mind and body. When forgiveness is rushed or used to silence pain, it can cause further harm. Anger, in many cases, is a valid and necessary response to injustice.

True forgiveness is something that must be freely chosen and may take time. Healing often begins with being seen and understood, not with being told to move on. The Christian story offers this through Jesus, who enters into human suffering and does not stand at a distance from it.

Reflection & Discussion

- Have you ever experienced forgiveness being rushed or demanded? What impact did that have?
- What is the difference between healthy and unhealthy forgiveness?
- Why is it important that forgiveness is freely chosen?
- What does it mean to you that Jesus understands human suffering?

Going Deeper (optional)

Chapter 6 explores how forgiveness relates to justice, and what it means to take wrongdoing seriously without becoming defined by it.

Chapter 7 turns to self-forgiveness, raising the question of where we carry shame or self-blame, and what it might mean to begin letting that go.

Prayer

Lord, we bring you the pain we have been carrying. The things that happened that should not have happened. The things that were done to us and the things we have done. We ask you to be our empathetic witness - to see, to know, and to hold what we cannot hold alone. We do not ask for quick healing or easy answers. We ask for your presence. And we trust that in your presence, healing becomes possible. Amen.

SESSION 5

FORGIVENESS AND COMMUNITY

Exploring why forgiveness is the foundation communities cannot survive without

Reading

- Chapter 8: Forgiveness as an Integral Part of Flourishing Community

Watch the Video



Opening Question

Think about a community you are part of. What happens when someone makes a mistake or causes harm?

Key Idea

Forgiveness is essential for any community to function and flourish. Human beings are created for relationships, reflecting the relational nature of God himself. Yet wherever people are involved, there will be hurt, misunderstanding, and failure. Without forgiveness, communities tend to become shaped by power, control, or distance. With forgiveness, there is space for honesty, repair, and growth.

Forgiveness does not remove pain, but it makes continued relationships possible. A healthy community is not built on perfection, but on grace - on the willingness to admit wrong, to forgive, and to begin again.

Reflection & Discussion

- What happens in a community when forgiveness is absent?
- Why can it be difficult to admit when we are wrong?
- What would a community shaped by grace and forgiveness look like?
- Where might you need to extend or receive grace in your relationships?

Going Deeper (optional)

As you think about forgiveness in community (Chapter 8), ask yourself: What kind of community am I helping to create through my responses—one shaped by grace, or one shaped by fear or control?

Looking ahead to everyday practice (Chapter 9), ask yourself: Where in my daily life do small moments of hurt or misunderstanding tend to build up? Notice patterns you might usually overlook.

Prayer

Lord, we confess that community is harder than we hoped. We wound one another. We misunderstand. We fail. We sometimes hide behind idealism to avoid the harder work of grace. Forgive us for the communities we have fractured. Give us the humility to confess, the courage to repair, and the grace to begin again. Help us to reflect the love you have always had within yourself - a love that gives, that centres the other, and that refuses to let division have the final word. Amen.

SESSION 6

FORGIVENESS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Exploring how forgiveness shapes societies, history, and the future

Reading

- Chapter 10 and Conclusion

Watch the Video



Opening Question

What do you find hardest to acknowledge about your country's history or present?

Key Idea

Forgiveness is not only personal but also has implications for societies and nations. Every nation carries both achievements and failures, and the challenge is how to hold both honestly. Without forgiveness, cultures tend toward denial, blame, or division. With forgiveness, there is space for truth, repentance, and renewal.

This does not mean ignoring wrongdoing, but refusing to let it define the future. Forgiveness allows for a more honest and hopeful engagement with history, where both accountability and restoration are possible.

Reflection & Discussion

- Why is it difficult for nations or groups to acknowledge their failures?
- What is the difference between loving a country and refusing to see its flaws?
- Can forgiveness play a role in public or national life? How?
- What would it look like to hold both honesty and hope together?

Going Deeper (optional)

Pay attention to how conversations about your nation's past actually happen around you (in media, family, education). Where do you notice defensiveness, silence, or simplification? What effect does that have on understanding and healing?

Prayer

Lord, we bring you our nations. We bring you the glory and the shame, the things we are proud of and the things we would rather not see. Give us the courage to be honest. Give us the humility to repent where repentance is needed. And give us the hope to believe that forgiveness can open a different future - for our communities, our countries, and our civilisation. May we be people who do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with you. Amen.

FOR GROUP LEADERS

Creating a safe environment

- Establish confidentiality at the start of every session
- Make it clear that people are welcome to pass on any question
- Remind the group that this is a space for honest exploration, not performance

Suggested timing per session (60-90 minutes):

- Opening question: 5 minutes
- Watch the video (if watching together): 20-30 minutes
- Key ideas review: 10 minutes
- Reflection questions: 20-25 minutes
- Closing prayer and practical exercise: 5-10 minutes

Handling sensitive disclosures

- If someone shares a personal experience of abuse or trauma, thank them for their trust, do not rush past what they have shared, and follow up with them privately after the session
- Do not attempt to offer therapy within the group context

