The Value of Forgiving: Class One*

Chapters 1 and 2

Insights taken from The Book of Forgiving;
Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu;
HarperOne Press, 2014

1) Why Forgive?
   a) A person who is wronged has the right to be outraged.
   b) The desire is often to hurt back, to retaliate. But retaliation only gives momentary respite. The pain remains.
   c) Forgiving is the only way to experience healing and peace. Otherwise, we remain locked into our pain and locked out of the experience of knowing healing and freedom.
   d) Without forgiving, we remain tethered to the other person, bound with chains of bitterness, tied together, and trapped.
   e) We don’t forgive to help the other person. We forgive to help ourselves, the best form of self-interest.

2) Science of forgiveness
   a) Psychologists and physicians are now studying forgiveness. A question is asked if there might even be a forgiveness gene.
   b) Modern forgiveness research shows that forgiving transforms people mentally, emotionally, spiritually and even physically.
   c) In Forgive for Good: A Proven Prescription for Health and Happiness, the author Fred Luskin writes, “In careful scientific studies, forgiveness training has been shown to reduce depression, increase hopefulness, decrease anger, improve spiritual connection, [and] increase emotional self-confidence.”
   d) Research shows that people who are more forgiving report fewer health and mental problems, and fewer physical symptoms of stress. Hanging on to anger and resentment, living in a constant state of stress, can damage the heart as well as the soul.
   e) Research has shown that failure to forgive may be a risk factor for heart disease, high blood pressure, and a score of other chronic stress related illnesses. Other risks from holding on to anger: increased risk of anxiety, depression, and insomnia. One may also suffer from ulcers, migraines, backaches, heart attack, and even cancer.

3) Healing the whole
   a) According to the findings of Dr. Lisa Berkman, chair of the Department of Society, Human Development, and Health at Harvard University who studied seven women and men, people who are socially isolated were 3 times more likely to die prematurely than those who had a strong social web. Even more fascinating was that those with a strong social web but unhealthy lifestyle (smoking, obesity, and lack of exercise) actually lived longer than those with a weak social circle but healthy lifestyle! Loneliness can kill you quicker than cigarettes!
   b) We are interdependent. To treat anyone as if they were less than human, less than a brother or sister, no matter what they have done, is to contravene the very laws of our humanity.
   c) Anger and bitterness do not just poison you; they poison all your relationships, including those with your children. Thus, anger and bitterness becomes social.
4) Additional insights
a) Unconditional forgiveness frees the person who inflicted the harm from the weight of the victim’s whim – what the victim may demand in order to grant forgiveness – and the victim’s threat of vengeance. Unconditional forgiveness also frees the person who is doing the forgiving. When you forgive, you slip the yoke, and your future is unshackled from your past. You are free to move on in life, to grow, to no longer be a victim.
b) Ultimately, forgiveness is a choice we make, and the ability to forgive others comes from the recognition that we are all flawed and all human. Each of us could have been the perpetrator. In some situations we have harmed and in other situations, we have been harmed.
c) To not forgive leads to bitterness and hatred. Like self-hatred and self-contempt, hatred of others gnaws at our vitals. Whether hatred is projected out or stuffed in, it is always corrosive to the human spirit.
d) Forgiveness is not a luxury. Healing and reconciliation are not magic spells. They do not erase the reality of an injury. Healing and reconciliation require an honest reckoning.
e) Behavior that is hurtful, shameful, abusive, or demeaning must be brought into the fierce light of truth. If we want real forgiveness and real healing, we must face the real injury.

5) The Forgiveness process
a) Forgiveness opens the door to peace between people and opens the space for peace within each person.
b) The victim cannot have peace without forgiving.
c) The perpetrator will not have genuine peace while unforgiven.
d) There cannot be peace between victim and perpetrator while the injury lies between them.
e) The invitation to forgive is an invitation to search out the perpetrator’s humanity.

6) What Forgiveness is Not
a) It is not weakness. We admire and hold in esteem those who forgive others in their hearts, even when they are betrayed, cheated, stolen from, lied to, or worse. Forgiveness does not mean one is spineless. Anger is still experienced. It is a remarkable feat to see past the inhumanity of the behavior and see the humanity of the person performing the acts. This is heroic strength.
b) It is not a subversion of justice. The truth is that people will always live with the consequences of their actions. Even the Christian God does not subvert temporal justice to open the door to eternal forgiveness and peace.
c) Forgiveness is not forgetting. Some find forgiveness difficult because they believe they must forget the pain they experienced – not true! The cycle of forgiveness can only be activated and completed only in absolute truth and honesty. Forgiving requires giving voice to the violations and naming the pains we have suffered. We are not served by forgetting our history.
d) Forgiveness is not easy. How do we think of forgiving when we feel the person is not deserving of our forgiveness? Grant forgiveness when you are ready to let go of a past that cannot be changed. Our suffering, our pain, our losses have the power to transform us. It does not always feel just, nor is it easy, but we have seen that, with time, what great good can come from great sorrow.
1) The Fourfold Path of Forgiveness
   a) The first step is Telling the Story.
   b) The second step is Naming the Hurt.
   c) The third step is Granting Forgiveness
   d) The fourth step is Renewing or Releasing the Relationship.

2) Retaliate or Reconnect
   a) Are we hardwired to seek revenge and hurt back when we are hurt? Or are we not also able to forgive and reconnect? The fact that we have an impulse to toward revenge does not equate to the justification to hurt back when we are hurt. We are social creatures and our physical survival is just as dependant on happy relations and social connections as it is on food, air, and water.
   b) Whenever we are injured we have the choice to retaliate or to reconnect. There is a certain type of dignity we admire when someone refuses to meet anger with anger, violence with violence, or hatred with hatred.
   c) Two choices:
      i) Walk the path of revenge and be bound to suffering. One experiences hurt, harm, loss and pain results; one takes the pain and chooses to harm in return; by doing so, one rejects the shared humanity; revenge, retaliation, payback results; this can lead to more violence which starts the cycle anew.
      ii) Walk the path of forgiveness and be freed into healing. One experiences hurt, harm, loss and pain results; one takes the pain and chooses to heal; the healing occurs through telling the story, naming the hurt, granting forgiveness (recognizing the shared humanity) and renewing or releasing the relationship.
   d) Donna Hicks in her book Dignity tells us that our physical, emotional, and psychosocial harms are affronts to our physical, emotional, and social dignity.
   e) The response to hurt is universal: sadness, pain, anger, or shame or a combination of any or all of these. But instead of embracing our sadness, we stroke our anger. We feel compelled to restore our dignity by rejecting our pain and denying our grief.
   f) When we cannot admit our own woundedness, we cannot see the other as a wounded person who has harmed us out of his own ignorance, pain, or brokenness. We move along the Revenge Cycle to reject our shared humanity.
   g) In the Forgiveness Cycle, we do not reject our pain and grief but accept our pain and grief. Depending on the depth of hurt, the process may be long. There are stages in this Forgiving Cycle – between the initial sadness and a full acceptance of our pain. They are the same as the stages of grief – denial,
anger, bargaining, depression and ultimately acceptance. The stages do not come in a prescribed order and often circle back on one another as we experience waves of pain and loss.

h) The person who injured us also has a story. They stood within their own story and acted out of pain, shame, or ignorance. They have ignored our shared humanity.

i) By accepting both our humanity and the perpetrator’s, we can write a new story, one in which we are no longer a victim but a survivor, even perhaps a hero. We are able to learn and grow from what has happened to us. Healing means that our dignity is restored and we are able to move forward in our lives.

3) How long does it take to forgive?
   a) No one can answer this question for another. It can take a short time or years. It depends on the nature of the hurt and the unique story of situation and story.
   b) Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu encourage us to first walk the Fourfold Path to find forgiveness in one’s heart for the people who have harmed you.
   c) As you walk the path with the intention to forgive, you will come to understand more deeply the gift you are asking of and bestowing upon another when you ask a person to forgive what you have done.
   d) We heal as we forgive others and as we forgive ourselves.

4) Are some people beyond forgiveness?
   a) The authors believe there are monstrous and evil acts but that the persons who commit them are not evil or monsters. To relegate someone to a level of monster is to deny that person’s ability to change and to take away that person’s accountability for his or her actions and behavior.
   b) Monsters have no moral sense of right and wrong and therefore cannot be held as morally culpable, cannot be regarded as morally blameworthy.
   c) Everyone remains a child of God with the capacity to become a saint. Let us condemn heinous acts but never relinquish the hope that doers of the most ghastly deeds can and may change.
   d) No one is to be labeled beyond redemption, regardless of what they have done.
   e) Forgiveness does not condone an act; does not relieve someone of responsibility for what they have done; does not erase accountability; is not about turning a blind eye or even turning the other cheek; it is not about letting someone off the hook or saying it is okay to do something monstrous. It is simply about understanding that every one of us is inherently good and inherently flawed. Within every seemingly hopeless person lies the possibility of transformation. Are some people beyond forgiveness? No.

5) True forgiveness:
   a) is a deep and thorough look at the reality of a situation;
   b) is an honest accounting of both actions and consequences; a conversation which is one only when it is done;
   c) and is a path as unique as the people who choose to walk on it.

6) Peace is built with every small and large act of forgiveness.
   a) Hurt, insult, harm, and loss are inevitable aspects of being human; psychologists call it trauma.
   b) It is the meaning of our experiences which defines who we are and who we will ultimately become.
   c) Every day we are faced with the possibility of being hurt by others; it is part and parcel of living and loving and being a member of the human family.
d) Each time we are injured, we stand at the same fork in the road and choose to travel either the path of forgiveness or the path of retaliation.

e) If we choose the path of forgiveness, we recognize that we must give up all belief that we can change the past.

7) **Why Tell the Story**

a) Telling the story is how we get our dignity back after we have been harmed; we begin to take back what was taken from us.

b) Neuroscientists tell us that there are explicit and implicit memories. Remembering an event and knowing what happened forms an explicit memory.

c) There is another kind of memory: implicit memory. It is when we experience an event of which we are not consciously aware. We don’t realize we are remembering something.

d) Telling our stories helps us integrate our implicit memories and helps to begin to heal from trauma.

e) When we know our stories and make sense of what has happened, we get connected to the larger story of our lives and its meaning. We become more resilient, we are able to handle stress, and we heal.

f) For a parent, if you are able to talk about your life and the joys and sorrow you have experienced – if you know your story – you are much more likely to be a skillful parent.

8) **Tell the Truth**

a) The truth prevents us from pretending that the things that happened did not happen.

b) How we begin is by first letting the truth be heard in all its rawness, in all its ugliness, and in all its messiness.

c) Start with the facts. This is the most important first element of this first step. It may be like putting together a puzzle; one piece at a time. Memories may be fragmented but eventually they may come together to form a whole.

d) Small details are important because they may be the threads by which we make sense of the story.

9) **The Cost of Not Telling**

a) When we lock our stories inside us, the initial injury is often compounded. Tucking one’s secrets and stories away in shame or fear or silence may bind one to victimhood and trauma.

b) It may not be easy to tell one’s story but it is the first critical step on the way to freedom and forgiveness.

c) When you tell your story, you no longer have to carry your burden alone.

d) The path of forgiveness leads back to where we were trapped, so we can rescue the parts of ourselves we have given up.

10) **Deciding Whom to Tell**

a) Ideally you can tell your story to the person who caused you harm. There is a profound reclaiming of dignity and strength when you are able to stand in front of your abuser, stand in your truth, and speak of how that person abused you. This is not always possible or even practical.

b) To face one’s abuser, the perpetrator has to be receptive. You need to be sure the person will not harm you.

c) Ideally, they have shown remorse, are asking for your forgiveness, and are willing to witness the pain they have caused you by listening to your story.
d) In the ideal model of forgiveness, there is an exchange of stories and if done with total honesty and no justification or rationalization on the part of the perpetrator, there can be great understanding and healing between the people.

e) Even if you are able to speak directly to the one you want to forgive, it may be better for you to share your story with others first, whether that is a close family member or a friend. You may also turn to your religious leader, to your therapist, or directly to God. This other needs to be affirming, empathetic, and trustworthy.

f) If you can trust no one, write down your story in a letter to the person who harmed you even if you cannot send the letter. When we tell the truth about our hurt or loss, we lessen the power it has over us.

g) Telling the story is not a single action. It is an ongoing process within the unfolding process of forgiving and healing.

11) Telling the Story Directly to the Perpetrator

a) This is a delicate matter; it may make matters worse. The way to understand any enemy is to realize that, from his perspective, he is not a villain but a hero.

b) Begin by affirming your relationship with this person and its importance to you. If you can show the person that you can see their goodness, then they don’t have to work so hard to defend it. In exchange they may show empathy for you.

c) If you can, have empathy for why the perpetrator may have done what they did.

d) We are embedded in social webs that affect our choices and our behavior.

12) Telling the Story Publicly

a) Do not worry too much about how or where you tell your story. What is most important to healing is that you tell your story.

b) Your story may change as time goes on, as you move through the forgiving process, as you come to a deeper understanding of the hurt you experienced and of those who hurt you.

c) Some choose to tell their stories publically and they find unique comfort in doing so.

d) We may need to tell our stories many times over, to many different people, and in many different forms before we are ready to move forward in our forgiveness process. Telling our story may help relieve a burden we have carried. Telling our stories allows us to practice a form of acceptance.
The Value of Forgiving: Class Two*

*Insights taken from The Book of Forgiving; Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu; HarperOne Press, 2014*

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   d) Each time we are injured, we stand at the same fork in the road and choose to travel either the path of forgiveness or the path of retaliation.
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   d) Telling our stories helps us integrate our implicit memories and helps to begin to heal from trauma.
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   c) If you can, have empathy for why the perpetrator may have done what they did.
   d) We are embedded in social webs that affect our choices and our behavior.

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   a) Do not worry too much about how or where you tell your story. What is most important to healing is that you tell your story.
   b) Your story may change as time goes on, as you move through the forgiving process, as you come to a deeper understanding of the hurt you experienced and of those who hurt you.
   c) Some choose to tell their stories publically and they find unique comfort in doing so.
   d) We may need to tell our stories many times over, to many different people, and in many different forms before we are ready to move forward in our forgiveness process. Telling our story may help relieve a burden we have carried. Telling our stories allows us to practice a form of acceptance.

8) Naming the Hurt
   a) As we begin to heal, our relationship to the story loosens and we can choose when and where to share it. We need to be careful of being stuck in our trauma – telling our story to anyone and everyone irrespective of the person or of the situation.
   b) We must move beyond the bare facts to the raw feelings. It is a necessary element for healing and moving forward. We have to own the feelings we experienced. “We can’t let go of feelings that we don’t own.”
   c) We give voice to our hurts not to be victims or martyrs, but to find freedom from the resentment, anger, shame, or self-loathing that we can fester and build inside us when we do not touch our pain and learn to forgive.

9) Why Must we Name the Harm
   a) Easy to simply dismiss a hurt, stuff it down, push it away, pretend it didn’t happen, or rationalize it, telling ourselves we really shouldn’t be feeling the way we do. A harm felt but denied will always find a way to express itself.
   b) When we ignore the pain, it grows bigger and bigger, and like an abscess that is never drained, eventually it will rupture. And that affects every aspect of our lives.
   c) We must each be courageous and name the hurts that cause us to feel shame or to diminish us. The only way to heal this real hurt is give voice to what ails us; this keeps the pain and loss from taking root within us. We must dig the hurt out at the very roots that have bound us to it for so long. Truth is the means to do it.
   d) We as adults must give name to any abuse that still lives within us. We are not responsible for what breaks us, but we can be responsible for what puts us back together again.
10) When is it necessary to name the hurt?
   a) Won’t it be a full time job if I must have a forgiveness process for every time someone insults or slights me, or every occasion I find my pride wounded? The truth is we engage a process whenever there is an injury or violation. Sometimes we traverse the cycle of forgiveness so rapidly we barely notice our feet touching the steps.
   b) Each of us is different and each of us will approach harm differently depending on our circumstances. The single most important thing is to share our sorrows, pains, fears, and grief.
   c) In Her book, *Dignity*, Donna Hicks explains that the pain felt from everyday assaults on our dignity are not imaginary. They can undermine our self-worth and our relationships with others. Our brains process and feel physical and psychological injuries in the exact same way.
   d) Never naming the hurt can have unimagined and unintelligible consequences in our lives.

11) The Role of Grief
   a) When we experience any type of loss that causes us pain or suffering, there is always grief. Grief happens whenever we lose something that is precious to us, even our trust, our faith, or our innocence. Grief is how we both cope with and release the pain we feel.
   b) The stages of grief are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and ultimately acceptance. We often experience the same stages during and after any major trauma, such as a betrayal or an assault. We often cycle through the stages of grief or jump from one stage to another and then back again.
   c) Grief is how we come to terms not only with the hardship we have endured, but also with what could have been if life had taken a different course.
   d) When we name our hurts, we have moved out of the stage of denial. We must not berate ourselves even for our denial. Denial protects us from remembered pain and can serve to pace our grief.

12) Moving from Grief
   a) Whatever the cause of our grief, when we allow ourselves to feel the pain, we can quickly move to anger. Anger may have its say in the present but does not have the ability to change the past, and it rarely satisfies our true desires in the future.
   b) If I feel anger I am human; if I stay locked in my anger, I am a prisoner.
   c) Bargaining is the next stage of the process. It is a form of non-acceptance like denial. If only I had done this, it would have not have happened.
   d) The only way out of what hurts is through it.
   e) Depression in the grief process is an understandable reaction to the realization that life has changed, often in painful or even tragic ways.

13) Acceptance
   a) We find our hope and our healing in the final stage of the grieving process: acceptance. It is the recognition that things have changed and will never be what they were before.
   b) We accept our hurt, our anguish, our sadness, our anger, our shame, and in doing so we accept our own vulnerability.
   c) When we deny our feelings, when we choose not to name our hurts and instead reject the pain of our losses, we always end up seeking destruction. The only way to stop the pain is to accept it. The only way to accept it is to name it, by naming it, to feel it fully. Others have suffered and survived. We too can survive and know joy and happiness again.

14) No Feeling is Wrong
   a) Father Lapsley says in his book, *Redeeming the Past*, “People must be encouraged to feel to the fullest, no matter how uncomfortable ... People need space to be weak and vulnerable for a time before they can become strong.”
b) The only way to really help another is to listen, do not try to fix the pain, do not minimize the loss, do not offer advice, do not respond with your own loss or grief, keep confidentiality, offer your love and your caring, and empathize and offer comfort.

c) Find someone who will listen and acknowledge the harm you feel, and pour out your sorrow until you are utterly empty.

15) With Whom Do We Share

a) In the ideal world, the one who hurt us would come to us, admit their wrong, and witness our anguish. We in turn would share the depth of our loss and pain and grief with them; we would ask our questions receive satisfactory and complete answers, understand, forgive, and renew the relationship. Apologies would be offered, remorse expressed, justice served and reparations made. This rarely happens.

b) What if the person who hurt us has died? What if we do not know who hurt us? What if the person who hurt us ends up hurting us more? What if that person does not care that he hurt us? What if that person does not yet know how desperately he needs our forgiveness? What if that person cannot or will not listen to us?

c) We can still name the hurt.

d) If the one who hurt us is a group, can we still walk the path of forgiveness? Yes, we can.

e) If talking to the perpetrator is not possible, then you can talk to a trusted friend or family member, a spiritual advisor, a counselor, another who has experienced the same kind of harm, or another who will not judge you and will be able to listen with love and empathy. You can also write down your hurt in a letter or in a journal.

f) Share your feelings with someone who will not shame you or judge you for having your feelings.

g) It is recommended to share with another other than the perpetrator at first because it is never easy to face the perpetrator.

16) Finding Your Voice

a) Giving our voice to our hurt loosens its stranglehold on us.

b) Forgiveness lets us become the author of our own future, unfettered by the past.

c) Giving voice to our hurt and desire for retaliation lessens the desire for revenge. There is relief. This relief just means we don’t have to let our suffering make us perpetual victims.

17) Learning to Feel and Learning to Forgive

a) Many people are disconnected from their feelings and their own experiences. This is often the result of old suffering that has caused us to numb ourselves. We may need to relearn how to feel.

b) One of the authors takes time at the end of the day or the end of a week and takes an inventory to see if he is holding on to any resentment or harboring any new hurts. It can be manifested in physical symptoms like anxiety, uneasiness in one’s stomach, tightness in the chest or feeling tears well up.

c) The more conversant you are with your emotions, the richer your experience of life will be, and the more capable you will be of forgiving.

18) We are one family - We will inevitably hurt one another, sometimes horribly, sometimes unimaginably, and sometimes irrevocably. Yet as members of one family, for us to flourish there must be forgiveness. There must be healing.

*[This outline is drawn from Part Two Chapters 4 & 5, Understanding Forgiveness from the Book of Forgiving, pp. 67-113]*
The Value of Forgiving: Class Three*

*Insights taken from *The Book of Forgiving; Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu;* HarpoOne Press, 2014

1) Granting Forgiveness
   a) Desmond Tutu states that he prays for the well-being of other people for whom he holds anger or resentment towards. The prayer is for the person to rediscover one’s humanity.
   b) The Dalai Lama has a “Giving and Taking” Meditation. He visualizes sending his enemies his positive emotions, such as happiness, affection, and love, and he visualizes receiving their negative emotions: what he calls their poisons: hatred, fear and cruelty. He breathes in their poisons and breathes out compassion.
   c) All our grievances are part of a larger story, and when we can understand this greater drama and the humanity of all involved, our anguish and anger are diminished.

2) Choosing to Forgive
   a) We tell our stories and name our hurts. It is time to grant forgiveness which may happen quickly or slowly.
   b) Forgiveness is how we find freedom and keep from remaining trapped in an endless loop of telling our stories and naming our hurts.
   c) We move from being victims – a position of weakness and subject to the whims of others – to being heroes – people who determine their own fate and their own future. A hero has the strength and ability to be generous and forgiving, and the power and freedom that come from being able to make the choice to grant forgiveness.
   d) Sometimes we find forgiveness after a long time and sometimes it finds us within our grief.

3) Recognizing Shared Humanity
   a) We are able to forgive because we recognize our shared humanity. We are all fragile, vulnerable flawed human beings capable of thoughtfulness and cruelty.
   b) We also recognize that no one is born evil and that we are all more than the worst thing we have done in our lives. A human life is a great mixture of goodness, beauty, cruelty, heartbreak, indifference, love, and so much more.
   c) All of us share the core qualities of our human nature, and so sometimes we are generous and sometimes selfish, sometimes thoughtful and sometimes thoughtless, sometimes kind and sometimes cruel.
   d) If we look at any perpetrator, we can discover a story which led up to that person causing harm. It doesn’t justify it but it does provide some context.
   e) We understand our shared humanity by seeing our connection and not our separation.
   f) No one is born in any less glory or goodness than you or I. But in any given day, this glory and goodness can be forgotten, obscured or lost.
   g) Geneticists maintain that all modern humans are related to what they call Mitochondrial Eve, our one common matrilineal ancestor who lived approximately 200,000 years ago.
   h) She is said to have lived in Africa, so in a real way we are all Africans! [Reference for this is *The Seven Daughters of Eve: The Science that Reveals our Genetic Ancestry;* Bryan Sykes; New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002].
   i) When the author is particularly affronted, injured, or angered, it helps him to remember our shared humanity and that we are all part of a context that so often determines, or at least greatly influences, our actions and choices. This does not excuse but helps explain them.
   j) In seeing the many ways our lives are similar and how our lives are inextricably linked, we can find empathy and compassion which moves us towards forgiving others.
   k) We have seen that in order to forgive it is important we accept the facts of what happened and the feelings we felt about what happened. We have accepted our own vulnerability and frailty. We must accept the vulnerability of the one who harmed us.
4) True forgiveness
   a) The authors caution us that many people, even very spiritual people try to leap over their suffering in pursuit of inner peace or their sense of what is the right thing to do. The words of forgiveness have been spoken but the reality of forgiveness has not really taken hold.
   b) When this happens, a veneer of peace that is more of an uneasy truce than a genuine forgiveness can occur. Make sure when you forgive another, you have confronted your own past.
   c) How do we know we mean it when we say we forgive? Various possibilities: for some it feels as if a huge weight has been lifted; for others, an overwhelming sense of peace; it can be when you know you wish the other person well or at least you no longer wish them harm.
   d) There is freedom in forgiveness, and when you feel this freedom, you know you have truly forgiven the other.

5) Telling a New Story
   a) With forgiveness, your story is no longer just about the facts of what happened, or about the pain and hurt you suffered. It is the story that recognized the story of the one who hurt you, however misguided that person was. It is a story that recognizes our shared humanity.
   b) What is incredible when we listen to so many people retell their stories is how they are able to retell them in a way that is filled with courage and compassion. They are able to explain what happened to them in a way that reveals how it has ennobled rather than embittered them.
   c) Life guarantees us that we will suffer. What is not guaranteed is how we will respond, whether we let the suffering embitter or ennoble us. It is our choice. We make meaning out of our suffering and make it matter.
   d) You are the author of your life, and only you can write your book of forgiving.
   e) READ BEN’S STORY pp. 129-132.

6) Growing Through Forgiveness
   a) When I am hurt, when I am in pain, when I am angry with someone for what they have done to me, I know the only way to end these feelings is to accept them; the only way out of these feelings is to go through them.
   b) A butterfly struggles against the cocoon that surrounds it, and it is this very struggling that makes it resilient enough to survive when it breaks free. So it is that you and I must struggle through our anger, grief, sadness, and push against the pain and suffering on our way to forgiving.
   c) When we don’t forgive, there is a part of us that doesn’t grow as it should. Like the butterfly, we must become stronger and more resilient, and we will transform.
   d) We must choose forgiveness over and over again, and cultivate it as part of our character.
   e) Many people will carry grudges and resentments for years, believing this will somehow hurt the other person. It often hurts only the person carrying the grudge or resentment.
   f) Forgiveness is the only thing that can transform the aching wound and the searing pain of loss.

7) Renewing or Releasing the Relationship
   a) Forgiveness is not the end of the Fourfold Path, because the granting of forgiveness is not the end of the process of healing.
   b) Once you have been able to forgive, the final step is either to renew or release the relationship you have with the person who has harmed you.
   c) Only when you renew or release the relationship can you have a future unfettered by the past.
   d) The decision to renew or release is a personal choice that only you can make.
   e) It is easier to renew a relationship when it is a close connection such as a spouse, parent, sibling, or close friend. It is easier to release a relationship with an acquaintance, neighbor, or stranger, because these people often do not hold as much of your heart.
   f) The preference is towards renewal or reconciliation, except when safety is an issue. When we choose to release a relationship, that person walks away with a piece of our heart and a piece of our history.
g) Renewal is not an act of restoration, making a carbon copy of what we had before. It is a creative act of making a new relationship regardless of the realities of the old relationship.

h) How is it possible to renew a relationship born out of severe pain and grief? What seems to be most true is to create meaning out of suffering and to move forward and heal after a tragedy.

i) It is what makes us human to fix what is broken, repair relationships, and find understanding and a larger purpose after we have lost something or someone dear to us.

j) Renewing our relationships is how we turn our curses into blessings and continue to grow through our forgiving.

8) I Have a Part
a) A very important but difficult piece of renewing our relationships is accepting our responsibility for our part in our conflict.

b) If we have a relationship in need of repair, we must remember that the wrong is not usually all on one side, and we are more easily able to restore relations when we look at our contribution to a conflict.

c) There are times when we truly did nothing, as when a stranger robs us, but even then we have a role in permitting or participating in a society where such desperation exists. Tutu says this not to inspire guilt or apportion blame, since no one person creates a society. But we have a role in the society we have created.

d) We are always at our best when compassion enables us to recognize the unique pressures and singular stories of the people on the other side of our conflicts.

e) Each of us can create a more peaceful world from wherever in the world we stand.

9) Asking for What You Need
a) In order to renew or release a relationship, we must make meaning of our experiences. This is how we move away from our identity as victims.

b) When we are hurt, we most often need the truth of why we were hurt — why a person we trusted lied to us, or a spouse was unfaithful, or a stranger saw fit to accost us. Often it is this truth telling that gives us the momentum we need to complete the final step in the Fourfold Path.

c) We may also claim restitution or recompense for what was taken or lost. Ask yourself what you need to renew or to release the relationship, and then, if you can, ask it of the person who harmed you. It may be for the person to hear your story and learn of your hurt; it may be remorsefulness from that person; it may be assurance that it will not happen again.

d) If the person is not sorry for what they have done, you may decide it is best to release the relationship.

e) And if you cannot ask of the person who harmed you, ask it of others. Ask for empathy, for belief, for understanding; or the space to tell your story, and name your hurt until you are done.

f) When you ask for what you need to heal, you are no longer a victim without any say in your fate.

g) Sometimes all we can do is renew the relationship within our hearts, but doing so makes all the difference in the world.

10) What is Releasing?

a) Sometimes renewing isn't possible. Renewing the relationship might harm you further, or you do not know who harmed you, or the person has died and it is not someone you carry in your heart (someone very close to you).

b) You can choose to not have someone in your life any longer, but you have released the relationship only when you have truly chosen the path without wishing the person ill.

c) Releasing is refusing to let an experience or person occupy space in your head or heart any longer. It is not only releasing the relationship but your old story of the relationship.

11) What is Renewing?

a) Renewing a relationship is not restoring a relationship. We do not go back to where we were before the hurt happened and pretend it never happened.
b) We create a new relationship out of our suffering, one that is often stronger for what we have experienced together.

c) Our renewed relationships are often deeper because we have faced the truth, recognized our shared humanity, and now tell a new story of a relationship transformed.

12) I'm Not There Yet

a) Sometimes you move quickly in one phase and slowly in another of the Fourfold Path. Sometimes you straddle two places at once or you just need more time before moving through the process.

b) If you are not ready to renew or release the relationship with the person who harmed you, this is okay.

c) If you do not know what you need to ask of the person to heal, that is okay.

d) We complete this last step not from our heads but our hearts. And it can truly take time to know what's truly in our hearts.

e) Renew your relationships when you can and release them when you can't. When we practice this last step of the Fourfold Path, we keep anger, resentment, hatred and despair from having the last word.

The last class will address the elements of Needing Forgiveness and Forgiving Oneself

*[This outline is drawn from Part Two Chapters 6 & 7, Understanding Forgiveness from the Book of Forgiving, pp. 119-157]*
1) Needing Forgiveness
   a) The simple truth is that we all make mistakes, and we all need forgiveness.
   b) We cannot undo the past but we can do all in our power to set right what has been made wrong. We can endeavor to make sure the harm never happens again.
   c) There are times when all of us have been thoughtless or selfish or cruel.
   d) No act is unforgiveable; no person is beyond redemption.
   e) We can come up with all manner of justifications to excuse what we have done. “I am sorry”: are perhaps the hardest words to say.

2) Seeking Forgiveness
   a) We reveal the depth of our humanity when we have done wrong and seek to make it right. We reveal the depth of our desire to heal ourselves.
   b) When I harm another, whether intentionally or not, I inevitably harm myself. I become less than what I am meant to be. I become less than I am capable of becoming.
   c) When I harm another, I need to restore what I have taken from that other or make a gesture of recompense.
   d) To recover what has been lost requires that we take an honest look at ourselves and confront our own mistakes.
   e) It requires a genuine remorse; a remorse that we look into our own souls and realize that a person who harms another person is not who we want to be.
   f) It requires that we be willing to make amends and to do whatever we can do to repair the relationship, even if this means never seeing the person again.
   g) Even if we never find the forgiveness we seek, we must make the courageous choice to walk this path because we must make every effort possible to do the right thing.
   h) If the process of forgiveness is to succeed, we must accept the responsibility for what we have done.

3) Admitting the Wrong
   a) Ideally, the Fourfold Path begins with the one who has inflicted the harm admitting what they have done. It makes it easier for the one we have harmed to forgive us.
   b) The person who grants forgiveness receives a gift. The person who asks forgiveness receives the healing gift of an honest reckoning. When we seek forgiveness, we hope that our humble admission will help the person we harmed.
   c) This first step can be difficult. It is not easy to admit our wrongs but it must be done.
   d) Admitting the wrong is how we begin to take responsibility for hurting another human being.
   e) When we experience true remorse, then we can make an honest confession and begin to relieve the suffering we have caused.

4) How do I Admit the Wrong
   a) Just begin.
   b) Another crucial piece of admitting what we have done is to acknowledge that it was wrong and know we have hurt the person, perhaps badly and irreparably.
   c) We must be willing to answer any and all questions the victim has about what we have done.
   d) We must be careful not to self-justify or excuse our actions in any way.
   e) There can be no reconciliation without responsibility.

5) What if My Actions Were Justified
   a) What if you haven’t done anything and the other person is still angry with you for an imagined slight or wrongdoing?
b) If someone is hurt, we are enjoined to try and understand that person’s pain. We are invited to see from the other person’s perspective.

c) If someone is hurting because of us, whether we have intended that hurt or not, we must do whatever we can to make it right.

6) What if the Victim Doesn’t Know

a) We know our past. If you do not face up to your past, it will haunt you.

b) If you cannot admit your mistakes or crimes, the guilt or shame is going to rear its ugly head in some destructive way or another.

c) We all lose a part of our humanity, our divinity, when we hurt another human being. And that loss is a heavy burden to carry.

d) Whether the person you have harmed knows it or not, you know it and that is enough to seek the path to make it right.

e) Though the path to making it right may or may not include telling your story to the person you have injured.

f) Revealing an unknown betrayal may cause a deeper injury to the victim than the person’s ignorance of your deed. If this is the case, then you can tell your story to a trusted counselor or confessor.

7) What if I am Afraid of the Consequences

a) It is understandable that you may be afraid of what may happen when you admit your wrongs. The price will be far cheaper than the personal cost of keeping quiet. Guilt can be staggering and shame unbearable.

b) If there are legal consequences to consider, you may wish to consult counsel before admitting the wrong.

c) You may want to bring a trusted friend along for support for both you and the victim such as a friend, family member or a professional.

d) There is no genuine forgiveness, no genuine healing, without genuine truth. It is what sets us free.

8) Witnessing the Anguish and Apologizing

a) Even when we know we have been thoughtless or selfish or cruel, it is not easy to admit it, face the hurt we have caused, and say the word “I am sorry.”

b) When we witness the anguish we have caused another, we help that person heal, and we help the relationship heal.

c) Victims need to tell their story. Victims need to tell how much they have been hurt.

d) And as perpetrators, we need to be fearless enough to stand in front of those we have hurt and open our hearts to make space for their pain. We had a part in creating it and we have a part in healing it.

9) How do I witness the Anguish

a) Victims need to feel they are being heard and affirmed. The best way to do this is not to argue the facts of their stories or the ways they are hurting. When people are hurting they cannot be cross-examined out of their pain. We all want our pain to be acknowledged and understood. We all want to feel safe and express our hurt feelings in all their various forms and textures.

b) Empathy is the gateway to forgiveness for you and for the one you have harmed.

c) If the victim has questions, answer them honestly and thoroughly. Tell them the truth without trying to justify or excuse your actions.

d) We are all so much interconnected that when we hurt one person, the pain often ripples far deeper and wider than we can ever imagine.

10) Three Simple Words

a) After admitting our wrongs and witnessing the anguish, we must offer a genuine apology. There is healing in the words, “I am sorry.”

b) We may need to utter those magical words many times before they are heard and felt. We may have to say them many times before they are believed.
c) Are we courageous enough to say them, vulnerable enough to mean them, and humble enough to repeat them as many times as necessary?

11) How do I apologize
   a) When you apologize you are restoring the dignity that you have violated on the person you have hurt. You are also acknowledging that the offense has happened. You take responsibility for your part in causing harm.
   b) Apologizing with humility and with true remorse opens a space for healing.
   c) A hollow or insincere apology can only compound the initial damage done. If you don’t feel it, don’t say it.
   d) Only when we recognize the suffering of the other person and the true harm we have caused, that our apologies will be genuine.

12) What if I can’t Apologize Directly to the Person I have Harmed
   a) The freedom and healing that comes from saying “I’m sorry” is still possible even if the person to whom you need to apologize is no longer alive or there is no possible way to speak with them directly.
   b) You can write them a letter which you can bury or burn. You can also participate in a number of online anonymous apology websites or even call an apology hotline phone number and leave your apology as an anonymous voicemail message.

13) Asking for forgiveness
   a) It is not selfish to ask for forgiveness. It is the highest form of accountability.
   b) By asking for forgiveness we are committing ourselves to the possibility of change. We are signing up for the hard work of transformation.
   c) We ask for forgiveness because none of us can live in the past. Asking for forgiveness is asking to begin again although things will not be as they once were.
   d) There is no asking for forgiveness without admitting the wrong and witnessing the anguish.
   e) Asking for forgiveness from your victims is another way of acknowledging your responsibility and your sincere wish to repair what is broken.
   f) There is no guarantee that you will be forgiven or that the relationship will be renewed. But through our asking, we do our part.

14) How Do I ask for Forgiveness
   a) When we ask for forgiveness, we express our remorse and offer an apology.
   b) We acknowledge the harm and explain why and how we will not hurt the victim again. We will also be willing to offer whatever means of restitution the victim may require.

15) What if They Will Not Forgive
   a) If forgiveness is refused, do not press your victim or respond with anything but humility and understanding.
   b) Often and especially with in intimate relationships, it takes time to rebuild trust. It may take weeks, months, or years before they consider forgiveness and renewing the relationship.
   c) The fact that you may not be forgiven will not prevent your continuing along the path of growth and healing.
   d) If you have honestly tried and failed in your request for forgiveness, then you have fulfilled your part.
   e) Reparations are still necessary. We must always seek to make amends, to try to give back to someone something we have taken, whether tangible or intangible.
   f) Sometimes we can’t give back what was taken but we do have to make amends.

16) How do I Make Amends
   a) Amends depends on what the victim needs from you in order to forgive. Our words can express our remorse but our actions often show our true intentions.
   b) The amends needed may be of a more symbolic nature.
   c) In general the victim needs to know and be assured that the offense won’t be repeated again.
   d) What your victim needs will be unique to your situation.
   e) The amends process cannot be glossed over or skipped over.
f) If you cannot directly ask for forgiveness, you can still make indirect amends on behalf of your victim.

g) There are countless ways we can set matters right, even without direction from those we have harmed.

17) Renewing or Releasing the Relationship
   a) The preference is always for renewal and restoration of a connection.
   b) Often our relationships can grow stronger through the process of admitting a wrong and asking for forgiveness.
   c) Remember: renewing is not forgetting. We do not ask our victim to forget but to recognize the humanity we share and our willingness to change.
   d) We seek restoration and renewal and if that isn’t possible, we release the relationship. Sometimes we cannot create something from the wreckage of the past, but still we must move forward into the possibilities of the future. Relationships cannot be forced.
   e) If the person you have harmed chooses not to have a relationship with you that is that person’s choice. You must honor that person’s decision to release you and the relationship.
   f) Releasing means moving into a future free of the past.

18) Forgiving Yourself
   a) We are called to forgive one another time and time again; it is the nature of being in a relationship.
   b) It is hard to forgive others but it can be even harder to forgive ourselves.
   c) Forgiving ourselves is the same as forgiving others; it frees us from the past. It can be difficult when you are both perpetrator and victim of your own story.

19) Self-forgiveness is Not Asking for a Free Pass
   a) To truly forgive ourselves, we cannot skip over an honest attempt to admit our wrongs, confront the consequences of our hurtful actions, apologize, ask for forgiveness, and make amends.
   b) People who genuinely seek to forgive themselves are people who want to change. They don’t want to repeat the mistakes of the past.
   c) If you feel shame, guilt, regret, or remorse for something you have done, this is the place to begin.

20) Why Should I forgive myself and Why is it so Difficult
   a) Lack of self-forgiveness can affect every area of our lives – our health, careers, relationships, parenting, and our general happiness and well-being.
   b) Holding on to self-blame keeps us stuck in a prison of our past and limits the potential that lies within the present moment.
   c) We can easily make ourselves victims of our own thoughts and feelings of guilt and shame for what we have done.
   d) We must be accountable for our own past actions but careful not to be stuck in the unhappy story of what we have done – when we make an identity out of our past actions – we deny ourselves the gift of transformation.
   e) Perhaps, we hold ourselves to a higher standard than the standard to which we hold other people. If we think carefully, we recognize this double standard as a small arrogance: I am a better person than he or she is so I should behave better.
   f) Guilt and shame have their place but they can be toxic.
   g) When we do wrong, we are not monsters but rather human beings who have become separated from or goodness.
   h) We are not defined by what we have done. In truth, our worth has nothing to do with performance but the belief that we are defined by what we have done makes it very difficult to forgive ourselves when we do wrong.
   i) None of us is constantly our best self. None of us is perfect.
   j) Sometimes the failures we did to ourselves are not willful but doing the best we knew to do at the time.
   k) We can perfect the art of self-forgiveness. We can perfect learning from our mistakes. This is how we grow and change and ultimately begin anew.
21) What Forgiveness is and Is Not
   a) It is not a way to excuse yourself for what you have done or gloss over the harm you have caused others.
   b) It’s not forgetting about your actions.
   c) Self-forgiveness is self-acceptance, meaning you accept yourself as a flawed human being.
   d) Hatred is poison. If you direct hatred at yourself, then self-forgiveness is the antidote to that toxin.

22) What Does Self-Forgiveness require
   a) First and foremost, it requires absolute truth.
   b) We need truth before we can reconcile with others, and we need truth before we can reconcile with ourselves.
   c) The forgiveness of others is not a requirement for self-forgiveness although it may make it easier, but some may never forgive you.
   d) We cannot force someone to forgive us. That is that person’s journey.
   e) Self-forgiveness requires that we face how we are feeling – guilt, shame, grief, hopelessness, despair.
   f) Identifying our feelings allows us to work with them and transform them.
   g) Our feeling of guilt or shame may never go away completely, and we must be careful to not compound matters by feeling guilty or shame about still feeling guilt or shame.
   h) Self-forgiveness also requires humility and hard work. It requires a sincere desire to change and not repeat the behavior.
   i) We can make an identity out of being bad but when we forgive ourselves, we let go of that identity and discover the vast beauty of who we really are.

23) How Do I Forgive Myself
   a) Identifying our feelings and embracing them will help us choose the way to either live with them or transform them.
   b) Guilt: we feel guilty when we do something wrong or when we hurt someone we care about. Guilt can be good when it occurs when we compare something we have done – or failed to do – with our personal values.
   c) When you experience guilt, ask yourself what is causing it. Then decide what actions can make it right. The solution for guilt is always doing, in making amends.
   d) Shame: Shame is a feeling associated with being rather than doing. When I feel ashamed, it means that there is more than something wrong with what I have done, there is something wrong with being who I am. Shame makes us feel unworthy of forgiveness from others and from ourselves.
   e) Shame can be the biggest barrier to self-forgiveness. Unexpressed shame can lead to isolation, depression, substance abuse, or suicide.
   f) We lessen the power shame has on us when we give it a voice. Shame hides while truth does not.
   g) The process of self-forgiveness and lessening shame involves reaching out to a group of like-minded and accepting people and sharing your identity and experiences. Like in a 12 step program, people come together and identify with each other in a place they find they belong, regardless of who they are or what they have done.
   h) Shame is felt in isolation and healed in a community with connection to others. We feel shame but can be compassionate towards the shame felt by others. Because we feel compassion for others, we feel compassion for ourselves. When we feel self-compassion, we then can experience forgiveness for ourselves.
   i) When we place ourselves and our stories in the service of others, we can more easily forgive ourselves for our failings.
   j) Each of us can find a way to transform a painful past into a hopeful future. We can develop compassion for others and for ourselves.
   k) We can tell a new story. This new story admits we have caused pain and suffering; it recognizes the harm I caused in the past is not who I am today.
I) Self-forgiveness is truly at the core of peacemaking and we cannot build peace with others if we are not at peace with ourselves.

*[This outline is drawn from Part Three Chapters 8 & 9, All Can Be Forgiven from the Book of Forgiving, pp. 165 -209]*