

# **HIGH SCHOOL FORGIVENESS CURRICULA, COURSE ONE**

USA Gr. 9, UK Year 11/Ages 12 – 16

*This Course One is a prerequisite for Courses 2-4 of the High School Forgiveness Curricula.*

## **UNIT I: WHAT IS FORGIVENESS?**

### **Core Learning and Behavioral Objectives**

To complete this unit, students will:

- Understand the meaning of forgiveness including what it is and isn't.
- Differentiate between the truths and misconceptions of forgiveness
- Identify and understand the main virtues involved with forgiveness -- humility, courage, agape love, justice, temperance, wisdom, and patience.
- Understand that forgiveness is a choice that is within each person's own power, it cannot be forced nor can it be taken away.
- Understand that forgiveness is an ongoing, continual process, not simply one step or a one-time effort.
- Identify and reflect on some of the benefits of forgiveness.

### **Supplemental Learning and Behavioral Objectives**

To complete this unit, students will:

- Make clear distinctions between agape/selfless love, self-love, phileos, and eros.
- Understand how virtues are related to and important in forgiveness.

### **Unit Procedures**

To complete this unit, please:

Please prepare yourself for presenting this unit to your students; read and reflect on the definition and description of forgiveness in the unit description below *and* from the introduction of this curriculum guide. This unit will cover the main points of what forgiveness is, what it is NOT, how and why it is a choice, and the virtues involved with forgiveness. These are important concepts for gaining a complete and accurate understanding of forgiveness and for presenting the truth about forgiveness in its entirety. We also encourage you to read Dr. Robert Enright's book, *Forgiveness is a Choice*, which is an essential resource and tool for better understanding forgiveness.

Present the meaning of forgiveness to your students using the unit description below. This could be done in any format you feel will be most effective for you and your students, such as a PowerPoint presentation, lecture, discussion, etc. Be sure to include each of the main learning objectives in detail.

We also recommend assigning readings of sections of Robert Enright's book, *Forgiveness is a Choice*, which help define and explain forgiveness, such as Chapter 1 "Forgiveness: A Path to Freedom" and Chapter 2 "What Forgiveness Is ... and What It Is Not."

After or in conjunction with presenting the main learning objectives and concepts, you may also choose to do the Enrichment Activities provided (and/or your own activities to present and reinforce the main learning objectives and concepts given in the "Unit Description").

Please see the Interdisciplinary Ideas provided in this unit and if possible, share these ideas with your fellow collaborating teachers. This could be done through the staff forgiveness community or via online networking as described in the introduction of this curriculum.

## **WHAT IS FORGIVENESS?**

### **Unit Description**

There are many misconceptions and misunderstandings about what forgiveness means and what it entails, as well as a wide variety of definitions. Robert Enright has found the following definition adapted from the ideas of philosopher Joanna North of Great Britain to be the most accurate and all-encompassing. He writes,

"When unjustly hurt by another, we forgive when we overcome the resentment toward the offender, not by denying our right to the resentment, but instead by trying to offer the wrongdoer compassion, benevolence, and love; as we give these, we as forgivers realize that the offender does not necessarily have a right to such gifts."<sup>6</sup>

Let's break this definition down and delve into all that it is saying a bit deeper. It first points out that an injustice has been inflicted. Before forgiveness can occur, we must first recognize and acknowledge this unjust act. It is important to note that forgiveness is not condoning, excusing, forgetting, living with, denying, or diminishing the injustice or the hurt that it caused. When we offer forgiveness, it does not mean that we should subject or leave ourselves vulnerable to further hurt or injustice by the same person. We can offer goodness and love without having direct contact with the wrongdoer. Although reconciliation is a desired outcome of forgiveness, it is not a prerequisite for it; for the protection of the victim, it should be approached with common sense, justice, and a *balanced* sense of self-esteem.

As we recognize that the hurtful act committed is wrong, we must also recognize

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<sup>6</sup>Enright, R.D. (2001) *Forgiveness Is a Choice: A Step-By-Step Process for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope* American Psychological Association (APA), 25.

that the action is separate from the wrongdoer himself. Therefore, the action does not devalue the wrongdoer's humanity; he or she is still a person worthy of the gifts of forgiveness even though he or she has done nothing to earn them. They are not entitled to our gifts of compassion, benevolence, or love, but through forgiveness, we offer them despite their actions or in-actions. Forgiveness allows us to realize the humanity of others when we see each person as a human being of great worth and value, despite his or her weaknesses. We, in turn, gain a stronger sense of self-worth as we realize that each person, including ourselves, deserves to be treated with human dignity and respect, despite our downfalls and mistakes. Thus, we understand more fully that the unjust actions committed against us were wrong and that we do not deserve such treatment.

After acknowledging that we have been wronged and fully recognizing the hurt that this injustice has caused us, we can then choose to forgive. Choosing to commit to forgiveness is the first step in forgiving. While this may be a scary first step, it helps to know that this choice does not have to be permanent. If needed, one can stop and begin again later if forgiveness seems to become irrelevant or too painful at the current time.<sup>7</sup>

Forgiveness is a choice only we ourselves can make when fully ready; no one can do it for us. We are all free to reject or accept the idea of forgiveness. No one should be coerced or pressured into forgiving, rather it should be a gift freely given from the heart. The choice should come from an intrinsic desire not from external rewards or punishments. We must understand that each individual has specific needs and reasons for choosing forgiveness and allow him to come to the decision on his own, freely without reservation, and in his own time. It is important to wait until you feel ready, before you commit to forgiveness; this readiness comes at different times for each individual.

Conversely, no one should feel pressured or coerced to *withhold* forgiveness. Due to the many misconceptions of forgiveness, some times others do not understand why or how someone else would choose forgiveness. This should not deter us from choosing forgiveness. Again, no one can make this choice for you. Rather, we should try to lovingly teach those who oppose our decision to give them a clearer understanding of what forgiveness is. While some people still may be unable or unwilling to understand our reasons, we can and should ask that they still respect our decision.

So what exactly are we choosing when we choose to forgive? We choose to try, as best we can, as part of an *ongoing* process:

1. To view this person through new eyes of love and compassion and see him as a human being separate from his actions.
2. To offer goodness and love as selfless, virtuous gifts, even though the wrongdoer has not earned nor deserves such gifts; we offer them out of agape or selfless love.
3. To let go of our need of revenge and resentment towards our offender; we release ourselves from the bonds of unhealthy anger and its negative effects.

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<sup>7</sup>Enright, R.D. (2001) Forgiveness Is a Choice: A Step-By-Step Process for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope *American Psychological Association (APA)*, 133.

*\*Please note, the word “anger” is used as a general word throughout this curriculum to indicate any form of negative, unhealthy emotions experienced from an injustice. Students should feel free to substitute another word for anger that more precisely communicates how they are feeling (such as disappointed, sad, grieved, hurt, enraged, and so forth).*

Choosing to forgive is the first and often the most difficult step, but not the last. Remember, forgiveness is an ongoing process. Note a key word in the definition, *trying*. It reads, “... by *trying* to offer compassion, benevolence, and love.” It takes time, patience, and temperance to go through the healing process of forgiveness. We do our best to let go of our anger and resentment, but that doesn't mean those feelings will never return. The same feelings we thought we had rid ourselves of may occasionally bear their ugly head again. Then it is important not to become discouraged and retreat, rather, re-group instead.

### The Virtues of Forgiveness

Through forgiveness, we try our best to practice seven main virtues toward the person who has wronged us. These seven main forgiveness virtues include humility, courage, agape love, justice, temperance, and patience. A virtue can be defined as goodness that starts within a person [his inner thoughts and feelings], and then flows out to others for the good of others [through his attitudes, words, and actions].<sup>8</sup>

For a more in-depth look at virtues, let's review Aristotle's seven characteristics of a moral virtue:

1. A moral virtue is concerned with the good of human welfare. This includes other people and the self. In other words, the virtue originates within the person and is brought forth to others for good.
2. The person expressing the virtue is motivated to deliberately affect moral goodness. This characteristic points to the inner quality of the virtue, including effect.
3. At least to a degree, the one expressing the virtue knows that it is good, even though the person may not be able to articulate a precise rule or principle about why it is good. This characteristic points to the cognitive quality of the virtue.
4. The expression of the moral virtue requires practice for greater proficiency in the development of that virtue. This characteristic points to the behavioral quality of the virtue.
5. The person need not be perfect in the expression of the virtue. This probably includes the inner and behavioral (outward) expression of the virtue.
6. Different people demonstrate different degrees of the virtue.
7. The one who is practicing the virtue tries to do so as consistently as possible.

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<sup>8</sup> Yves Simon (1986) *The definition of moral virtue*. New York: Fordham University Press.

## The Healing Power of Forgiveness

Forgiveness has the power to heal the wounds of the heart – our own heart, the heart of our offender, the hearts of those we interact with, and the hearts of those who we spread the message of forgiveness to. It can end cycles of anger, pain, resentment, and revenge within individual relationships and within societal relationships. It can reconcile broken relationships and even build new, positive relationships of trust and mutual respect where none previously existed at all. Through the process of forgiveness, we become stronger, more virtuous, compassionate, and caring people as our anger diminishes and our hopefulness increases.

Again, it is important to reiterate what forgiveness is and is NOT:

- Forgiveness is **not** condoning, denying, excusing, diminishing, pardoning, putting up with, or forgetting the hurtful actions of the offender or the pain it has caused us. Rather it acknowledges the injustice that was caused. It helps the victim of the injustice realize that what happened to him was not his fault nor was it deserved in any way. This can help him to break free from patterns of recurrent abuse or unfairness.
- Forgiveness is **not** reconciliation. We can use forgiveness as a means towards reconciling hurt relationships; however, reconciliation is NOT a prerequisite to forgiving. We can choose to forgive an offender who continues to behave unjustly or treats us unfairly, without continuing the relationship. It is important to exercise good common sense and sound judgment to determine if a past offender may be trusted again and if the benefits outweigh the risks of continuing the relationship or not.
- Forgiveness is **not** for the weak; it takes courage, strength, and commitment to take on this heroic endeavor. It can be difficult and challenging, but well-worth the benefits.

### **WHAT IS FORGIVENESS?**

#### **Enrichment Activities**

#### **Misconceptions of Forgiveness Activity**

After defining forgiveness, present a story or video in which people show misconceptions or misunderstandings about what it means to forgive according to Robert Enright's definition, such as one of the following stories\*:

- *Forgiving Dr. Mengele* by First Run Features (History/World War II, Social Sciences)
- “Forgive, but Remember” is the story of Lawrence Hart and his battle of forgiving

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\*Please refer to Appendix A “Resources List and Descriptions” for a more detailed description of each video/story. Also, please feel free to use any other video/story that you feel would be appropriate for your class while meeting the learning objectives of this unit.

while remembering the massacre of his Cheyenne ancestors. His story is part of the *Journey Toward Forgiveness* video documentary by Mennonite Media Productions. (Cultural/Native American/Social Studies)

- You could also use any story or event which is studied as part of your school's curriculum and portrays misconceptions about forgiveness.

Throughout the chosen story or stories, students should try to “catch” misconceptions about what forgiveness is. Some ideas for ways students could indicate that a misconception has been shown: 1) Hold up a colored flag or sheet of paper, 2) use a buzzer or horn, 3) raise a hand, 4) stand up, 5) write them down as they watch/listen, or 5) any other idea you would like to try. Depending on the story, you may want to have students try to “catch” truths about forgiveness as well. This could be done by dividing students into two teams/groups, one trying to catch truths and the other misconceptions.

Complete this activity with a discussion on each of the misconceptions found in the story. Please include why they are *not* accurate or complete understandings of what forgiveness is, and how they could be corrected to make them accurate. You could also discuss why each misconception exists or what leads people to think the ways they do about forgiveness. This could be followed with ways to educate others on the real meaning of forgiveness.

### **Virtues of Forgiveness Activities**

- Review the acronym or mnemonic device that the students learned in Lesson Two of the [Eighth Grade Forgiveness Curriculum](#). (Unless, another one was used, the suggested acronym was “Hot Cranberry Apple Jelly Toast With Pineapple” which stands for Humility, Courage, Agape Love, Justice, Temperance, Wisdom, and Patience. However, students may have created their own so please ask your students.) Or create a new one to remember the virtues involved with forgiveness.
- Discuss how each of these virtues is important and relevant in forgiving.

### **Brainstorming Activity**

Again, it is best to Google “brainstorming,” as these sites go off-line very quickly. Here is one link as of September, 2015:

<http://www.brainstorming.co.uk/tutorials/runningabrainstormsession.html>

### **Interdisciplinary Ideas**

The following is a list of ideas which could be used to teach the forgiveness concepts of this unit in other subject areas. Please feel free to use and adapt them in any ways useful and relevant in your individual classes. Also, as this is only a sample of ideas, please feel free to add and use your own ideas which best suit your or your school's specific needs. Please be sure to follow the core learning objectives as a guide for how and what to teach about forgiveness.

## Art

- Create a collage or other art form that expresses forgiveness. Here is an example from the on-line magazine, Greater Good, published by the University of California-Berkeley. This particular example focuses on gratitude, a virtue related to forgiveness: [http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/gratitude\\_activities\\_for\\_the\\_classroom](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/gratitude_activities_for_the_classroom)

## Creative Writing/Literature/English:

- Have students reflect on “What is forgiveness?” in their Personal Forgiveness Journals, beginning with their current understandings prior to defining and discussing forgiveness in class. After the discussion, they should then revise or add to their previous definition based on what they have learned.
- Choose a story or character(s) in a story to reflect on and analyze how forgiveness either did or could have played an important role; with questions such as: How did forgiveness (or un-forgiveness) affect the outcome of the story and the lives of those involved? If the character(s) *had* chosen to forgive, how could this have benefited others and changed the outcome of the story? How did choosing to forgive or not forgive effect certain characters in the story?
- See the **Misconceptions of Forgiveness Activity** in the Enrichment Activities section above.

## History:

- Similar to the idea above for Literature/English, analyze how forgiveness either did or could have played an important role in an historical event. Select an event in which there was conflict. Reflect on what might have happened differently in the short-run if the participants in this conflict had begun to forgive and seek justice simultaneously. What might have happened differently in the long-run, across human history in that region of the world, had both of these virtues been practiced together by the leaders on one or both sides of the conflict as it erupted for the first time?
- See the **Misconceptions of Forgiveness Activity** in the Enrichment Activities section above.

## Tutoring/Mentoring Programs:

- Students could teach or talk about the meaning of forgiveness to younger students in lower grade levels.

## Foreign Languages:

- In the foreign language being studied, teach some vocabulary words, including the virtues, associated with the meaning of forgiveness.
- Students can write letters to their foreign language pen-pals explaining and defining what forgiveness is.

## Philosophy/Religious Studies:

- Further discuss the ideas of virtues within a philosophical context, for example, Aristotle (*Nicomachean* and *Eudemian Ethics*), St. Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica*), Plato, Greek Philosophy, Buddhism, and Confucianism.

Social Sciences:

- Consider one major theory in psychology, anthropology, or sociology. Has forgiveness been directly considered by this theorist? Why or why not? [In all likelihood, forgiveness will be absent from that theory.] What is this theorist's view of the world when forgiveness is absent from that worldview? Could forgiveness be incorporated into that theory and, if so, what would forgiveness look like within that theory?

Speech/Forensics:

- Students could give a presentation or speech on this topic. They could argue this issue, for example: Forgiveness is a good response when a person is treated unjustly/Forgiveness is a dangerous response when treated unjustly. Other possible debates or speeches could be on any of the common misconceptions of forgiveness.

**Forgiveness Challenge**

Close the Unit or final lesson of this Unit by explaining what the *Forgiveness Challenges* are (see explanation from the introduction of the curriculum). Then give the first Forgiveness Challenge at the end of this Unit (Remember, these are optional for the students, but please encourage them to take the challenges to heart and to see the benefits in them). Please lead a discussion on the Forgiveness Challenge – what it means, its benefits, reasons for taking it up, etc., and help students brainstorm ideas for how to complete the challenge. (The following page may be used as a handout or overhead copy.)

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## *Forgiveness Challenge*

Research and explore the topic of forgiveness on your own to better understand what it is and what it means to forgive. You may want to reflect further on your own and others' perceptions. How has your perception and understanding of forgiveness changed?

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## 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Curriculum Guide Book Summary

**Book Title:** *Forgiveness is a Choice: A Step-by-Step Process for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope*

**Author:** Robert D. Enright, Ph.D.

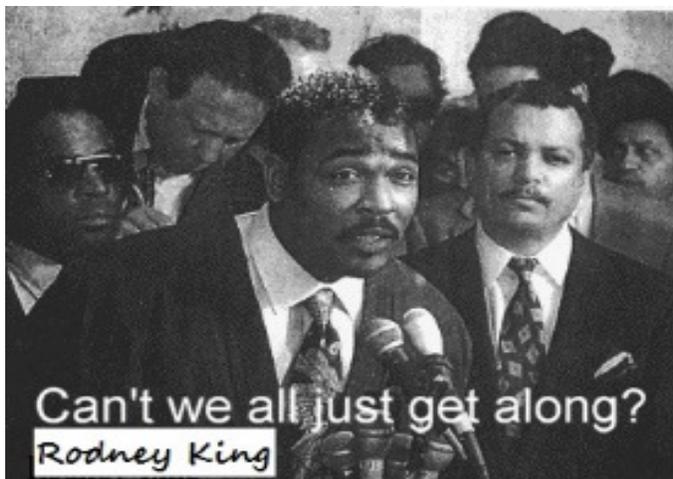
**Note:** This excerpt from Dr. Enright's book is taken verbatim from pages 56-57. Published by APA Life Tools, American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C. Copyright ©2001 by Robert. D. Enright. All rights reserved.

### Anger and Community Dysfunction

The beating of the African American Rodney King by four White Los Angeles police officers on the night of March 3, 1991, demonstrates that personal anger can have devastating consequences. Mr. King and a companion had led the officers on an 8-mile high-speed chase. Once apprehended, Mr. King exited the car and was asked to lie on the ground. As he refused and rose up from the ground, the officers hit



him again and again with their metal batons.



The police were angry: perhaps it was work-related stress, perhaps they had family problems, perhaps they had been abused as children, perhaps they had been angry so many times that they now enjoyed the anger-adrenaline rush. Whatever the reason, they turned their anger on Mr. King. What the police did not know was that the entire scene was being videotaped by a bystander.

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## ***Forgiveness is a Choice***, Page 2

The video was broadcast on television. The same pictures were played over and over. The community became angry, and when the police were acquitted of wrongdoing, that anger turned into rioting. In the chaos that followed, businesses were looted, buildings were burned, and people were shot.

Anger begets anger. In the former Yugoslavia, Muslims, Orthodox Russian Christians and Catholics have been fighting one another for centuries. Freed from Communist control, they turned on one another, and we have seen on TV the bodies of slaughtered men, women, and children as they are removed from shallow graves. We have seen the burned villages and bombed cities, and there



appears to be no end to the violence in sight. In the Middle East, in Northern Ireland, and in India and Pakistan, innocent people die, and the anger lives on.

Anger over a real injustice can transfer to an entire group and then be transmitted from one generation to another. Revenge too often creates more victims, and the angry victims then demand revenge. One can hope that if people learn how to forgive personal hurts, they will learn to deal with communal anger. ❤️