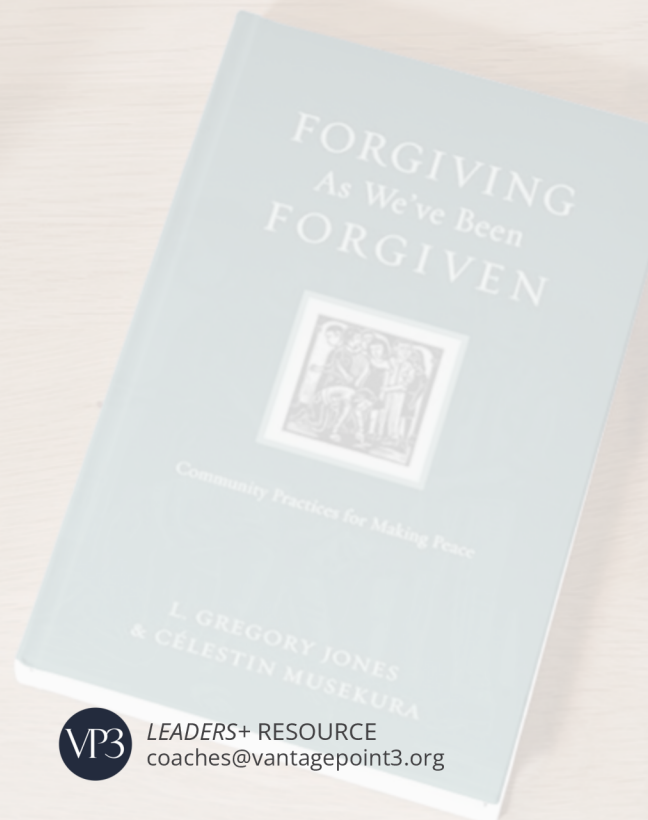


Forgiving as We've Been Forgiven

A BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE

Purposes of reading the book:

- Explore a biblical understanding of the practice of forgiveness for Christian community and mission.
- Prayerfully reflect upon our life story through the lens of forgiveness.
- Foster a more global perspective on contemporary Christian faith and practice.



Dialogue and Discovery

Participants are instructed on pages 58, 98, and 112 of their Stage 2 manuals to read ahead in preparation for discussing the book in session 7. We encourage you to ask them, “so what for my life and community?” as they read Jones and Musekura. We must not be just spectators of Musekura’s story, but we must be open to how the Spirit might be challenging us to live out forgiveness in our own hearts and in our communities. Explore the question: How might Christian faithfulness in Rwanda over the last couple of decades stretch our understanding and practice of following Jesus faithfully?

Application

As the facilitator, familiarize yourself with the discussion questions at the back of Jones & Musekura’s book (pages 125-129). These questions can encourage fruitful discussion and integration of the materials in the book into participants’ lives. In particular, the discussion questions for Chapter 2: *The Dance of Forgiveness* and Chapter 4: *Healing the Wounds of Memory*.

Before your group discussion, encourage participants to reflect thoughtfully and pray with the questions on page 119 in session 7. Depending on your group’s comfort level, consider inviting participants to share their responses with a partner and pray together with grace and love.

The prayer, “*Beyond Amazing*,” is an example of what this can look like (page 2). This is provided as encouragement as your participants engaged with the **Personal Integration & Prayer** exercise (*A Way of Life* Stage 2, pages 119-122).

A Closing Thought (*A Way of Life* Stage 2, page 123) provides a prayerful ending to your discussion.

Further Discussion Questions:

- What does forgiveness as a daily practice look like?
- What motivates you to forgive?
- What holds you back from forgiving others?
- How does Colossians 3:12-17 help us in this process?
- How is the practice of forgiveness shaping your own heart?
- How is the body affected by the individual practice of forgiveness?
- How does the topic of forgiveness relate to living gratefully, truthfully and hospitably?



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coaches@vantagepoint3.org

Personal Integration & Prayer (AWOL Stage 2 Session 7, 119-122)
"Beyond Amazing" by Samantha—used with permission (names have been changed)

Dear Lord,

I come to you in deep pleading to understand forgiveness in action. Not just in theory, not just as something I should espouse because I'm Christian and Jesus taught it, but to ask you to actually put me in training for forgiving others and releasing situations from my past, both distant and recent.

There are some cases where I've experienced forgiving another person, where I truly came to see their behavior differently and let them off the hook, so they could swim away from my anger like a happy fish. These cases seem to involve coming to understand my part in the conflict. Not that this exonerates the other person's actions, nor does it mean that my part was "equal" to theirs, just that if I had a role, or I can think of a time I did something similar to what the person did to me, it creates space for me to forgive.

The grievances I cling to are in two categories. Either things done by people whom I care about the most—those to whom I've opened my heart and made myself vulnerable, OR cases where someone with whom I am not close has managed to enact significant consequences on my life. In the latter case, I might also be mad at a third-party who brought the dangerous person into my sphere and enabled them to harm me.

The whole thing confuses me because usually people's behavior is not in a vacuum, but is the result of their attitudes and beliefs that play out in patterns, like all people have. So if they have done something to harm me and they are not sorry, and/or they don't seem to think they did anything wrong, and/or don't care about what they did to me, then I assume they may do the offending action again, and I feel strongly compelled to protect myself from that person. God, would you please teach me how to protect myself without anger? I want to understand how forgiveness can be compatible with taking care of myself. I guess I should realize that the anger I might harbor is damaging to me, also. I would like to have more of a neutral stance toward injustices that are done to me. That way, I neither subject myself to further damage, nor damage myself by holding onto resentment.

Part of the problem, Jesus, is that I feel mad at myself for being so stupid as to let people near me who do these things. I had not the foggiest idea that Will had such profound negative feelings about me. To the contrary, I thought we got along well and I was extremely grateful for his mother's not having succeeded at ruining our relationship, and for what I believed was a mutually pleasant and mature interaction with him. The fact that I was so wrong, and so blind to what was really going on in him, actually scares me. Likewise, with Conner, I kept believing that I had an obligation to work on the marriage, to keep things together for Sarah and Will, so I kept forgiving him long after he demonstrated himself to be dangerous—emotionally, financially, and otherwise. But also, I didn't trust you, God, enough to provide for me without him. So, I am the one who kept sitting on the railroad tracks, getting run over time and time again, yet I feel mad at him for doing so, and mad at myself for not figuring out a way to prevent it or get away.

Anyway, I ask for your wisdom in these areas. I ask that you continue to enlighten my heart about my part in these difficulties, and help me feel free from guilt in things that are not my fault.

Regarding Will in particular, I ask that you enliven and maintain in me a willingness to forgive him. Please help me not exclude that possibility, because at this point, what he has done to me feels utterly unforgivable.

Because his actions surprised me so much, I feel even more hurt by him than by Conner. At least Conner had established precedent, and I knew that by staying with him, I was taking a risk.

Finally and most of all, Lord, I thank you for loving me and abiding me and edifying me despite my own errors of anger and non--forgiveness. I am humbled by your unrelenting love for me, and I hope you will never let me get so far gone as to lose touch with your grace, which is quite beyond amazing.

With much love and attempted obedience,
Samantha