

Student's Guide

FORGIVE

Learning Biblical forgiveness.



RON TOEWS

Forgiveness  
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Requests for information should be addressed to:

BiblicalTraining.org  
523 NE Everett St  
Camas WA 98607

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<https://www.biblicaltraining.org/forgiveness/ron-toews>

# Overview

Title: Forgiveness

Speaker: Mr. Ron Toews, Counselor in Vancouver, BC, Canada, counselor at Brighter Life Solutions, and speaker at the Oasis Retreats, Canada.

## GOALS

1. Understand the difference between justice, mercy, and forgiveness.
2. What it means to not let the past control our present and future.
3. When forgiveness is not relevant.
4. The emotional process of hurtful events.
5. The actual process of forgiveness.

## REQUIREMENTS

1. 7 sessions
2. Three hours

## PREREQUISITES

None

## FORMAT

Video and audio

# BiblicalTraining.org

BiblicalTraining.org is not-for-profit ministry that gives all people access to a world-class Christian education at no cost. Our classes range from new believers to biblical literacy (“Foundations”), deeper Bible study (“Academy”), and seminary-level training (“Institute”).

We are a 501(c)3 not-for-profit and rely solely on the donations of our users. All donations are tax deductible according to the current US tax codes.

## DISTINCTIVES

**World class.** All Bible classes are taught by world-class professors from major seminaries.

**Holistic.** We want to see students move through content to deep reflection and application.

**Configurable.** Ministries can use BT lectures as well as their own to design their educational program.

**Accessible.** BiblicalTraining is a web-based ministry whose content is provided at no cost.

**Community-based.** We encourage people to learn together, in mentor/apprentice relationships.

**Broadly evangelical.** Our materials are broadly evangelical, governed by our Statement of Faith, and are not tied to any one church, denomination or tradition.

**Partners.** We provide the content and delivery mechanisms, and our partner organizations provide the community and mentoring.

# Table of Contents

Overview . . . . .	iii
BiblicalTraining.org . . . . .	iv
Your Speaker . . . . .	vi
Student's Guide . . . . .	vii
Mentor's Guide . . . . .	ix
1. Introduction . . . . .	1
2. Forgiveness: What It Is, and What It Is Not . . . . .	10
3. When Forgiveness is Relevant . . . . .	15
4. Emotional Process of Hurtful Events (Part 1) . . . . .	21
5. Emotional Process of Hurtful Events (Part 2) . . . . .	26
6. Levels of Relationship . . . . .	32
7. The Process of Forgiveness . . . . .	37
Questions and Answers . . . . .	44

# Your Speaker

Mr. Ron Toews is a practicing counselor in Vancouver Canada and has been part of the team of Oasis Retreats, an experience that is a marker in life for many in ministry. Over a thousand people in ministry have invited the Oasis experience to shape their ministry. Words they use to describe their experience and the impact on their ministry going forward include: healing, hope, restored, new effectiveness, vision, understanding and ministry tools.

Ron has also recently co-founded Brighter Life Solutions, an online community dedicated to helping parents build their child's character for success in our increasingly challenging world.

# Student's Guide

We are pleased that you have chosen to use materials from BiblicalTraining.org. We trust that you will find them to be of the highest quality and truly helpful in your own spiritual growth and that of your church. Please read through the following guidelines; they will help you make the best use of this guide.

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE

**Listen or watch the lesson.** The lesson for each chapter is designed to be listened to outside of your meeting. Each lesson lasts for an hour. This is a crucial step. If the meeting time with your fellow students is going to be productive and encouraging, everyone in the group needs to have listened to and wrestled with the lesson.

**Take notes.** This guide has the outline for each lesson with a summary of the teaching for each major point. If you are unable to take notes while listening to the lesson, please work through the guide at some point before your meeting.

**Questions.** Each chapter closes with a series of questions. Some of the questions are data based, confirming that you understand the information. Other questions are more reflective, helping you move beyond the important accumulation of knowledge to challenging you to think through what you are learning about God, yourself and others, and finally to application. Our encouragement is to think through your answers before your meeting and then use the meeting to share your thoughts and interact with others.

**Meeting.** Meet together with your group.

## **MEETING TOGETHER**

While some people may have to study on their own, we strongly recommend finding a group with which you can study.

A group provides encouragement to finish the class.

Interacting with others, their understanding and insight, is the most effective way to sharpen your own thoughts and beliefs.

Just as you will need the help of others from time to time, so also they will need your help.



# Mentor's Guide

If you are leading the group or mentoring an individual, here are some suggestions that should help you.

**Your role is to facilitate.** This is not an opportunity for you to teach. In fact, the less visible role you take, the better. Your role is to listen and bring out the best in the other people.

**Preparation.** Be sure to have done your homework thoroughly. Have listened to the lesson and think carefully through the questions. Have an answer for each question that will get the conversation going. A great question is, "What is the Lord teaching you this week?"

**Creativity.** What works to help one person understand may not help another. So listen to the conversation and pray that the Lord help you bring out the greatest interaction among all the people.

**Correct error.** This is difficult. If someone says something that isn't right, you don't want to come down on them, telling them they are wrong and shutting down their participation. On the other hand, if you let an obvious error pass, the rest of the group may think you agree and what was said was correct. So look for gracious ways to suggest that perhaps the person's comment was incorrect.

**Focus.** Stay focused on Jesus and the Bible, not on church or religious traditions.

**Lead the discussion.** People don't want to listen to a sharing of common ignorance. Lead by asking questions that will prompt others to think.

**Silence.** Don't be afraid of silence. It may mean nothing more than people are thinking. But if the conversation lags, then ask thought-provoking questions to get the discussion started, and then step out of the way.

**Discipleship.** Be acutely aware of how you can mentor the

people in the group. Meet with them for coffee. Share some life with them. Jesus' Great Commission is to teach people to obey, and the only way this happens is in relationship.

**Different perspectives.** People process information and express themselves in different ways based on their background, previous experience, culture, religion and other factors. Encourage an atmosphere that allows people to share honestly and respectfully.

**Privacy.** All discussions are private, not to be shared outside the group unless otherwise specified.

**Goal.** The goal of this study is not just increased knowledge; it is transformation. Don't be content with people getting the "right" answers. The Pharisees got the "right" answer, and many of them never made it to heaven (Matt 5:20).

**Relationships.** Share everyone's name, email and phone number so people can communicate during the week and follow up on prayer requests. You may want to set up a way to share throughout the week using Slack or WhatsApp.

**Finish well.** Encourage the people to make the necessary commitment to do the work, think reflectively over the questions, and complete the class.

**Prayer.** Begin and end every meeting with prayer. Please don't do the quick "one-prayer-covers-all" approach. Manage the time so all of you can pray over what you have learned and with what you have been challenged. Pray regularly for each individual in the meeting.

# 1

## Introduction

### Lesson Overview

Ron Toews introduces the topic of forgiveness, commenting on why we need to talk about it, what happens when we choose to not forgive, and what happens when we do choose to forgive.

#### INTRODUCTION

Why you need to think about forgiveness and what happens when you choose to forgive or choose not to forgive.

## **SOURCES OF MATERIAL**

Resources used as sources for these lectures.

## **THE PROCESS OF FORGIVENESS CANNOT BE REDUCED TO THREE EASY STEPS**

Forgiveness is when God does a Miracle in our lives.

From a logical perspective, forgiveness doesn't make sense.  
You want vengeance!

## **WHAT DO YOU WANT TO TAKE AWAY FROM THIS SEMINAR?**

What has brought you to this place and where do you want to go from here?

# **FORGIVENESS THEMES**

We tend to polarize justice and mercy.

## **1. Justice**

What I want for others when I am wronged.

## **2. Mercy**

What I want from others when I do wrong to them

# THE BROAD CONTEXT OF LIFE

## 1. Your present

The present is created by making choices and experiencing the impact of past decisions, by following through on decisions that you made.

## 2. Your future

We make decisions and follow through on those decisions. Sometimes, our plans change.

## 3. Your past

The events are there and cannot be changed. The past simply is. When you replay the video of painful experiences in your mind, you relive the experiences. When you put those negative videos in charge of your life, they elicit different responses inside of you.

#### 4. Chinese proverb

“He who seeks revenge should dig two graves.” Putting the past in charge of your future is a problem.

### NOT TALKING ABOUT ADDING TO YOUR NICENESS

Forgiveness is not something you do for other people so that things get a little better.

When you forgive, you say that you are not allowing those events to take you forward; they will not continue to direct your life, to be in charge of your present and your future.

### QUESTIONS

1. What have been your experiences of forgiveness not being granted, either by you or by someone else? How did your life become “common” and “narrow”?







8. Ron makes a crucial point that we tend to play the video of our past over and over in our minds, but we can't change the past. Does this resonate with you? How did you react when you heard him say that? Honestly, do you think that remembering the past can somehow change it? I suspect that to some degree we all do.

9. Can you think of times in recalling the past, that good things became better, and bad things became worst?

10. Do you know of any illustrations when replaying a difficult past actually had a negative effect on your body?

11. When have you allowed the past to be in charge of your present and future?

12. How is forgiveness not a “nice thing”?

## **RECOMMENDED RESOURCES**

*The Art of Forgiveness*, by Lewis Smedes

*Healing Life’s Hurts: Make Your Anger Work for You*, by  
Graham Bretherick

# 2

## Forgiveness: What It Is, and What It Is Not

### Lesson Overview

When you decide not to forgive, your future is pretty fixed. It will narrow your possibilities and will be followed by bitterness and destruction. Ron discusses what forgiveness is not, and when forgiveness is not relevant.

### **ONE OF THE MOST NATURALLY GIFTED LEADERS IN THE BIBLE**

He is described in 2 Samuel 15: 1-6.

In the story of Amnon and Tamar, you see that Absalom is a nice person, but he lets bitterness lead to revenge, which leads to self-destruction. 2 Samuel 13.

## **WHEN WE DECIDE NOT TO HEAD IN THE FORGIVENESS DIRECTION**

You narrow the possibilities in your life and bitterness and destruction follow. Choosing to forgive is often difficult and sometimes doesn't seem to make sense, but is necessary if you want to move your life forward.

## **UNRESOLVED DEBTS**

Unresolved debts take over your present and set the direction for your future. It becomes a problem when you put other people in charge of your life by putting your past in charge of your present and future.

## WHAT FORGIVENESS IS NOT

### 1. Excusing or minimizing

"It wasn't that bad."

### 2. Forgetting

You remember some events more than others.

### 3. Smoothing things out

Sometimes it can be a helpful strategy.

### 4. Denial of emotional pain when you are boiling

It's important to deal with the situation and your emotions.

## **5. Dependent on the choice of someone else**

When you depend on someone else, you are putting them in control of the situation.

## **6. Reconciliation**

Forgiveness does not necessarily result in reconciliation.

## **WHEN IS FORGIVENESS NOT RELEVANT?**

Just like tools, forgiveness is not the right tool in certain situations. When you experience annoyances, slights or the “bumps and bruises of life,” it’s an opportunity to exhibit and grow in your understanding of the “fruits of the spirit.” Forgiveness is not necessarily required.

## QUESTIONS

1. Do you know of anyone who had all the “tools” but allowed anger to take over and determine their present and future?
2. What did you think of Ron’s central statement that if we do not forgive, we allow the past to take over our present and determine our future? What would that look like for you? For others? This is the main point to learn in this lesson. This is a shorter lesson but this point is essential.
3. What other points could you make about what forgiveness is not? Other possibilities? Perhaps you could share some specific events that were difficult or were not germane to forgiveness.
4. Do you have other examples of when forgiveness is not relevant?



# 3

## When Forgiveness is Relevant

### Lesson Overview

The more intimate the relationship, the more risk that is involved, and the more likelihood that forgiveness is going to be part of the picture. A pivotal concept is that pain and anger are not the message, just the messenger. When our lives develop cracks, the light of God is able to shine in and heal us. Ron covers the powerful example of a tennis ball. It is relatively small, but when we bounce it around the room it takes up a lot of space. Likewise, when we ruminate about the past, when we rehearse the hurts, they take up bigger and bigger areas of our lives. However, the past was never meant to be in charge of our lives.

## **EXAMPLES**

Instances where forgiveness is relevant include people being disloyal and betraying you by using your trust in them against you, to hurt you.

## **GREATER RISK**

The more intimate the relationship, the more risk there is, and the more likely that forgiveness is going to be part of the picture.

When we lay our hearts bare, some people use it against us (such as the church prayer chain).

## **HUMAN RESPONSES TO PAIN**

How do you respond to emotional pain?

## **1. How do you think of pain?**

We want relief, especially when the pain seems overwhelming.

## **2. What do you do when you hurt?**

Numb the pain with activity or substances, trying to control the environment.

## **3. Think of anger as a messenger**

Experiencing anger can be an opportunity to reflect on the source of your pain

## **4. What happens when we tell people about our pain?**

We are no longer alone in our pain.

## **5. Image of a tennis ball**

The more you think about painful thoughts, the more space in your mind they occupy

## **6. Stop ruminating**

Recognize your feelings and journal or discuss them in a context that you can deal with them.

## **7. Leonard Cohen**

"There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in."

## **8. Make a commitment to grow, not just in crisis times**

Make growth a pattern of your life.



4. Anger is the messenger, not the message. What do you think about this?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Can you share any stories when you shared your pain and it was helpful to not feel alone?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. What did you think of Ron's illustration of the tennis ball? Can you see how it is true? Care to share any personal anecdotes?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. God's light shines into our lives through the cracks created by pain. Does anybody agree with this? Does anybody disagree with it? How is knowing this helpful?

# 4

## Emotional Process of Hurtful Events (Part 1)

### Lesson Overview

When we are hurt, the anger rises. This is okay; anger is just the messenger that there is danger, it is an internal emotion and not the outward behavior. But what we need to do is step away from the event, calm down, and then deal with the actual event and the real issues. Painful things want to distract us, but they aren't suppose to be in charge of your life. Rather, we should not explode, but rather manage our emotions. We walk in the same direction, day after day, and eventually we will reach our destination.

### INTRODUCTION

What are you allowing to influence your day, today?

Emotions resulting from painful experiences can distract you, but they shouldn't be in charge of your life.

### **WHAT HAPPENS TO US INTERNALLY WHEN THESE HURTFUL EVENTS HAPPEN?**

The intensity of emotion over time depends on the nature of an event. The more intense the emotion, the more your anger is focused on the particular event, which results in behavior.

### **WHEN AN EVENT HAPPENS, IT IS NORMAL TO EXPERIENCE EMOTIONS**

Sometimes you absorb the emotional impact. When you act out, the focus is often on the behavior and not what caused it.



## WHAT'S NEXT

If you don't absorb the impact, you often experience fear or anger. When you act out as a result, the focus is often on the behavior and not what caused it.

## WHAT DO YOU EXPERIENCE AT THE POINT OF ANGER?

### 1. Physiological impact

When you are angry, your body tenses up and you exhibit physical indicators.

### 2. Cognitive impact

When you are angry, you lose perspective and your focus narrows.



3. Where do your personal challenges lie? Absorbing too much or too little of a difficult event? Or being impacted more or less than you should?
  
4. Talk about Ron's distinction between anger as something that goes on inside and the behavior that is outside. How does that help you understand anger?
  
5. When you are at the point of anger, what goes on inside your mind?
  
6. What are some of the ways you have learned to lessen the intensity of your anger so you can deal with it?

# 5

## Emotional Process of Hurtful Events (Part 2)

### LESSON OVERVIEW

Once we have experienced pain, we have to get the intensity down and then come back and handle the event. Ron suggests a sample set of questions. (1) Tell the person what it was like for you. (2) Then ask the other person what the event was like for them. Remember, the behavior is the messenger, not the message. The message is what you need to get to.

### GET THE INTENSITY DOWN

Physical and mental strategies you use to reduce the intensity of your emotions

## **THEN YOU CAN COME BACK AND HANDLE THE RELATED EVENT**

The importance of dealing with the event and the emotions it caused.

## **QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE**

If someone is expressing anger in a way that threatens your safety, it may be helpful for you leave the immediate situation and invite a third party to have a conversation with both of you later so you can express how you are experiencing the situation.

## **STRATEGIES FOR HANDLING THE EVENT**

It's important to understand the emotions you are each experiencing. Confrontation is difficult but there is no other way.

**1. "This is what it was like for me."**

Explain the emotion you are experiencing in this particular situation without referencing other events or assigning blame.

**2. "What was it like for you?"**

When someone comes to you, ask clarifying questions to find out how they feel so they know you care about them. It's not your natural response.

**EVALUATE YOUR RELATIONSHIP**

In order to have an authentic conversation about deeply personal feelings, it's important to have a relationship built on mutual trust.









# 6

## Levels of Relationship

### LESSON OVERVIEW

There are different levels of relationship, and with each comes a different level of vulnerability and risk. How you deal with forgiveness depends on which level your relationship with the other person is. A key issue in forgiveness is the level of the person's relationship and how that affects how you pursue forgiveness.

### THREE LEVELS OF RELATIONSHIP

The three levels are facts (speaking about information) - low risk, head (saying what you think) - medium risk, heart (speaking about your emotions) - high risk. It's not realistic for all of your relationships to get to the bottom of the "V" on the chart. The level of conversation you have depends on the nature of your relationship with the other person.

### **1. Facts: Speaking about information**

Low level of risk for shallow relationship.

### **2. Head: Saying what you think**

Sharing your opinions with someone involves higher risk.

### **3. Heart: Speaking about your emotions**

Sharing your emotions safely requires a more intimate relationship and is limited to fewer people in your life.

## **COMING BACK AND DEALING WITH THE HURT**

You must determine what level of relationship you want to have and then respond with the appropriate level of intimacy.

**1. How do you establish an appropriate level of intimacy in a ministry situation?**

When someone approaches you, ask them what their expectations are about your involvement.

**2. What level of intimacy can I risk and still be accepted?**

Be aware of the context you are in and then nature of your relationship to determine the level of comments that you can share appropriately.

**QUESTIONS**

1. Can you give examples of relationships that fit in each of the three levels: fact; what I think; how I feel.



5. Have you ever been invited into deep relationship that you did not want? What happened?

6. How does this lesson help you think about forgiveness?

# 7

## Process of Forgiveness

### Lesson Overview

The process of forgiving someone follows a specific format, depending on whether they repent or not. Regardless of what the other person does, you can still forgive, but it may not mean the restoration of the relationship.

#### **WHEN SOMEONE HURTS YOU, YOU CAN CHOOSE TO FORGIVE OR TO NOT FORGIVE**

When someone hurts you and you experience anger and fear, you can either choose a path of forgiveness, conciliation and reconciliation or unforgiveness. It's not a choice to be made at the time of the event. It's a decision you make despite your emotions about the direction of your life and how you are going to live.

# 1. Unforgiveness

## A. Attitude: Vengeance

Often your normal immediate emotional response

## B. Behavior: Revenge

This is what you do to carry out your attitude of vengeance

## C. Outcome: You choose bitterness as a way of life

This is where you live as a state of mind and the lens with which you see the world.



## **2. Forgiveness**

### **A. Attitude: Conciliation**

It's a direction you decide to go even though your emotions may take time to change.

### **B. Behavior: Forgiveness**

#### **1) Repentance by the offender**

Sometimes the offender will sincerely and completely repent for what they did and the pain they caused you.

#### **2) No repentance by the offender**

It's appropriate to set boundaries.

# **FORGIVENESS IS HARD WORK (LIKE GRIEVING)**

## **1. Aim in the same direction**

It's a process that can take an extended amount of time

## **2. Be patient with yourself**

It's normal to regress and experience setbacks

## **3. Pray for a community of slow forgivers**

People who allow the forgiveness process to progress over a period of time.

#### **4. Develop the capacity to hold these things as you face forward**

You develop the ability to process these emotions as you move forward

#### **5. Trust is both a decision and an emotion**

When you make a decision to trust, your emotions follow.

### **QUESTIONS**

This is probably the most important lesson of this seminar, so you need to spend some significant time thinking through the issues that were raised.

1. Walk through the chart and make sure it is clear to you.  
Any questions?



5. Have you ever experienced true repentance, either on your own part or by the person who offended you? Has the trust come back? Should it? Have you ever experienced a miracle of complete restoration?

6. Will you help create a community of slow forgivers? What would it take to do so?

# 8

## Question and Answer

Questions and answers about what forgiveness looks like in specific situations.

### **WHAT IS FORGIVENESS?**

When you ask for forgiveness, you are asking a person to not hold it against you in the relationship.

### **HOW DO I KNOW THAT GOD HAS FORGIVEN ME?**

God says it in the Bible, even though we may not experience the emotion right away.

## **HOW DO YOU PROCEED WHEN SOMEONE PLACES CONDITIONS ON THEIR FORGIVENESS?**

Might be a appropriate to invite a mediator to help identify the motives involved and get a clearer picture of the situation.

## **IS THERE A POINT IN WHICH A PERSON REFUSES ACCEPT YOUR APOLOGY AND WON'T FORGIVE YOU, AND YOU MOVE ON?**

Yes. We should live with an attitude of conciliation but not be controlled by the other person's unwillingness to forgive.

## **WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SETTING A BOUNDARY AND UNFORGIVENESS?**

When there is no repentance for the behavior, it's appropriate to set a boundary to prevent from being reviolated.