

*Moving Forward:
Six Steps to Forgiving Yourself
and Breaking Free from the Past*



Self-Directed Learning Workbook
An Intervention Designed to Promote Self-Forgiveness

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(Adapted as a Workbook by Brandon Griffin & Caroline Lavelock)

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Introducing the Program

In this workbook, you will work through practical exercises designed to promote self-forgiveness for an offense you committed against another person. Once you learn the method, you can apply the same easy six-step process to many hurts or even to times when you just get down on yourself for failing to reach some standard that you know is too ambitious to consistently achieve. By learning and then later applying this method, you may experience freedom from self-condemnation and restore a sense of self-acceptance and personal growth in your life.

Clinical psychologist and professor, Everett L. Worthington, Jr., Ph.D., established the method employed by this workbook in a book, *Moving Forward! Six Steps to Self-Forgiveness and Breaking Free from the Past* (Waterbrook/Multnomah, 2013). In addition to providing insight from a career of scientific inquiry into forgiving others and oneself, Dr. Worthington narrates experiences from his own life to meet the reader as a fellow traveler on the path to self-forgiveness.

Do you struggle to self-forgive?

What? We designed this workbook to help you move through six steps that can equip you with a method to self-forgive an offense you committed against another person. Think about a particular thing you might have done over which you experience self-condemnation. Are you distressed by the guilt, remorse, and shame associated with your transgression? Do you feel like a failure when you think about it? Do you have trouble getting past it? Does a feeling of dread and an oh-no-I-simply-can't-believe-I-did-*that* feeling make you break out in a cold sweat at the memory of your mess-up. By practicing this six-step method on one particular offense that you identify, you can then later generalizing your experience to your everyday life. You might become a skilled self-forgiver and reintroduce self-acceptance and personal growth to your life, or you might be able to get back on track to a life of flourishing.

Who? This workbook is designed to equip people to forgive themselves for doing an interpersonal offense that they regret. There are other things that we all regret—like not achieving to the level we would like. But most people have experienced times when they simply messed up and hurt someone and they know it—know it all too well. Individuals who experience self-condemnation and self-blame associated with specific interpersonal offenses and are willing learn and practice the six-step method proposed by Dr. Worthington will benefit most from the workbook. Of course, they must be both self-controlled and patient with themselves, and while they are waiting to see their regret slip into their rear-view mirror, they must work hard to bring about these changes. Is this for you? Are you courageous enough to face up to your own failures? Are you self-controlled enough to be able to work through this workbook conscientiously? If you've got this far, we think you are. You've taken the biggest step by just committing to start through it.

How? Perhaps you've tried to forgive or excuse yourself for some transgression before but emotional self-forgiveness has eluded you. You still experience the same self-blame and condemnation with which you initially struggled—maybe not quite as often or as intensely, but it is still there. This workbook will teach you to responsibly forgive yourself—not just let yourself off the hook without facing up to your own moral issues—by using a six-step process that has been developed in the laboratory of life. It has been refined in counseling. It has been test in the fire of emotional turmoil. It has been studied scientifically in both group counseling (and the results published in a psychological journal) and through a brief workbook study (that served as a dissertation that has not yet been published).

When? Now is the best time to start to recapture your shame-free life. Now is the time to get yourself on the road to freedom from the regret. Now is the time to break the chains that have shackled you to the past.

If you are doing this for a psychological scientific study, then this workbook must be completed in **two weeks** within order for you to receive credit for participating in this study. Completing the sections should take about six to eight hours total (depending on the seriousness with which you work through the exercises, how much you reflect on the experiences, and your rate of work). So, you should work at your own pace. Once you start a section, try to finish it on the same day.

Even if you are not doing this as part of a psychological scientific study or class project, you will benefit from this the most if you work through it within a week or two. Experts at psychological change tell us some things about how we can get the most benefit from our effort at trying to change. First, we need to work through a program in enough committed time to have a sense of the flow of the whole program, which is called “massed practice.” Second, we need to keep reviewing where we have been as we are working through the workbook—not just when we get to the end. Third, we can benefit the most by frequent review or what is called “spaced practice.”

So, that suggests several strategies in working through the book. One is to hurry through it in six hours and just do the exercises but not spend time reflecting on them. Perhaps you might dedicate a Saturday to this, or you might work on it from six pm until you finish one night. If you do this, you *will* benefit. You *will* experience a measure of relief from your self-condemnation. But if you are doing this for your own benefit and not just to get a project done, then you will probably take longer and think more about the exercises. You'll write more because you know that we learn through writing. We think faster than we write, so by writing more, you spend more time thinking about it. Also, you'll probably do the workbook in maybe three three-hour segments. And as you get ready to start the second and third segments, you'll look back over the material you've already written (so it's fresh on your mind) and perhaps even write more. At the end, you'll sit back and flip through the whole workbook again and reflect on what you've learned.

Personal Self-Assessment

The goal of this workbook is to help you forgive yourself and to equip you with a practical method by which you may adequately cope with self-condemnation. To accomplish this goal, you must be willing to face up to times when you feel that you've failed yourself. If you are in a study, you will complete the workbook and will share parts of your personal life. That requires trust. The investigators of this study pledge to safeguard the information shared within the workbook and not to divulge it to anyone outside of our research lab in any way in which you personally could be identified, and we will *never* to link your name with any publicly discussed information.

Demographic Information

Write the following:

First name:

Brief description of the specific transgression you committed against another person that you will use throughout this workbook.

What do you want to get out of this workbook experience?

Self-Forgiveness Scale for a Specific Offense

DIRECTIONS: For each item, write the number in the space provided that best represents how you think or feel about yourself as a result of the specific transgression you described above.

1
2
3
5
5

Very Unlike Me

Very Like Me

Step	Statement	Rating		Step	Statement	Rating	6 minus rating
1	I never feel abandoned or punished by God (higher power, nature, etc.).			1	I don't believe God (higher power, nature, etc.) has forgiven me.		
2	I have repaired the damage I did through my wrongdoing or, if that was not possible, I paid benefits forward to make amends.			2	If my actions harm other people, I rarely try to make amends and repair the relationship.		
3	I rarely dwell on the mistake I made			3	I condemn and punish myself for long time after I committed the initial offense		
4	I have decided to forgive myself for what I've done wrong			4	I often experience sadness, fear, or anger toward myself because of the harm I caused.		
5	I give myself permission to make mistakes.			5	I do not accept myself when I know I've done wrong		
6	I am a virtuous person who sometimes does bad things			6	I do not use my failure or wrongdoing as opportunities to grow as a person		
	Sum of Ratings				Sum of (6 minus ratings)		

Self-Forgiveness Score = Add together [Sum of Ratings] + [Sum of (6 minus ratings)]

Self-Forgiveness Score = _____ + _____ = _____

Interpreting Your Score:

KEY:

12-24 pts: You have not forgiven yourself for the offense and may find this workbook very helpful.

25-50 pts: You have somewhat forgiven yourself for the offense and may find this workbook helpful.

50-60 pts: You have mostly forgiven yourself for the offense. Therefore, it may be worth considering a different offense for the purposes of this workbook.

Although it is possible to over-interpret just two items, note that low scores on particular steps (i.e., rating in left columns and 6-minus-ratings in right columns) can alert you to pay careful attention to those steps in the workbook.

Step One

Receive Divine Forgiveness

Step One
Receive Divine Forgiveness

People need little more than a daily routine to encounter numerous opportunities to experience self-condemnation. Shame suffocates us after committing an offense of omission, such as forgetting an anniversary or not defending a friend whose character is questioned. Unfortunately, at some point we all will also fail to meet expectations and neglect to perform the behaviors expected of us. But, that's only half the problem! Offenses of commission occur when we intentionally act in ways that disappoint and harm loved ones, friends, coworkers, etc. For example, veterans who regret their wartime actions and individuals who act unfaithfully toward a spouse are two groups of people that struggle to self-forgive as a result of their intended actions. Despite the details of a specific harm, we can be certain that the remorse, guilt, and shame we experience can transform even the smallest offense to a monstrous burden.

Think about the offense you chose to consider while completing this workbook. Have you ever tried forgiving yourself before? Perhaps, you've simply attempted to let yourself off the hook. But, guilt and shame have a way of creeping back into your thoughts, irritating and depressing you, and even stealing your sense of hope or purpose. This might be because you have not considered that life is more than simply whether WE are happy, but we have obligations to others and to things that are beyond or higher than even others. We call this the Divine, though for some people it can be more about feeling we have let down or disappointed nature, humanity (or other important groups of people like family or other collective), or even a sense of something transcendent, something beyond the normal existence. Your own condemnation disorients your life and your connection with God, nature, people, or the transcendent beyond. Self-forgiveness that is responsibly experienced without simply trying to let ourselves off the hook can restore the balance.

In the process of self-forgiveness, you are both a perpetrator and victim of an offense. You try to believe the best about yourself, and you want to act according to your own values, priorities, and beliefs. But, none of us can escape the reality of harm and disappointment that we cause others. In fact, transgressions rarely affect just one person; there's always collateral damage. We "sin" against ourselves, people we value, and what we call divine. Our transgressions, like a blade, sever our lives in two. No person can ever return our life to be the spouse who has not forgotten or the soldier who never took a life. For this reason, we must begin the self-forgiveness process by looking beyond ourselves. We must seek the forgiveness available in God, nature, or humanity in general to restore wholeness to our fragmented life.

Exercise 1-1
Experiencing Self-Forgiveness in Literature

The goal of this exercise is for you to explore self-forgiveness by considering the meaning of each literary quote.

Instructions for each item:

- Read the quote.
- Write a one-word response to the quote.
- Read the quote again.
- Write a phrase that captures your feeling about the quote.

Quote 1

Guilt upon the conscience, like rust upon iron, both defiles and consumes it, gnawing and creeping into it, as that does which at last eats out the very heart and substance of the metal.

Bishop Robert South

Word:

Phrase:

Quote 2

The worst loneliness is to not be comfortable with yourself.

Mark Twain

Word:

Phrase:

Quote 3

We are supposed to forgive everyone; everyone includes ourselves.

Denis Waitley

Word:

Phrase:

Quote 4

Our capacity to make peace with another person and with the world depends very much on our capacity to make peace with ourselves.

Thich Nhat Hanh

Word:

Phrase:

Quote 5

Love yourself – accept yourself – forgive yourself – and be good to yourself, because without you the rest of us are without a source of many wonderful things.

Leo F. Buscaglia

Word:

Phrase:

Quote 6

When guilt rears its ugly head confront it, discuss it and let it go. The past is over. It is time to ask what can we do right, not what we do wrong. Forgive yourself and move on. Have the courage to reach out for help.

Bernie S. Siegel, M.D.

Word:

Phrase:

Quote 7

On our own strength, we are not capable of really forgiving, especially if it concerns deep hurt. Forgiving is the most divine thing we do. It is the completion of love. When we notice that we cannot (yet) forgive, we must be very much on our guard not to blame ourselves or get discouraged, so long as there is a sincere desire to grow towards forgiveness.

Peter van Breeman

Word:

Phrase:

Exercise 1-2
Dealing with Distress

In one psychological scientific study of self-forgiveness, psychotherapist Mickie Fisher and Case Western Reserve University professor Julie Exline (2006) concluded that excessive self-blame leads to psychological, social, and spiritual maladjustment. It introduces a theme of rigidity to our lives that invades our thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and relationships. Have you ever noticed how hard it can be to achieve personal growth or connect socially when you can't forgive yourself? Does it seem like the people, things and events that once brought joy to your life have lost their luster? In our distress, we feel distant from people we value, stifled in our spiritual lives, and unable to accomplish our personal goals. Our inflexibility makes us incapable of achieving a stable sense of happiness. All we know is what we did, whom we wronged, and how badly we feel.

Fortunately, Fisher and Exline also investigated the strategies used by individuals who appeared free from the imprisonment of self-condemnation. Those who reported more repentance, a greater sense of humility, and more feelings of remorse discovered that reducing their negative feelings required substantial effort. In the following exercise, you too will work to take responsibility for the harm you caused and adequately handle the condemnation you feel.

Instructions for each item:

- Use each prompt to write a sentence (or more) about your chosen offense.

1. We must accept responsibility for our actions.

a. If I only had . . .

b. If I only had not . . .

c. I should have . . .

d. I wish that I . . .

2. We must show regret and remorse for our actions.
 - a. I'm sorry that I . . .

 - b. I feel guilty because . . .

3. We must realize that making up for wrongdoing and repairing relationship will be costly.
 - a. The people I have hurt are . . .

 - b. If I could talk to those I've harmed, I would say . . .

4. We must cultivate repentance and humility in ourselves.
 - a. My actions made others feel . . .

 - b. Others' needs are important to me because . . .

 - c. My pride keeps me from . . .

 - d. God, nature, or humanity forgives me because . . .

References

Fisher, M. L. & Exline, J. J. (2006). Self-forgiveness versus excusing: The roles of remorse, effort, and acceptance of responsibility. *Self and Identity*, 5, 127-146

Exercise 1-3
Take a Spiritual Inventory

We know this is difficult to do and a very personal thing. (If you are sharing this workbook with us because you are doing it as a project or within a study, feel free to write your full inventory on a separate sheet of paper and just abbreviate your responses below to show that you have seriously done this.)

- Write down what you consider to be the most sacred so that you have it in writing before you begin. Is it God, people, nature, or something “beyond” that you might not be able to name specifically? You might consider several things to be Sacred. If so, note them, but identify the thing you consider to be most Sacred.

- Spirituality is usually defined as a sense of closeness or connection with the Sacred. Evaluate your relationship with what you consider most Sacred. How close or connected do you feel to it? Do you feel more out of sorts spiritually when you are ruminating or worrying about past offenses?

- Has your self-condemnation resulted in an overall weakening of your connection or closeness with the Sacred?

- How has that disruption of the Sacred bond shown up? (Examples, angry at God, disconnected from nature, loneliness from others, bonds with close friends have loosened, etc.)

- Here’s the big question: What do you want to do differently to help restore this sense of spirituality? Make a long-term and shorter-term plan.

*Exercise 1-4
Contract to Try to Forgive Yourself*

Making a decision to forgive oneself is vital to progress through the remaining exercises in the six-step process of this workbook. Your decision will empower repentance, aid relationship repair, help confront unrealistic expectations, weaken ruminations, and lead the way to emotional self-forgiveness. We can be certain that anything less than a completely sincere and committed decision to try to forgive yourself will reduce the benefit of the self-forgiveness process.

As you will learn in Exercise 2-4 of this process, decisional self-forgiveness and emotional self-forgiveness are not the same. In fact, our emotions may lag behind our most resolute decisions to forgive ourselves. By signing this contract, you are not stating that have already completely forgiven yourself of your chosen offense. Instead, the contract affirms your commitment to work diligently through the difficult process of assuming responsibility for your offense, practicing the method of self-forgiveness, and committing to change to a new healthier lifestyle. In a later exercise, you will make a sincere decision to forgive yourself to the extent possible at that time. But that is still down the road. This contract is simply a sincere statement to give this a strong effort.

Self-Forgiveness Contract

I declare to myself that on _____, 20 ____, I intend to use this workbook on *Moving Forward! Six-Steps to Forgiving Yourself and Breaking Free from the Past* to try to forgive myself for the wrong I did. I will try to use the exercises contained within this workbook to try to forgive myself for _____

Also, I plan to practice these steps regularly in order to become a self-forgiving person, to adequately cope with guilt and shame, and to restore hope and purpose in my life.

Signature

Date

Witness

Exercise 1-5
Finding Your Own Example of Self-Forgiveness

Describe a classic narrative of self-forgiveness, maybe from a children's story, scripture passage, or movie plot. You might consider viewing the movie *Good Will Hunting*, the story of a young man who escapes the chains of self-condemnation. Try watching as this experience unfolds for Will by copying this link to your Internet browser: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYa6gbDcx18>. Using this or a similar narrative, describe the resistance to and rewards of the self-forgiveness process. Do any parallels exist to your story?

Type your response here.

What Did Your Get Out of This Section?

Write one (or more) thing(s) that you got out of *Step One: Receive Divine Forgiveness*. We urge you to think seriously and list as many things as you can that you benefited from—remember, your time spent taking this seriously will determine how much change you might experience. But please list at least one at a minimum.

Ideas from Step One to Consider

1. To what degree do you believe self-forgiveness depends on forgiveness by God, nature, or humanity in general?

In *Free! Six Steps to Self-Forgiveness*, Worthington argues that self-condemnation affects our physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual selves. The consequences of our offenses reach beyond the limits of our own personal life; therefore, self-forgiveness begins by seeking forgiveness from God, nature, or humanity in general to promote our spiritual standing. In the following steps, we will continue to address effects of self-condemnation on all aspects of our lives.

2. How much of the guilt you experience is healthy? Do you ever feel guilty for something outside your control, a need to be perfect, or a desire for social approval?

It has been argued that we only have a limited amount of psychical energy and that guilt ties up resources that we could be spending elsewhere. Such exhaustion leaves us vulnerable to new stressors. For this reason, it is important to identify sources of healthy guilt and eliminate guilt that results from unrealistic expectations (i.e. perfectionism, a need to always say yes, etc.)

3. Chuck Colson: A Case Study in Divine Forgiveness

The life of Chuck Colson (1931-2012) changed drastically when his association with the Watergate Scandal forced the termination his role as advisor to the United States President and reassigned him as an inmate in Maxwell Prison. Although he still paid the social consequences of his offense in prison, he writes in his book, *Born Again* (Chosen Books, 1976/2008), about the relief he experienced after being confronted by a peer and becoming accountable to God. During and after his time in prison, Colson worked diligently to loose the chains of self-condemnation from millions of fellow suffers. He is now known primarily for his contributions to society described in his book, through a Prison Fellowship ministry, and from his radio program, *Breaking Point*.

Step Two

Repair Relationships

Step Two *Repair Relationships*

The gift of divine forgiveness—a restored sense of connection or closeness with whatever you hold to be Sacred—is an essential first-step in the self-forgiveness process. However, alone, it cannot repair the social damage caused by our actions or even psychological damage from rumination and unrealistic expectations. To self-forgive responsibly, the next step is to make amends with those whom we have harmed.

When people are wronged, they experience injustice. They might even feel entitled to restoration at the expense of their transgressor. One of the earliest legal principles, the *Lex Talionis*, required that an offender’s punishment be equal in kind and severity to the initial harm. Yet, this idea did not disappear with the ancient civilizations from which it came. News stories often highlight victims’ relief as justice is served via the court system. We feel better when our transgressors suffer. Indeed, misery does love company!

The discrepancy between the way a victim perceives a relationship after an offense and the way they would like it to be restored is called the *injustice gap*. The bigger the offense is, the bigger the injustice gap will be. Trivial transgressions might be resolved with a simple apology. However, significant offenses can create an injustice gap that is so large that it cannot be bridged by even the most eloquent and sincere confession. In these situations, an attempt to make amends and seek forgiveness may receive a response such as “no not ever” or “just not yet.” Whether by forgiveness, revenge, civil justice or another method, victims seek to resolve the injustice gap they perceive. It is your job, as an offender, to reduce the injustice gap and restore equality to the relationship.

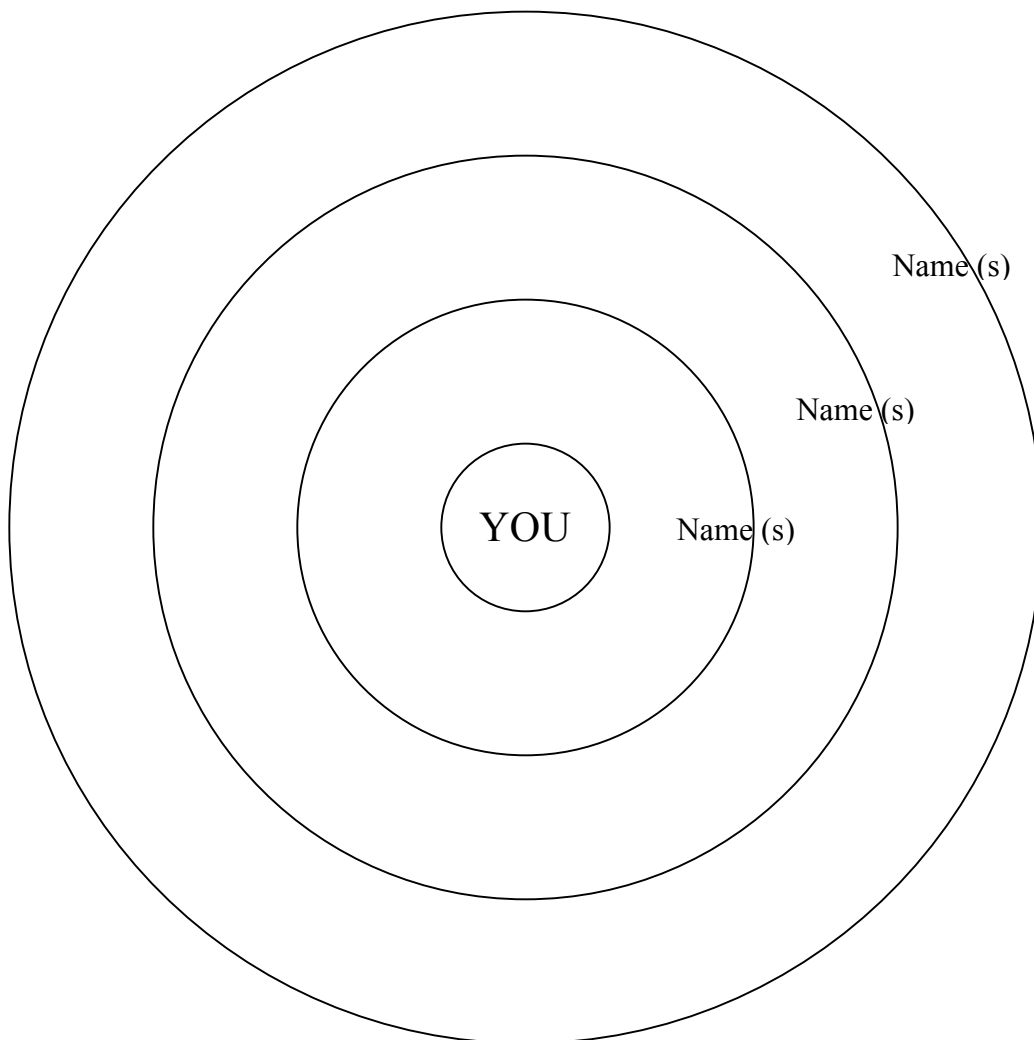
A similar process occurs when we damage our own character or fail to live up to personal or moral standards. We cannot escape the feeling of injustice toward ourselves after we harm others. Shame – the *expected* negative evaluation of others – pervades our thoughts and emotions. We reinforce the belief that discovery of our secret will lead to abandonment by presenting a false identity to the world and withdrawing.

We must do whatever we can to narrow the injustice gaps that result from our transgression. Anyone who has attempted to make amends for a serious mistake knows that the process requires more time and energy than you might anticipate. Furthermore, there are some cases where the damage we did cannot be repaired. It is difficult and time-consuming to figure out how we might “pay it forward” and help others in an appropriate way if we cannot really make it up to the person we harmed directly. We cannot simply ignore the consequences of our actions. Instead, we bury our pride in humility and acknowledge the importance of others’ needs. By this our actions, coupled with our words, communicate that we value those we have harmed.

In summary, other people are crucial to the process of self-forgiveness. Focusing on ourselves leads to self-blame and shame, but focusing on others promotes healing and self-forgiveness.

Exercise 2-1
Assessing the Damage

Unfortunately, the harmful consequences of our wrongdoing extend beyond our own lives to people who surround us. In the diagram below, imagine that you are at the center of the concentric circles. Each additional circle represents those to whom you are close. For example, you might imagine that your family or close friends immediately surround you in the most proximal circle while distal relationships like coworkers and acquaintances remain further out from the center. Add a textbox to write the names of people who suffered as a consequence of your actions and place the name in the appropriate circle to indicate how close you are to that individual.



*Exercise 2-2
Injustice Gap*

An injustice gap exists solely inside the mind of a victim, but its effects are far-reaching. This complicates how we go about repairing relationships. The amount of injustice resulting from a particular offense perceived by a victim is often more than the injustice perceived by a perpetrator. Consider a child whose pride in life is a pet goldfish. Now imagine that, while the child is away, a parent forgets to feed the goldfish that eventually dies. Upon the child's return, he or she enters the bedroom in eager anticipation of seeing the favored fish only to become grief-stricken by what has happened. In the child's tear-filled eyes, what can replace that which is lost? Another fish? Two fishes? Not a chance!

Write the first names of people who experienced injustice as a result of your offense.

Imagine the severity of pain experienced by the victim(s) of your offense. *(Circle/Bold)*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mil			Moderat			Sever
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mil			Moderat			Sever

How severe is the guilt and shame you experience as the transgressor? *(Circle/Bold)*

Write down a few things you might do to make amends and shrink the injustice gap.

When it is impossible or dangerous to contact a victim, how can helping others who were not initially involved in the transgression promote self-forgiveness?

What percentage of your healing is tied directly two a victim's unforgiveness. Why?

Exercise 2-3
Assessing the Hurts

Think about the time that *someone else* hurt you. Try to get back to how you felt around that period of your life so you can remember how you reacted to the hurt. Indicate each of the kinds of hurt you felt by placing an "X" in the spaces provided.

___ Disappointment: I did not get from the person some things I wanted, some things I looked forward to, or some things that I expected.

___ Rejection: I experienced the loss of some important parts of our relationship and felt that some personal flaw of mine might have been the cause of the loss of the relationship.

___ Abandonment: I was left behind, physically or emotionally. This experience left me feeling fearful and insecure about the future.

___ Ridicule: I was the object of his/her anger and mockery. I sometimes wonder if the ridicule was deserved or accurate.

___ Humiliation: I lost every shred of pride and dignity I had.

___ Betrayal: My confidence was completely destroyed.

___ Deception: I was lied to, cheated on, or deceived.

___ Abuse: I was treated in a way that degraded who I am and robbed me of my dignity, emotionally, physically, or sexually.

___ Separated, unconnected, or estranged: I felt a loss of connection.

___ Other: What were they?

Describe your feelings when you learned about the person's hurtful actions.

Exercise 2-4
Finding Forgiveness

People employ similar methods to reduce injustice that results from interpersonal and intrapersonal offenses. But, not all approaches are ultimately beneficial. A variety of attempts to reduce injustice are described below, and two options are accurate definitions of forgiveness. Other descriptions are not quite right, and some are obviously wrong. Can you find the correct definitions of forgiveness? What other methods, if not forgiveness, are described? Select two options that best define forgiveness and record them at the bottom of the page.

1. Telling yourself that what happened wasn't that bad and you ought to move on
2. Forgetting that anything bad happened and pushing the event or relationship out of your memory
3. Return to the relationship
4. Accepting an excuse or explanation for what someone did or is doing to you
5. A voluntary release of your right to condemn and get revenge on the person who hurt you (or yourself) because you have different feelings toward the person
6. Tolerating negative things that someone has done or continues to do to you
7. Accepting people despite their flaws
8. Blaming and confronting the person who hurt you
9. Getting someone who hurt you to believe that everything is still okay
10. Getting even with the person who hurt you
11. Deciding to voluntarily give up your right to revenge against yourself and treat yourself as a flawed but valued person.
12. Having the other person apologize, express regret, or beg forgiveness until the balance of justice has been restored.
13. Relying on the legal system, karma, or divine justice to give offenders what they deserve

I choose _____ and _____ as the correct definition(s) of forgiveness. (You can see our responses of what each of these is by looking on the following page.)

Explanations for Non-Forgiveness Options

Here are reactions to each description on the previous page. First, reread the description. Then, read the reactions given below. Think about which reactions with which you most quickly identify. Do you believe forgiveness offers a better alternative?

1. **Denial** is a poor response. If you are hurt and you try to deny it, the denial almost never works. The hurt keeps resurfacing and you never seem to be free of it.
2. **Forgetting** is impossible. A memory has been formed. The memory may shift with time. It may change. Or the pain you associate with the memory may even diminish or disappear. But you simply won't be able to completely forget. The disturbing part of *trying* to forget is that the harder you try, the less you will succeed.
3. **Reconciliation** occurs when we continue in a relationship after an offense occurs. This is not forgiveness. You can *forgive* and reconcile the relationship or *forgive* and not restore the relationship when it dangerous to do so. Or you can *not forgive* but choose to interact with the person (and risk further hurts) or *not forgive* and not choose to interact.
4. **Excusing** (whether a valid excuse or explanation or an inadequate one) is not forgiving the person for hurting you and may set you up for further disappointment.
5. **Emotional forgiveness** acknowledges that a wrong was done but chooses not to seek revenge or continue condemning the person who hurt you. It is the experience of forgiving because you experience different feelings toward the person.
6. **Tolerating** negative things will not prevent an offense from happening again, and it will generally keep you angry and unforgiving.
7. **Accepting** someone (with or without acknowledging the flaws) is not forgiving. We can accept a person and not forgive a hurtful act by the person. Or we can forgive a hurtful act and still not accept the person.
8. **Blaming** a person or yourself for harm acknowledges the person's guilt but keeps negative feelings at the forefront. Confronting the person or yourself, which is directly talking about a hurt, might help the relationship (if the confrontation is done gently received without reservation). Confronting the person might also damage the relationship. Confronting is not forgiving.
9. **Deception** is getting someone who hurt you to believe everything is okay when you feel hurt. The deception might be done for good motives (such as to spare feelings or prevent being fired by a boss). Or the deception might have more undesirable motives (such as setting the person up so you can hurt him or her).
10. **Revenge** is getting even, not forgiveness.
11. **Decisional forgiveness** involves your pledge that your behavior will not be aimed at revenge against yourself and that you'll try to treat yourself as a valued and valuable person, even though you see your flaws.
12. **Getting Justice** by having the person apologize, express regret, or beg forgiveness might make you willing to put the offense behind you and might allow you to feel at peace. If the other person humbles himself or herself enough to satisfy your sense of justice, often the other person will feel resentful and feel that you might have asked for too much. Getting justice is not forgiveness.
13. **Vengeance**, not matter the point of origin, is not forgiveness. We continue to experience the negative effects of unforgiveness even after witnessing the suffering of a perpetrator.

Exercise 2-5
The Burden of Unforgiveness

Feeling unforgiveness is like carrying around a weight. This is true whether the unforgiveness is toward another person or toward oneself. It will help you if you get a very physical understanding of this. Literally, reading this without acting it out won't provide near the benefit of spending two minutes acting this out.

Clasp your hands and extend your arms as far away from your body as you can, holding them straight out from your body for at least 30 seconds, and probably more. Imagine that in your hands is your burden of self-condemnation. You can improve the experience by actually holding something weighty in your hands, like a basketball or some weight that it won't hurt to eventually let fall to the floor. After that initial time, you may not be ready to let go of this burden of self-condemnation yet, so hold it for thirty more seconds—at least a minute or more altogether. As your arms grow weary, think of all of the other things you could be doing with your hands (and with your life) if you could just let go of this self-blame and shame and self-condemnation and move on. Remember that holding this burden is hurting you and it doesn't seem to be helping you do anything productive about repairing the damage you caused.

Even though you may not be ready to figuratively let go of the self-condemnation, open your hands and let your arms fall back to their natural position. Remember the relief you feel, and embrace it when you are ready to forgive yourself.

Exercise 2-6
The Benefits of Forgiveness

In a 2008 article in the *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, researchers Judith Hall and Frank Fincham reported that people who feel forgiven by God and by victims of an offense are able to more fully self-forgive.

We can directly seek forgiveness from a victim through an explicit confession of our transgression and reparative action toward the relationship. For example, individuals involved in an extra-marital affair may experience liberation after a truthful confession to a spouse. However, victims may be unavailable (due to relocation, death, etc.) or contact might be too dangerous (an abusive ex-spouse) to permit a direct exchange. In these situations, we make amends indirectly by participating in socially beneficial actions on behalf of a victim.

List as many benefits of choosing to self-forgive as you can. Include benefits to physical health, mental health, relationships, and any other aspect of life (like spiritual).

Physical Health

Mental Health

Relationship

Other

Exercise 2-7
Elements of a Good Confession

Below are six steps to forming a good confession. By writing out exactly what you plan to say, you can prepare to confess to people who experienced harm or disappointment as a result of the transgression you selected to address throughout this workbook. Write a sentence or two under each step to prepare your confession. Then, if possible and prudent, directly contact those you have harmed to confess your wrongdoing. If direct contact is impossible or dangerous, share your confession with a trusted family member, friend, coworker, pastor, etc.

Step One: Admit to your wrongdoing, mistakes, and failures.

Step Two: Apologize to all parties who were affected.

Step Three: Empathize with victims' pain and acknowledge their personal value.

Step Four: Do more than you feel is necessary to restore relational equality.

Step Five: Make up your mind to sacrifice - Sacrifice in silence.

Step Six: Make an explicit request of forgiveness.

Exercise 2-8
The Empty Chair Exercise

One intervention used by therapists to help clients wade through the thoughts, emotions and behaviors associated with a transgression is called “The Empty Chair Exercise.” During the intervention, clients sit down in front of an empty chair and imagine that the intended recipient of their confession occupies it. Then, they proceed to perform a dress rehearsal before delivering their confession to the intended recipient.

You too can use this exercise to practice your confession. Go to a place where you may speak freely in private. Arrange two chairs facing each other and sit down in one of them. Picture a spouse, parent, child, friend, coworker or whomever you may have harmed and deliver your confession as if they were sitting in front of you. If your transgression involves solely yourself, imagine that a troubled friend communicates exactly the same confession to you. What would you say to them? Take ten to fifteen minutes to deliver your confession just as you would if the people whom you care about deeply were sitting directly across from you. Then, answer the following questions.

How did rehearsing a confession affect your attitude toward the transgression and victim?

What kind of emotional response did your confession elicit?

Which steps stated in the Exercise 2-7 made the strongest impact on your transgression?

How would you respond to someone who offered the same confession to you?

Exercise 2-9
Paying It Forward

It is not always possible to make amends for things we did wrong. Lewis Smedes told a story about a mother and daughter who got in a squabble after the daughter betrayed the mother. The mother retaliated by gossiping about her daughter all over the village. The squabble got so intense that the council of elders in the village met and decided that mother and daughter must climb the mountain and seek counsel from the Wise Woman who lived at the top of the mountain. They did and they told their stories. When the Wise Woman had heard both, she said that the daughter had to go find a 100-pound boulder and push it up the mountain. The mother was given the task of finding a sack and filling it with 100 pounds of pebbles and schlepping it up the mountain. When they finally arrived with their respective burdens, the Wise Woman said that, "You've now worked hard to get to this point in your relationship repair, but to complete it, you must put back the stones exactly where you found them."

Clearly, the mother's gossip could never be repaired because it assassinated the character of her daughter. There are many failures we make in life that we can't make amends for. Dr. Worthington felt that he failed his brother who had asked for advice about a serious struggle he was having with depression. But, Dr. Worthington got triggered into responding in an unhelpful way coming out of the family dynamics he and his brother had while growing up. When his brother later committed suicide, Dr. Worthington was devastated. He told his story in *Moving Forward: Six Steps to Forgiving Yourself and Breaking Free from the Past*. One difficulty he found in forgiving himself was that he could not make amends because his brother was dead. He could never pay back good for the harm he had done. However, he did find that he could pay it forward by helping his brother's widow deal with jumbled finances.

Consider what you have done wrong and are dealing with in this workbook. What damage did you do?

Is there some way that you could pay it forward by helping people who were not harmed directly? (Examples that others have identified have included things like a woman who was drunk, crossed the midline, and hit and killed another driver. She devoted years to Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). She could not bring back the deceased driver, but she could help others not experience those tragic events in their lives.)

What Did Your Get Out of This Section?

Review this section. (In fact, if you have time, review the first section also.) Write one (or more) thing(s) that you got out of *Step Two: Repair Relationships*.

Ideas from Step Two to Consider

Self-forgiveness that does not account for the harm incurred by others (or simply letting yourself off the hook) is limited and can be not very responsible if it simply ignores the damage you've done. For example, how might you feel if someone who harmed you deeply simply self-forgave without considering your pain? At the same time, our self-forgiveness cannot completely depend on others. As moral creatures, we alone are morally responsible for our thoughts and actions, and we must consider beliefs about and behaviors toward ourselves after committing an offense. A healthy balance between these two extremes is difficult, but not impossible, to achieve.

Some Ideas in Response to the Few Thought Questions for Section 2

1. In the previous section, we discussed a variety of ways to cope with wrongdoing. Some responses such as decisional and emotional self-forgiveness promote healing, and other responses such as blaming, excusing, and deceiving perpetuate unforgiveness. Can you identify the negative coping strategies that you are most prone to use? Which is stronger: positive or negative coping strategies? Write below:

Identifying the negative strategies that you believe you are most likely to use may help you put up guardrails to keep the self-forgiveness process on track. Guardrails operate as cues to warn of the danger of the slope of self-condemnation. By identifying cues of your negative behavior, you are more capable of changing your behavior.

An old saying may help illuminate our question of the relative strengths of positive and negative coping strategies. "Given a black dog and a white dog, which will be stronger? The one you feed the most." Think for a moment of which dog you feed the most. Are you constantly adding fuel to negative coping or is your effort on controlling negative and promoting positive coping?

Step Three

Rethink Ruminations

Step Three

Rethink Ruminations

When people dwell on negative thoughts and images, they may also experience symptoms of poor mental health. Rumination, the act of obsessing over negative thoughts and images, has been associated with numerous anxiety and mood disorders. Although worry can motivate us by reinforcing productive work toward a goal, rumination causes us to dwell on emotion-based questions and get stuck in unproductive patterns of thinking. So, what's the difference between worry and rumination? Worry focuses on a problem and reasons to a solution; rumination drowns us in a sea of repetitive emotion-focused questions, doubt, and fear. When we ruminate we focus on the worst parts of our lives.

Rumination is a repetitive problem. Although failure and mistakes are an inevitable part of life, many people experience intense rumination when their expectations to solve a problem or be perfect are not met. Even more, our condemnation grows when others also reap the consequences of our offense. When we ruminate about our failures and mistakes, it costs us dearly.

Have you ever considered how much your thoughts affect how you feel? Our thoughts inform our emotions and can even impact our physical health. In this section of the workbook, you will work to control sources of rumination such as a sense of failure from committing an offense or being unable to meet personal standards and expectations.

We also include in this step, reconsidering whether you are being too hard on yourself in terms of your expectations. Do you expect perfection from yourself? Do you expect yourself to be problem-free and never to hurt others? Those expectations are probably not realistic.

In addition, but closely related, do you have unrealistic standards? That is, perhaps you have reasonable expectations about how you behave, but you just don't think your level of performance will ever be good enough to merit self-approval—or even to merit not being worthy of self-condemnation.

Both rumination and mismatch between expectations and standards are part of the psychological self-repair you need to address. In the first two steps, you tried to repair your relationship with the Sacred and your relationships with others (either through making amends or paying it forward). In the present step, we consider the third area of repair—your own psychological self-repair.

Exercise 3-1
A Thought Experiment

Instructions: In the space provided, describe one of your best memories. Try to think of a time that you really enjoyed. Perhaps you can recall memories of a valued friend or family member, a pleasurable event, or when you successfully achieved a goal.

What moods and emotions does this memory inspire?

Now try to recall a bad memory. You might describe a conflict between you and another person, a time when you were disappointed, or a day when you received bad news. Describe your memory below.

What moods and emotions does this memory inspire?

During step three of this workbook, you will learn about the impact of thoughts on our emotions. First, the negative thought patterns that immediately precede your feelings of self-condemnation, blame, and guilt will be examined. Then, we will try to identify negative thoughts early to regain control of our self-condemnation. Finally, you will plan a strategy to avoid ruminating behaviors and commit to change in order to regain emotional stability.

Exercise 3-2
Rumination Quiz

Instructions: Complete the following quiz that will help you think about the effects of rumination on your life. Mark an item “True” if it is a good description of you. Mark an item false if it is unlike you.

- _____ 1. Sad thoughts prevent me from enjoying activities and people that I once loved.
- _____ 2. I regularly think about meeting my own standards or others’ expectations.
- _____ 3. I struggle to not feel depressed when I disappoint others or myself.
- _____ 4. I lose sleep over problems I cannot solve or mistakes I have made.
- _____ 5. Even though others forgive me, I hold myself responsible for wrongdoing.
- _____ 6. I wish I worried less about minor mistakes.
- _____ 7. After a conflict with others, I think regularly about how I’m hurt.
- _____ 8. It’s difficult for me to concentrate when I keep remembering my offense.
- _____ 9. I often feel badly for long periods of time as a result of shame and guilt.
- _____ 10. I worry about who might not accept me if they knew what I’ve done.

Instructions: Read the next section only after you have finished the rumination quiz. Then answer the questions below

When people ruminate they experience self-condemning thoughts and feelings long after an offense has taken place. Unfortunately these behaviors have significant negative consequences on our physical, emotional, mental, relational, and spiritual health. In addition, the content of ruminations might be either anxious, depressive, or something else entirely. In the above quiz, items 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 are all depressive behaviors and items 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 indicate increased levels of anxiety.

Did you answer “True” to three or more questions in either group? Both?

Have you noticed any negative effects of rumination on your health as described above?

Exercise 3-3
Assessing Faulty Beliefs and Assumptions

Although we assume faulty beliefs and assumptions are correct, they don't really help us negotiate our world. We say, "My life should be free from problems" or "I should overcome difficulties quickly and easily." But, life doesn't work this way. We invest a large amount of emotional resources in faulty assumption, and we are devastated when life seems to crush our fragile beliefs and reveal the emptiness inside. The result almost always is self-blame.

Identify three faulty beliefs or assumptions that you've held during your lifetime.

1.

2.

3.

In what ways have your faulty beliefs and assumptions done more damage than good?

What benefit exists for you to continue believing in a faulty belief?

What would be lost if you chose to no longer endorse a faulty belief?

What benefits exist for you to no longer hold a faulty belief?

*Exercise 3-4**Exposing Unrealistic Expectations and Standards that Are too Strict*

Failure is inevitable. Sometimes we make mistakes or encounter unexpected obstacles that stifle our progress and lead to self-blame. At other times our expectations are simply too high. Consider a person who plans to be cancer-free within six month's time. Or, think about an individual who anticipates a raise or promotion at work. If these expectations are not met, it can be easy to feel condemnation for something that is not even our fault. While the novelty of unrealistic goals may motivate us to achieve short-term goals, the long-term consequences of failure and self-condemnation can be crippling. In this exercise, you will examine the feasibility of your self-expectations.

Write down two self-expectations or standards you desire to uphold. It may be especially useful to include expectations over which you experience self-condemnation as a result of the offense that you have selected to review throughout this workbook.

1.

2.

Think about your early childhood, adolescence, and adult life. What experiences influenced your self-expectations and goals?

Which expectations are self-imposed and which are adopted from others' expectations?

Are your goals realistic given that we all will eventually fail? Why or Why not?

Do you hold yourself to different standards than you hold others? Why or Why not?

If you were to fail to meet these expectations, why should you still be a valuable person?

Exercise 3-5
Faulty Cognitive Processes

The roads to self-condemnation are many. People employ numerous different kinds of faulty thought processes that each lead to feelings of condemnation. Even without their knowledge, these faulty processes hijack our thinking and wreck our emotions. It is important to know where you may be vulnerable in order to adequately deal with your negative thoughts.

Instructions: Indicate the extent to which you believe each of the following cognitive processes characterize your rumination.

Dichotomous reasoning - when we think in all-or-nothing terms.

(Mom didn't complain as she raised me, so I shouldn't complain when I'm the parent.)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mil			Moderat			Sever
┌			┌			┌

Catastrophizing – inflating the negative consequences of our actions

(If I put mom in a care facility, her life savings will disappear. However, keeping her at home will bankrupt my own family).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mil			Moderat			Sever
┌			┌			┌

Questioning the known – doubting a statement of fact and raising uncertainty

(The doctor says mom will slowly get worse, but he's spinning it too positively.)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mil			Moderat			Sever
┌			┌			┌

Stuck in a rut – incessantly repeating the same line of reasoning

(I'm such a bad daughter, I'm such a bad daughter, I'm such a bad daughter.)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mil			Moderat			Sever
┌			┌			┌

Discounting Progress – discounting the good news you hear

(I try and try to control my temper. Once in a while I can do so, but that's usually when I have a good day.)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mil			Moderat			Sever
┌			┌			┌

Think about the effects of these faulty cognitive processes on you.

Exercise 3-6
Strategies to Rethink Rumination

Behaviors – How You Feel Can Depend on What You Think

Our emotions are not a direct response to things happening around us; they are the product of our thoughts and how we perceive events. Consider all the possible responses a crowd of people may have to witnessing a single event. Perspective affects everything we feel. If you practice controlling your thoughts, you can regain control of out-of-control emotions.

1. Recognize your repeated patterns and change them – patterns of thinking, not single thoughts, produce the greatest impact on your emotions.
2. Learn to interrupt the flow – Stopping the flow of negative thoughts is like trying to stop a boulder rolling down a mountain. The longer you wait, the more difficult it will be. Learn to intervene early by diverting your thinking to something productive.
3. Be aware of what won't help – Think about what to do rather than what not to do. Instead of telling yourself to avoid certain thoughts, be prepared with positive thoughts that you may focus on when ruminations arise.
4. How to Change – Changing your perspective is difficult. You must decide that you will try to improve, practice, set definite goals, monitor progress, and stay committed.

Questions about your ruminative behaviors:

What patterns of thinking strongly affect your emotions?

Write down positive things to consider when you encounter negative thought patterns.

Exercise 3-7
Develop an Action Plan

In order to rethink your ruminations, it is important to be prepared with an action plan. In the previous three exercises, you identified unrealistic standards, faulty cognitive processes and patterns. This exercise will help you build a plan to execute when you find yourself ruminating about negative thoughts and images.

1. Unrealistic Standards – A common cue for rumination is unrealistic standards. These standards can be self-imposed (i.e. perfectionism) or the product of others' desires for us (i.e. parents who seek to manage a child's career). Are the standards by which you judge your own worth self-imposed or adopted from an outside source? Are your standards reasonable? Many times we blame ourselves for not living up to an unreachable standard.

2. Faulty Cognitive Processes and Patterns – The roads to self-condemnation are many. People employ numerous different kinds of faulty thought processes that each lead to feelings of condemnation. It is important to know where you may be vulnerable. For example, some people think in all-or-nothing terms, others catastrophize about minor setbacks, and still others discount progress and positive news.

What people, events, or cues precede your ruminative behaviors?

List three positive thoughts to recall when your ruminative thoughts return.

- 1.

- 2.

- 3.

What Did Your Get Out of This Section?

Write one (or more) thing(s) that you got out of *Step Three: Rethink Ruminations*.

Thinking about the Material So Far

Go back to Exercise 1-1. Read again the quote by Bishop Robert South. What are your reflections on it now?

How are you doing on your plan for renewing your spiritual life? (Exercise 1-3)

What is the injustice gap? (Exercise 2-2)

There were two types of forgiveness. They were _____ forgiveness and _____ forgiveness. (Exercise 2-4)

From the benefits of self-forgiveness (Exercise 2-6), are you seeing any yet?

Can you recall any of the steps in making a good confession? (Exercise 2-7)

Ideas from Step Three to Consider

1. To what extent do you believe you are capable of failure, imperfection, and evil?

Yehiel Dinur was a holocaust survivor who was a witness during the trial of the infamous Nazi war criminal, Adolf Eichmann. Dinur entered the courtroom and stared at the man behind the bulletproof glass – the man who had presided over the slaughter of millions. The court was hushed as a victim confronted a butcher of his people. Suddenly Dinur began to sob and collapsed to the floor. But not out of anger or bitterness. As he explained later in an interview, what struck him was a terrifying realization. “I was afraid about myself,” Dinur said. “I saw that I am capable to do this. . . Exactly like he.” In a moment of chilling clarity, Dinur saw the skull beneath the skin. “Eichmann,” he concluded, “is in all of us.”

2. How much of the guilt you experience is healthy? Do you ever feel guilty for something outside your control, a need to be perfect, or a desire for social approval?

It has been argued that we only have a limited amount of psychical energy and that guilt ties up resources that we could be spending elsewhere. Such exhaustion leaves us vulnerable to new stressors. For this reason, it is important to identify sources of healthy guilt and eliminate guilt that results from unrealistic expectations (i.e. perfectionism, a need to always say yes, etc.)

Step Four

REACH Self-Forgiveness

Step Four
REACH Self-Forgiveness

Self-forgiveness doesn't happen overnight. Even though you made a sincere decision to try to forgive yourself for the offense you are concentrating on in this workbook during Step One (Exercise 1-4), you might still experience self-condemning emotions such as sadness, fear, and anger. For this reason, we distinguish between decisional and emotional self-forgiveness. Decisional self-forgiveness is an important part of the self-forgiveness process; however, it is unlikely that you will feel immediately better after deciding to self-forgive. Instead, making a decision is a first step and you must strengthen your decision by actively pursuing emotional self-forgiveness.

The fourth step in self-forgiveness process is REACH self-forgiveness. This involves making a sincere decision to forgive yourself and then, using the REACH Forgiveness method, which has successfully been used to promote forgiveness of others in victims of harm across the globe, to REACH Forgiveness for yourself. Recently, as a result of scientific productivity and personal experience, Dr. Worthington adapted the REACH method specifically to teach people how to experience emotional self-forgiveness. Therefore, the following steps are designed to help you replace self-condemning emotions with a positive, growth-oriented perspective. The REACH method is composed of five steps that are each represented by a single letter. During the next five exercises, you will review each of the REACH steps.

Exercise 4-1
Make a Decision to Forgive Yourself for Your Chosen Offense

Previously, you made a contract with yourself to try to use this workbook to experience forgiveness of yourself for the wrongdoing you chose to concentrate on. Now you will get down to the serious business of actually forgiving yourself.

As we have argued throughout this workbook, you really want to practice responsible self-forgiveness, not just letting yourself off of the hook. So, the first thing you worked on was trying to make things right with what you hold to be Sacred in your life (Step 1), whether that is a Sacred God that is informed by one of the major religions or God as you understand God, or whether it involves making things right with nature, with people, or with something “beyond” or transcendent. You might not have felt you could completely restore your sense of closeness or connection with the Sacred (or you might feel that you have). But we hope your spiritual inventory helped move you toward more closeness and connection.

We then (Step 2) sought to repair some of the social damage that might have been the fallout of the wrongdoing. We had you examine the relationships and consider making confessions and apologies to people you harmed. We doubt that many people will restore the harm in all respects and some might have committed to pay it forward in the future. However, you have taken significant steps to restoring the social balance and making social repairs, which is a socially responsible thing to do.

We then (Step 3) asked you to consider two types of mental self-repairs that were needed for responsible self-forgiveness. We asked you to consider how you might reduce your ruminations. We also asked that you consider the reasonableness of your expectations for your own behavior and your standards against which you judge that behavior.

To the extent that you have moved forward in being more responsible in repairing the three levels of damage related to self-condemnation, it is possible now for you to make a responsible decision to forgive yourself for the wrongdoing. Remember the definition of decisional self-forgiveness from Exercise 2-4 (definition 11).

Self-Forgiveness Contract

I declare to myself that on _____, 20 ____, I intend to forgive myself for the wrong I did. By this I mean that I will not seek to revenge myself on myself by being punitive toward myself with self-hatred and self-condemning thoughts (at least as well as I am able). I also mean that I will seek to treat myself as someone who is imperfect and will, on occasion fail, and yet will seek to realize and say to myself that I still have value despite my imperfections and failures. Thus, I declare that, regarding this wrong that I did:

I will decide to forgive myself. I thus, declare myself forgiven, realizing that there is more to being free of feelings of unforgiveness that is still to be done.

Signature

Date

Witness

Now, I can move to seeking to emotionally REACH Forgiveness. Later, I may revisit this decision to forgive myself and come to feel even more committed to the decision. For now, though, I move to REACH Emotional Self-Forgiveness by working through the five steps of the REACH Forgiveness model.

References

Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2006). *Forgiveness and reconciliation: Theory and application*. New York: Brunner-Routledge.

(A Christian-oriented self-help book in which Chapter 3 contains most of the theological aspects)

Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2003). *Forgiving and reconciling: Bridges to wholeness and hope*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Exercise 4-2
R: Recall the Hurt

The first step, R, is recall the hurt. Your mission, if you choose to accept it, is to remember the offense as objectively as possible. Try not to take sides! Avoid arguing that you are either evil incarnate or completely void of blame. A more accurate and healthier explanation most likely will find you somewhere in between these two extremes.

Instructions: Answer the following questions in the space provided.

1. First, what beliefs and emotions led you to commit the wrongdoing?

Was your offense a one-time incident or an event in a series of harms?

Did you commit the offense intentionally or unintentionally?

What do you believe are the consequences of your offense?

2. Next, recall the day you decided to self-forgive. How have your beliefs, emotions, and behaviors changed since the day you committed the offense?

How has your view of yourself changed in the wake of committing the offense?

*Exercise 4-3**E : Empathy Helps Replace Negative Emotions with Positive Emotions*

Chronic self-condemnation isolates us from our social environment. We focus only on ourselves and become numb to what others have to say. Sometimes our isolation is an act of self-preservation when we fear how others would respond if they knew of our secret offense. On other occasions, we feel that the weight of our wrongdoing exceeds the forgiveness offered by others or by God. And, in some cases, people who harm others feel no guilt, which is not self-forgiveness. Either way, we focus solely on ourselves, distort our responsibility for an offense, and continue to condemn ourselves.

Fortunately, that's only half the equation. Empathy is admitting wrongdoing and understanding the reasons and emotional factors that that might have led to that wrongdoing. Empathy may promote self-forgiveness thereby replacing negative emotions with positive ones. Moreover, by practicing self-forgiveness, we can experience self-compassion without neglecting our responsibility for our actions.

Instructions: You will be asked to empathize with a variety of people in the questions below. In addition empathizing with victims of your offense, you should also empathize with yourself. Accurate empathy with oneself neither excuses you of blame nor endorses an unrealistic expectation that you should never harm or disappoint others.

1. Circle the words (**or mark in bold**) that describe how the harm you committed made OTHERS feel.

Disappointed	Satisfied	Neglected
Relieved	Fearful	Sympathetic
Betrayed	Anxious	Wounded
Annoyed	Pleased	Unloved
Frustrated	Angry	Worthless

2. Circle the words (**or mark in bold**) that describe how the harm you committed made YOU feel.

Disappointed	Satisfied	Neglected
Relieved	Fearful	Sympathetic
Betrayed	Anxious	Wounded
Annoyed	Pleased	Unloved
Frustrated	Angry	Worthless

3. Were there any similarities between how you as a perpetrator and any victims of harm respond? Any differences?

Exercise 4-4

A : Altruistic Gift of Self-Forgiveness

The third step to REACH emotional self-forgiveness requires that you give yourself an Altruistic gift of self-forgiveness. Focus for a moment on feeling of freedom you received after seeking divine forgiveness and forgiveness from others. When you have been able to adopt this state of gratitude, do this exercise.

If you were going to write a letter of gratitude for being forgiven, what would you say?

Exercise 4-5
C : Commit to Emotional Self-Forgiveness

The fourth part of the REACH method is to commit to the emotional self-forgiveness you have experienced. At this point, you may benefit from a tangible expression of the self-forgiveness that is taking root in your thoughts and emotions. Nations often memorialize significant experiences in a similar way. They build memorials, construct statues, and preserve the scripts of iconic speeches. But, the individual people can do likewise.

Can you think of an important person or experience that you have memorialized? In the same way, you can create a memorial to signify your gift of self-forgiveness that will stand the test of time, doubts, and self-accusation. Let's work on several Walls of that memorial.

Wall 1: Commit by Reflecting on Your Change

Think back to how badly you felt toward yourself at the beginning of this workbook. It will help if you go back to Exercise 1-2, in which you detailed the negativity you felt then. But now, we hope, you feel a lot different.

So, on a percent basis, what percent of the negative feelings toward yourself—those feelings of guilt, shame, remorse, and self-condemnation—have you now replaced?

I have forgiven myself, such that _____ percent of my negative feelings have been removed.

Wall 2: Commit By Writing

- Write about how much you forgave emotionally and how that feels.

Wall 3: Commit by Hand-Washing

Use a pen to write a brief description of the transgression on your hand. You might try writing a single word such as “HURT, GUILT, SHAME, etc.”

Now try to wash it off. Were you able to get all of the ink off?

How might this exercise memorialize the self-forgiveness you have experienced?

Wall 4: What if Emotional Self-Forgiveness Isn't Complete?

If you have reduced less than 100 percent of your negative feelings, you might need to go back through the steps again.

The Roof: Broadening Your Experience of Successful Self-Forgiveness to Apply to Other People

If you have a history of offenses against another person—perhaps some big hurts and many small hurts—you do not need to recall every hurt to effectively forgive yourself. You can forgive the hurtfulness by taking three steps.

- Pick a few of the most hurtful acts that represent all the hurts you have inflicted. Work through those two or three—one at a time—until each is forgiven.
- At some point you will decide that you have forgiven enough of the individual acts, and you have thus forgiven the person.
- List any barriers to you experiencing emotional self-forgiveness below.

Exercise 4-5
H : Hold onto Self-Forgiveness

Freedom from self-condemnation and blame doesn't mean that you will never experience them again. If you believe your struggle is completely over, you're setting yourself up to be disappointed. We all experience doubts.

But, you have a choice about your emotions. You can hold onto unforgiving emotions, or if you have replaced those with love, empathy, sympathy or compassion, you can now hold on to your emotional forgiveness even in the face of powerful events that demand that you give up that emotional forgiveness.

Psychologist Fred Luskin suggests that experiencing negative emotions is like watching a television channel that is depressing, angering, fear-producing, or bitterness-enhancing. But importantly, **you can change channels**. Choose a more positive channel.

What negative emotional channels do you often watch?

What positive emotional channels do you want to watch more of?

Is there something stopping you from changing channels? What is it?

Can you do something about it? Or can you just commit to change channels and seek more positive experiences?

What Did Your Get Out of This Section?

Write two (or more) things that you got out of *Step Four: REACH Self-Forgiveness*.

Ideas from Step Four to Consider

1. Do you agree that you need to seek forgiveness regarding ways you have disrupted bonds with the Sacred, attempt to make amends or pay it forward to heal some of the social effects, and try to reduce ruminations and change expectations and standards if you are to make a decision to forgive yourself responsibly and then to experience healing of your emotions through REACHing self-forgiveness? If not, what do you think isn't needed or what else is needed?
2. Although wounds heal in time, time does not heal wounds. Actions heal wounds! The REACH methods provide a concrete series of actions that will help you self-forgive, but it is important that you remember and practice these steps regularly. Try starting this process by recalling each of the five steps below.

R:
E:
A:
C:
H:
3. In Exercise 4-3 you identified yours and others' reactions to the offense you committed. Were the reactions you identified similar? Were they different? Empathy describes your ability to take the perspective of and emotionally identify with others. As a perpetrator of harm, how might your empathy toward victims of harm facilitate or impede the self-forgiveness process. Can you think of anyone who empathizes with you as a perpetrator of harm?

Step Five

Rebuild Self-Acceptance

Step Five
Rebuild Self-Acceptance

Victory is hard-won in the battle for self-forgiveness as a way of reducing or eliminating self-condemnation. But unfortunately, forgiving yourself is also not the end of the war. Perhaps our most troublesome problem is this: How do I accept myself as valuable when I am more flawed than I ever believed to be possible?

Self-condemnation threatens how we think about ourselves. It drives a wedge between who we are and who we want to be. This problem arises for multiple reasons. First, it is possible that we believe we are no longer able to live up to our own or others' standards or expectations. For example, consider the anguish of a soldier whose wartime actions violate previously held moral beliefs, a spouse caught in an affair, or a parent who lost control disciplining a noncompliant child. A second reason why self-condemnation can cause problems is one might initially see oneself as better than one actually is. Perhaps a parent has sufficiently provided for his or her family in the past but is now no longer able to do so (whether by loss of job, consequence of physical disease or disability, etc.). Whether transgressions cause us to prematurely foreclose on life or reduce our inflated sense of self, a distorted self-concept is at the foundation of our problem.

Accepting oneself doesn't mean being completely satisfied with your past decisions and behaviors. We all must come to terms with the life path that got us to the point where we are now. Yet, self-acceptance is about being good enough. We must believe that we are valuable despite the mistakes we've made although we aspire to be better. Self-acceptance means embracing our ability to learn and grow from our mistakes.

Exercise 5-1
Where You've Been

Instructions: Each of us has experiences that contribute to who we are today. Some important experiences are positive and others are negative. But, we cannot deny the impact of these events on our lives. In the following exercise, you will be asked to consider the impacts of significant successes and failures in your life.

Describe an important success in your life.

How has this experience shaped your perspective?

Describe an important failure in your life.

How has this experience shaped your perspective?

In what ways did you learn from these past experiences?

Exercise 5-2
We Are All Capable of Wrongdoing

Yehiel Dinur was a holocaust survivor who was a witness during the trial of the infamous Nazi war criminal, Adolf Eichmann. Dinur entered the courtroom and stared at the man behind the bulletproof glass—the man who had presided over the slaughter of millions. The court was hushed as a victim confronted a butcher of his people. Suddenly Dinur began to sob and collapsed to the floor. But not out of anger or bitterness. As he explained later in an interview, what struck him was a terrifying realization. “I was afraid about myself,” Dinur said. “I saw that I am capable to do this...Exactly like he.” In a moment of chilling clarity, Dinur saw the skull beneath the skin. “Eichmann, “he concluded, “is in all of us.”

- Answer these three questions:
 1. What is the point of this story? Do you agree with it? Why or why not?

 2. Do you think that Yehiel Dinur thought that he was in any way similar to Adolf Eichmann before his realization?

 3. Do you tend to underestimate your capacity, under a different set of circumstances, to commit atrocities?

Exercise 5-3
What Makes You Valuable?

Freedom from self-condemnation and blame doesn't mean that you will never experience them again. If you believe your struggle is completely over, you're setting yourself up to be disappointed. Yet, it is important to keep in mind that we are valuable in spite of our mistakes.

Prior to committing your offense, what did you believe made you a valuable person?

How has your offense and mistakes threatened your sense of personal worth?

What makes you valuable in spite of your mistakes?

Who or what can you count on to remind you of your worth?

Exercise 5-4
Consider This

Suppose you found a \$100 bill on the sidewalk. It has dirt all over it. It had little rips and lots and lots of wrinkles. It was not that pretty to look at, though you thought you might be able to take it home with you, wash it off and press it in a book. In short, right now, it doesn't look like a hundred bucks. But here's the question: Would it spend? There are times in our lives when we do things that (metaphorically) get us dirty, wrinkled, ripped, and not morally pretty. But we are still valuable as a person.

What do you think of this metaphor?

Exercise 5-5
Man in the Mirror

Look at yourself in the mirror, then walk away. Return to the mirror a second time.

You have looked at two faces. The first face you saw was the face of a person who has been hurt and at the same time the face of a person who has hurt others. The second face you saw is the face of one who has struggled against the oppression of unforgiveness, revenge motives, and grudges. It is the face of one who has emerged victorious over self-condemnation.

What Did Your Get Out of This Section?

Write one (or more) thing(s) that you got out of *Step Five:Rebuild Self-Acceptance*.

Ideas from Step Five to Consider

Love yourself – accept yourself – forgive yourself – and be good to yourself, because without you the rest of us are without a source of many wonderful things.

Leo F. Buscaglia

1. Can anyone reach self-acceptance or is it an unlikely luxury?

Self-acceptance is not something people are born with. Instead, it takes a courageous individual to honestly confront life's failures and mistakes, generously forgive oneself, and work to rebuild self-acceptance. In this way, self-acceptance requires concentrated effort and discipline.

2. How long will it take to rebuild self-acceptance?

There is no standard for the amount of time it takes to rebuild self-acceptance. In fact, we have argued that self-acceptance way of living rather than a transient state.

Step Six

Resolve to Live Virtuously

Step Six
Resolve to Live Virtuously

A conflict rages inside each of us. Although we are flawed, we are also capable of seeking virtue and goodness. Unfortunately, wrongdoing often causes people to withdraw and foreclose on any effort to lead a virtuous and good life. The blaze of self-condemnation may consume our efforts toward character and moral growth if we are not careful. We must instead become aware of our wrongdoing and the consequences of our actions in order to responsibly self-forgive and lead a life of virtue.

However, we are not alone on our quest. How we think about and behave toward ourselves depends upon the influence of our relationships to the divine and others. In this way, our relationships function as valuable tools to build a healthy self-concept and virtuous life. Growth therefore is frequently the product of community. But, like us, our relationships are undeniably flawed and interpersonal offenses are an inevitable consequence. For this reason, we regard what takes place in the aftermath of wrongdoing as an essentially human event that may promote growth and virtue.

Exercise 6-1
Breaking Free and Moving Forward

Freedom from self-condemnation and blame doesn't mean that you will never experience them again. If you believe your struggle is completely over, you're setting yourself up to be disappointed. We all experience doubts. But, we must hold on to our commitment to self-forgive and resolve to lead a virtuous life in the future.

Many historical and fictional narratives indicate that the road to virtue is paved in mistakes. Consider the lives of individuals including Chuck Colson and the Apostle Paul who devoted their lives to serving others in the wake of severe offenses. Also, numerous examples from literature and movies such as *Les Miserables* and *The Mission* in which characters of virtue carry scars of past transgressions. In the space provided, describe one such narrative and indicate who your selected story encourages you to live virtuously despite your wrongdoing.

Exercise 6-2
Learning from Mistakes

Self-forgiveness provides us with a unique opportunity to promote self-acceptance even after committing wrongdoing. However, accepting ourselves – and our mistakes – does not mean foreclosing on our ability to change. Instead of limiting what we may become, wrongdoing and mistakes can be the origin of moral and character growth.

What have you learned from past wrongdoings that might support you now?

What have you learned from the wrongdoing described earlier in this workbook?

What positive consequences have resulted from your offense?

What positive consequences would you like to result from your offense?

What might you do to help promote desirable outcomes that result from your offense?

Exercise 6-3

Dedicate Yourself to Being a More Self-Forgiving Person: 12 Steps

Step 1: Why Forgive Yourself?

Why do you want to be a more self-forgiving person? List as many reasons as you can.

Step 2: Identify the 3 Greatest Wrongdoings You Have Committed against Others throughout Your Lifetime.

List a short description (like: "I betrayed a close friend") of the three most severe offenses you have committed

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Step 3: Self-Forgive One Offense at a Time.

Pick one of the offense you listed in Step 2, write a brief description of each.

R= Recall the hurt (summary)

E=Empathize (from a sympathetic point of view, describe the responses of victims of your offense)

A=Altruistic gift (write a reason why you might want to unselfishly grant self-forgiveness.)

C=Commit to any self-forgiveness you experienced (write your intention to try someday, or soon, or when, to forgive)

H=Hold on to forgiveness (write how hard you think it would be to make self-forgiveness last)

Step 4: Identify Your Self-forgiveness Heroes.

Looking back over your life and thinking of people you know or have read or heard about, identify 2 people you think of as *self-forgiveness heroes*—people who have self-forgiven much and whom you admire.

1. Describe someone in your life who you consider to be very self-forgiving. What makes them forgiving? How do you feel about this person?
2. Someone from the past (examples: Abraham Lincoln, Gandhi, King David, Solzhenitsyn, Martin Luther King, Jr., etc.)
3. Someone from the present whom you don't know personally

Step 5: Examine Yourself.

Write a detailed message to yourself expressing your desire to be a self-forgiving person.

Step 6: Try to Become More Forgiving.

Write ways you would like to develop a self-forgiving and warm character. How do you think you could begin moving toward this character?

Step 7: Change Your Experience with the Past.

You can't change the past, but you can change the way you are going to talk about it. Pick out one of the three offenses (step 2) and write how you are going to talk differently about it from now on.

Step 8: Plan Your Strategy for Becoming More Self-forgiving.

Write below a way you are going to try better from now on to forgive yourself.

Can you dedicate yourself to seeking forgiveness for your offenders and being more grateful for the roles others play in our lives?

Write something else that you really intend to do to become a more self-forgiving person.

Step 9: Practice Self-forgiving under Imagined Conditions.

Pick one of the people from your people from your list of three events (Step 2). Imagine you are in a room with that person. What happens?

Step 10: Practicing Self-Forgiveness Day to Day.

Looking back at your list of three offenses (see Step 2), choose the one person that you have the most negative feeling toward. List their strengths as a person.

Step 11: Consult Someone You Trust.

Do you seek social support when you have committed an offense, or do you try to handle it alone? Is there anyone you trust that you could talk to about your heartfelt desire to be a more self-forgiving person? Write that person, or persons, name(s) below. Why do you go to that person? What kind of response do they usually give you?

Step 12: Start a Campaign to Feel Warmth toward Your Enemies

Write out things you could do (both privately and publicly) to show your attempts to change your feelings toward those that you have harmed. Write out specific things you could do to show the warmth of your emotions towards one of those people you listed in Step 2.

What Did Your Get Out of This Section?

Write one (or more) thing(s) that you got out of *Step Six: Resolve to Live Virtuously*.

Ideas from Step Six to Consider

1. Can we be virtuous and acknowledge that we are flawed?

People who commit wrongdoings may foreclose on their lives and give up any effort at living a moral and purposive life. Yet, a single act of wrongdoing – no matter how severe – cannot undermine future attempts to live a virtuous life. We all will fail, and we all possess the capacity to learn from our mistakes.

2. In what ways do you plan to live virtuously in the future?

Conclusion

Personal Self-Assessment

The goal of this workbook is to promote self-forgiveness and equip readers with a practical method by which they may adequately cope with self-condemnation. Before beginning this workbook, you completed a scale to measure the amount of self-forgiveness you have experienced regarding a specific offense. After completing the scale below, compare your score to the total you received before completing the workbook. A greater numerical score on your final assessment indicates an increase in the self-forgiveness you've experienced regarding your specific offense.

Self-Forgiveness Scale for a Specific Offense

DIRECTIONS: For each item, write the number in the space provided that best represents how you think or feel about yourself as a result of the specific transgression you described above.

1
2
3
5
5
 Very Unlike Me Very Like Me

Step	Statement	Rating		Step	Statement	Rating	6 minus rating
1	I never feel abandoned or punished by God (higher power, nature, etc.).			1	I don't believe God (higher power, nature, etc.) has forgiven me.		
2	I have repaired the damage I did through my wrongdoing or, if that was not possible, I paid benefits forward to make amends.			2	If my actions harm other people, I rarely try to make amends and repair the relationship.		
3	I often dwell on the mistake I made			3	I condemn and punish myself for long time after I committed the initial offense		
4	I have decided to forgive myself for what I've done wrong			4	I often experience sadness, fear, or anger toward myself because of the harm I caused.		
5	I give myself permission to make mistakes.			5	I do not accept myself when I know I've done wrong		
6	I am a virtuous person who sometimes does bad things			6	I do not use my failure or wrongdoing as opportunities to grow as a person		
	Sum of Ratings				Sum of (6 minus ratings)		

Self-Forgiveness Score = Add together [Sum of Ratings] + [Sum of (6 minus ratings)]

Self-Forgiveness Score = _____ + _____ = _____

Interpreting Your Score:

KEY:

12-24 pts: You have not forgiven yourself for the offense and may find this workbook very helpful.

25-50 pts: You have somewhat forgiven yourself for the offense and may find this workbook helpful.

50-60 pts: You have mostly forgiven yourself for the offense. Therefore, it may be worth considering a different offense for the purposes of this workbook.

Although it is possible to over-interpret just two items, note that low scores on particular steps (i.e., rating in left columns and 6-minus-ratings in right columns) can alert you to pay careful attention to those steps in the workbook.

Look back to your initial self-assessment. Given that this is a short and “unofficial” scale, do you see any difference in the scores?

First Assessment: _____

This Assessment: _____

Processing the Workbook Experience

DIRECTIONS: Rate each of the following on a scale of 1 to 5 representing the degree to which you experienced the item.

- 1 = Not at all
- 2 = A Little
- 3 = Moderate
- 4 = A Lot
- 5 = Tremendous Amount

I feel more forgiven by God, nature, or humanity in general since completing the workbook.	1	2	3	4	5
I sought the forgiveness of and feel more forgiven by others whom I harmed.	1	2	3	4	5
I can better identify and avoid ruminative negative thoughts since completing the workbook.	1	2	3	4	5
I learned the five steps to REACH self-forgiveness.	1	2	3	4	5
Although I am not perfect and I am capable of hurting other people, this workbook helped me to accept my mistakes and myself.	1	2	3	4	5
This workbook helped me see myself as a virtuous person who sometimes does wrong rather than an evil person.	1	2	3	4	5

What feedback would you like to give the writers of this workbook?

About how long, in hours and minutes, did you spend on this workbook from start to finish?

If you did this as part of a research study, we sincerely thank you for participating in this study. If you did this purely to seek to better your ability to cope with self-condemnation, we also sincerely hope you have reached your goals.