

Study Guide for use with the book of the same title

making
sense
of



FORGIVENESS

Forgiving Others
Finding Forgiveness Ourselves
Receiving God's Forgiveness

JOHN PHILLIPS

making
sense
of
FORGIVENESS
Study Guide

JOHN PHILLIPS

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Introduction

Why a study guide?

We all have to face the issue of forgiveness; we have to respond when people hurt us, whether it is accidental or deliberate. And we will hurt others and need them to forgive us – and perhaps at times we may struggle to ‘forgive ourselves’.

Our book, *Making Sense of Forgiveness*, tackles all these elements and makes reference to the Bible’s teaching on the subject. The several stories of forgiveness in the book should be an inspiration to those of us who find it difficult to forgive even quite minor offences.

This study guide should benefit anyone wishing to think about forgiveness more deeply. However, its primary purpose is to help those who are struggling with an issue, whether it is to forgive someone, to ask for forgiveness or to be able to ‘forgive themselves’.

Using the study guide

If the guide is to be used in a group setting, the group leader will wish to set their own guidelines.

If you are using it on your own, we recommend that you work through the book at a relatively slow pace, e.g. only one or two chapters at a time.

Each chapter (other than Chapter One) includes ‘Thinking Personally’ questions. These encourage you to write about your own situation, expressing your feelings and the possible actions you might take. You may find some of the questions quite challenging. Where appropriate, take time to reflect and, if necessary, come back to them later.

You may also find that you need support, e.g. to decide how best to overcome the anger you feel towards someone or how to make an apology to someone you have hurt. If that is the case, seek help from someone qualified to advise you, perhaps a Christian leader.

There are some supplementary questions for Christians.

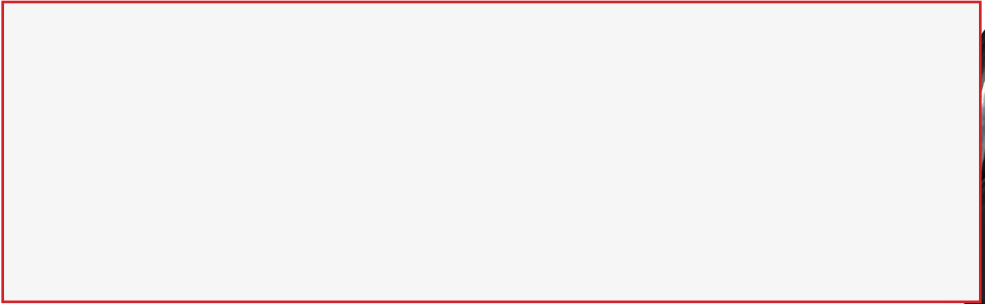
Throughout the guide, there are several blank pages for notes. Make use of these where you need additional space to answer questions.

John Phillips
January 2023

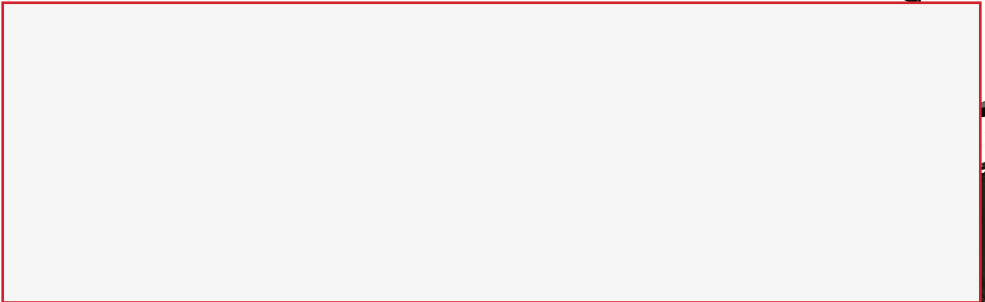
Chapter One:

The MEANING of forgiveness

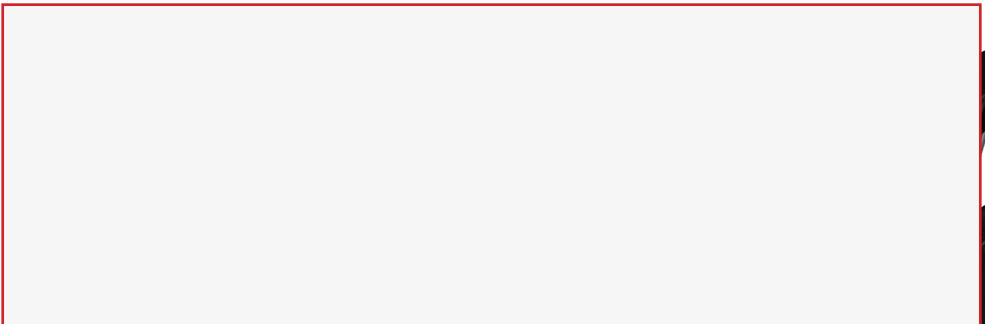
What prompted you to read *Making Sense of Forgiveness* and then to work through this study guide? Have you held any strong views in the past – positive or negative – on the issue of forgiveness?



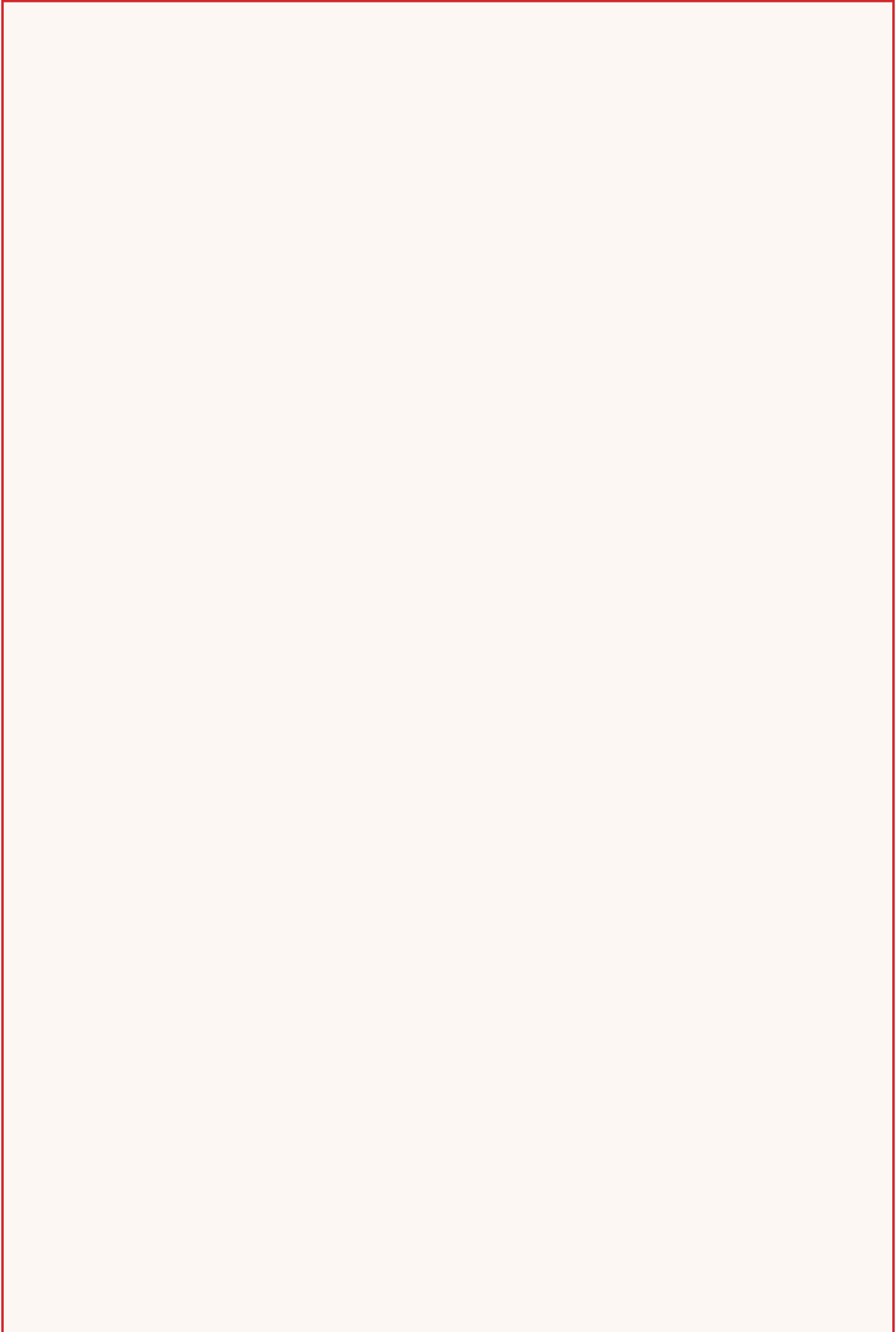
What do you think of the idea that you should ‘forgive and forget’?



Do you think that forgiving someone rules out the possibility of justice? Give reasons for your view.



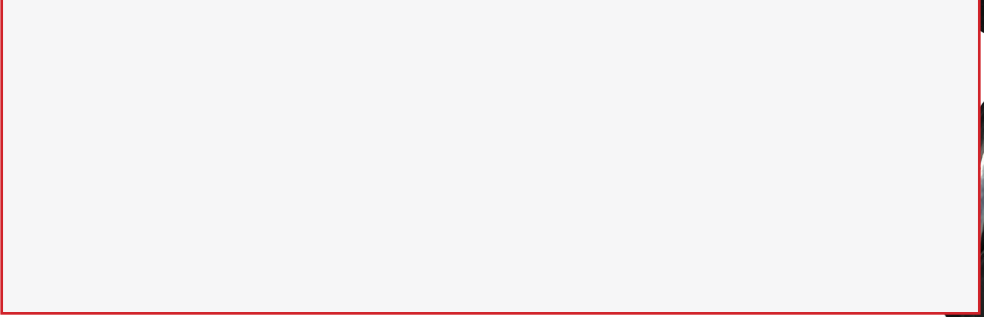
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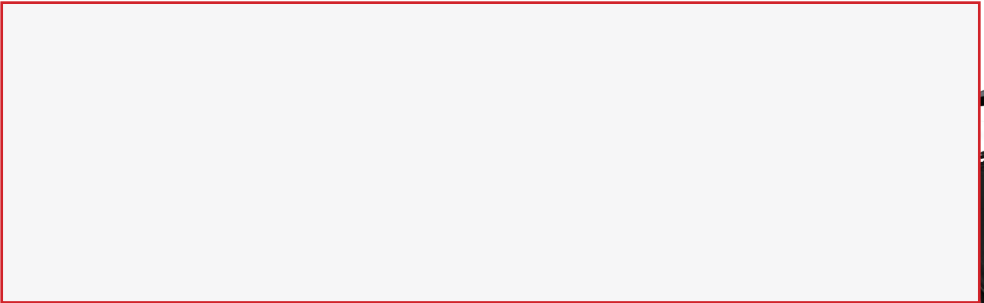
Chapter Two:

The WHY of forgiveness

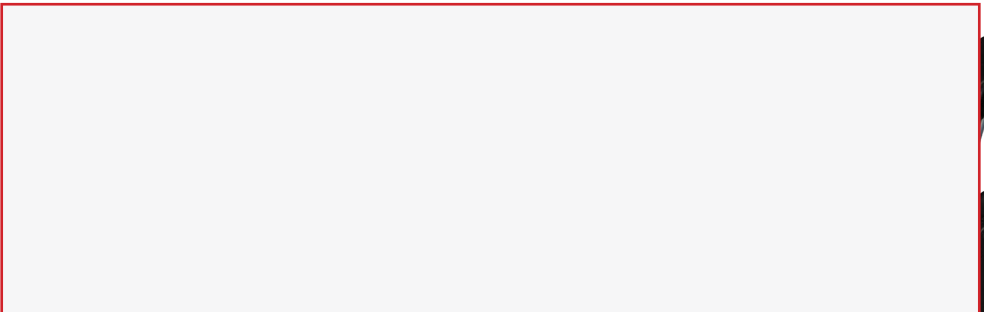
Who benefits when a person forgives? And how?



The chapter mentions five reasons people use for refusing to forgive someone. Which do you think are the most common? Have you used any of them yourself? Can you think of other reasons?



Ray and Vi Donovan say that a person who has been hurt shouldn't have to wait for an apology before forgiving. What is your view on this?



According to Desmond and Mpho Tutu, how do we suffer if we choose not to forgive people who have hurt us?

Have you found any of the victims' stories in this chapter (or any of their quotes) particularly helpful or surprising? Which ones? Explain why?

Do you think society would benefit if people were more willing to forgive? If so, how?

What is your view on the statement, 'Forgiveness pleases God'? Do you think that is a valid reason to forgive?

Thinking Personally

Is there anyone whom you have chosen not to forgive? What has been your reason?

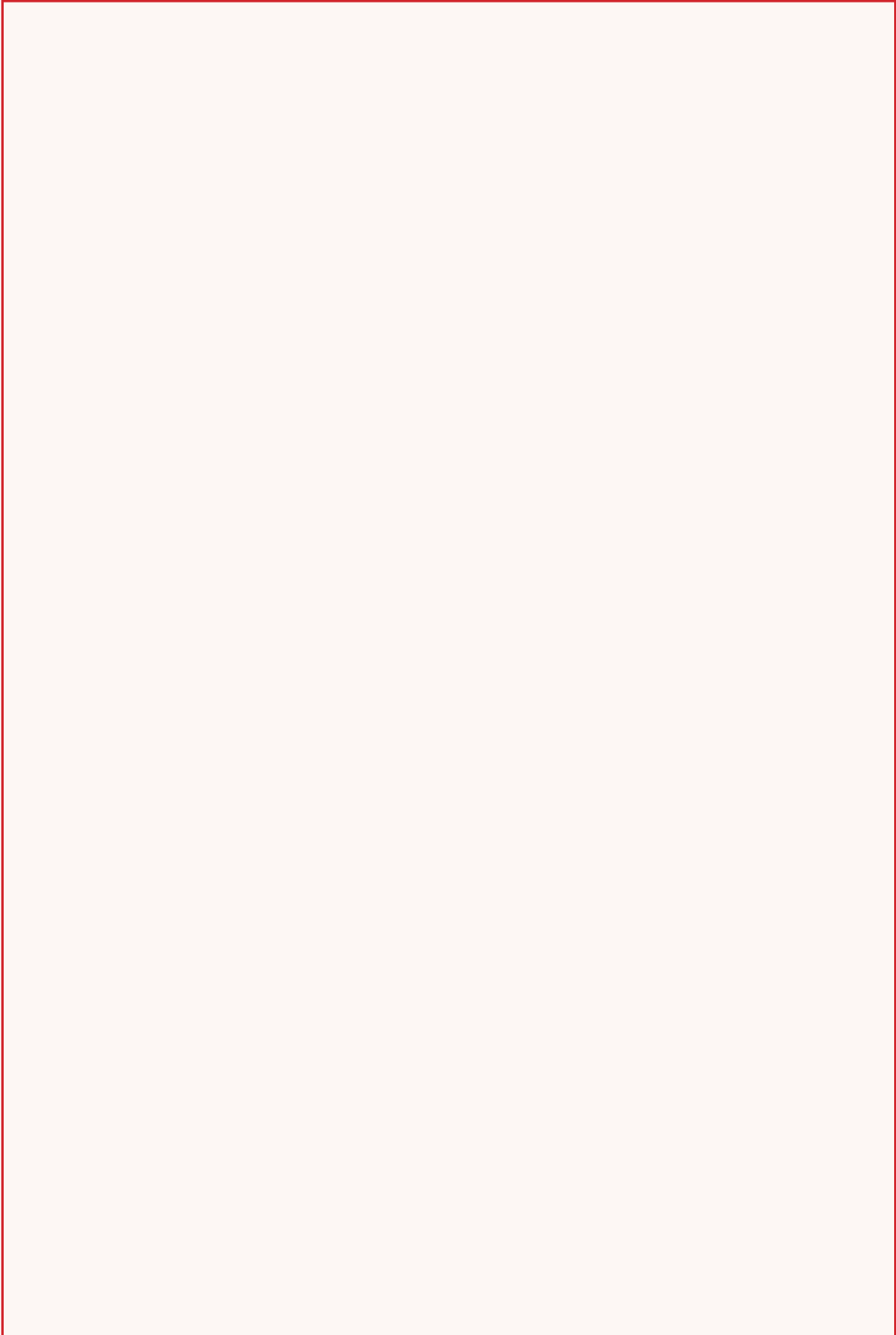


Is there someone who has caused you a lot of pain whom you have forgiven? Explain

- why you chose to forgive the person
- how long it took you to decide to forgive
- how you communicated your decision (or, if you have not actually told the person, your reason for not doing so).



Notes



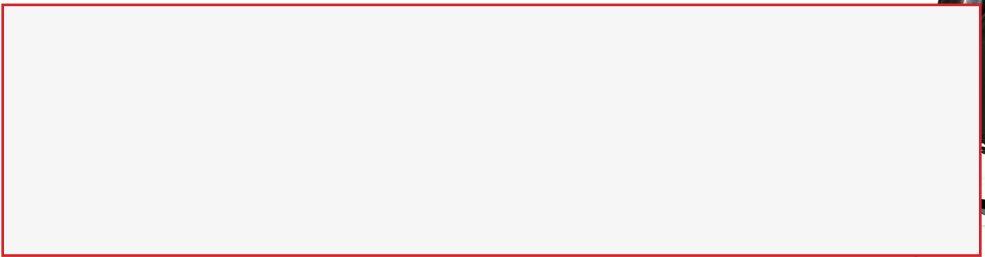
Chapter Three:

The HOW of forgiveness

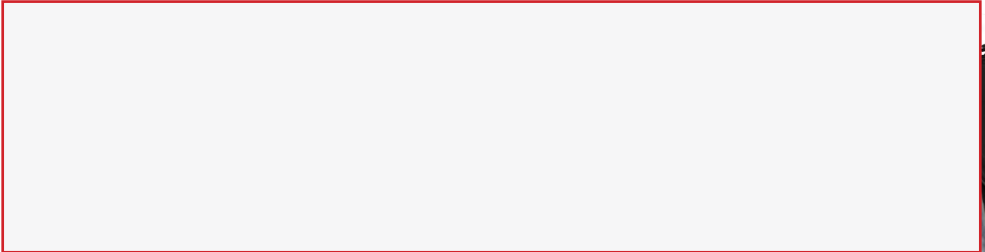
- when we have been hurt

The Bishop of Manchester, David Walker, has said: 'It (forgiveness) can often be a lifelong work ... we cannot jump to it across the pain and anger as though they were not there.'

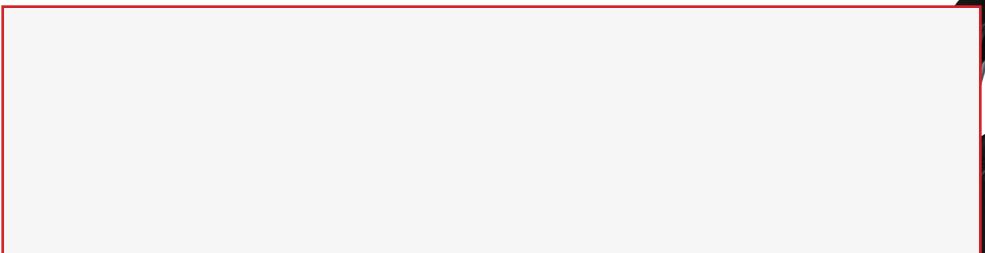
What is your view on this statement? Do you think it can take years to forgive? Or do you think it is possible to forgive while the pain is still raw?



What does Max Lucado say about forgiveness?



Why does Archbishop Tutu dismiss the idea of just 'letting bygones be bygones'? What does he mean when he says, 'Unless we look the beast in the eye...?'

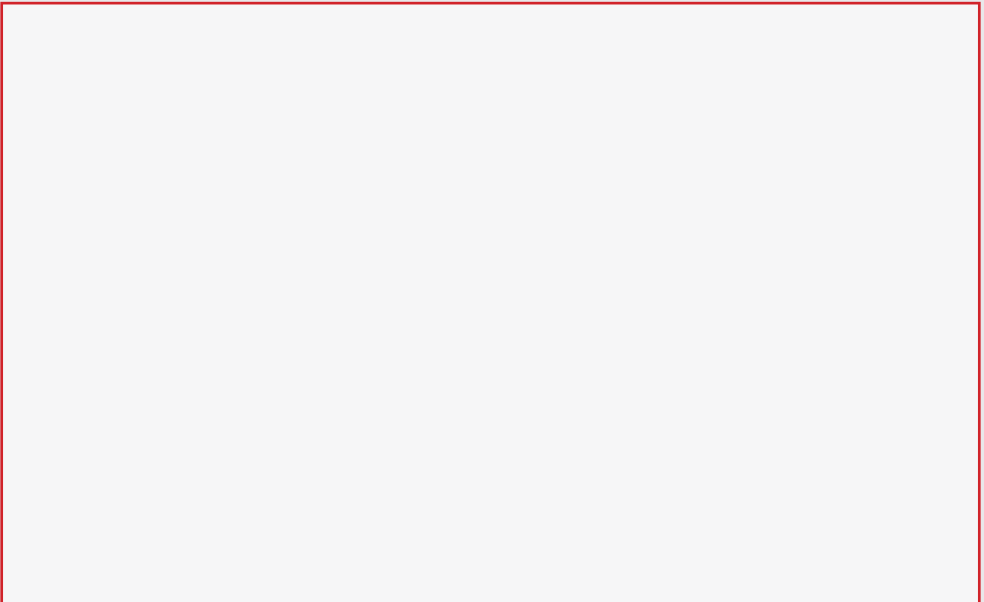


Thinking Personally

Have you fallen out with anyone within your own family? Would you like the relationship to be restored? If yes, what steps have you already taken to help restore the relationship? What further steps might be appropriate?



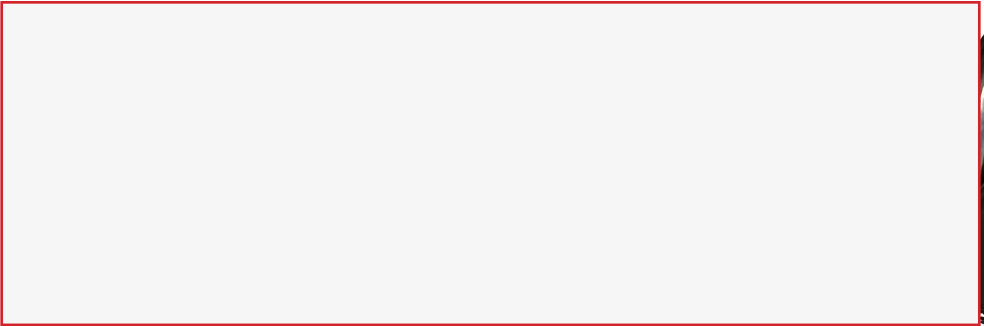
When people hurt you, do you tend to tell your friends – and divulge who has hurt you? What would be your motive for doing so?



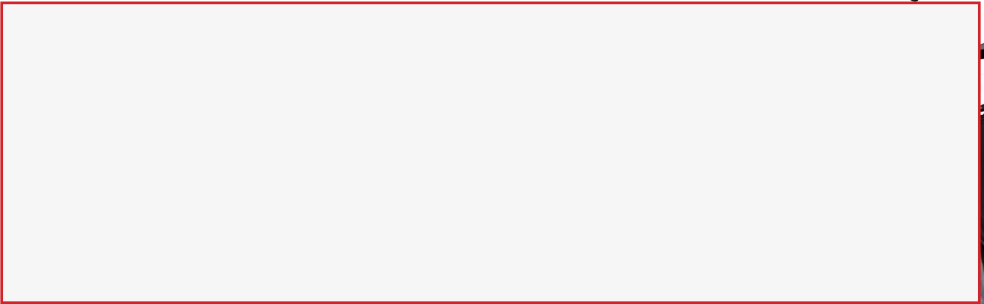
Chapter Four:

The HOW of forgiveness – when we have hurt others

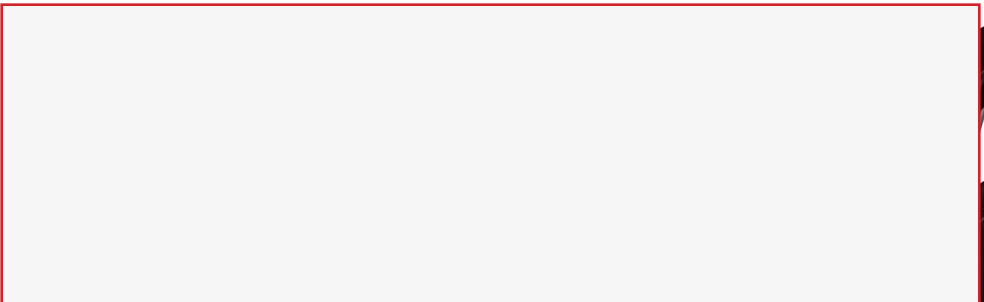
What steps should we take to help restore people whom we have hurt?



When we hurt others, what might be the most painful consequences for ourselves?



What do you think about the idea of 'forgiving ourselves'?



Thinking Personally

Have you ever committed a serious wrong, accepted responsibility for it and made an apology? If so:

- how difficult was it for you to apologise?
- how did you feel once you had made the apology?
- did the person accept your apology and forgive you?
- how did you react when they accepted, or refused, your apology?

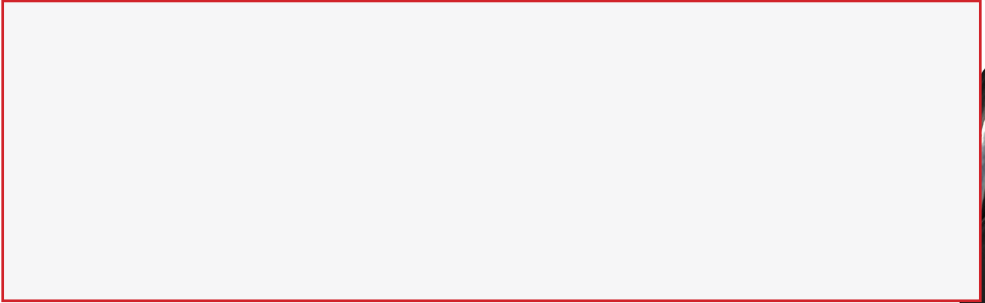
Is there anyone to whom you are not wanting to apologise? If so, what are your reasons?

Are you struggling to find healing for yourself for a wrong you have committed? What steps have you taken to try to find healing? What further steps, if any, might you take?

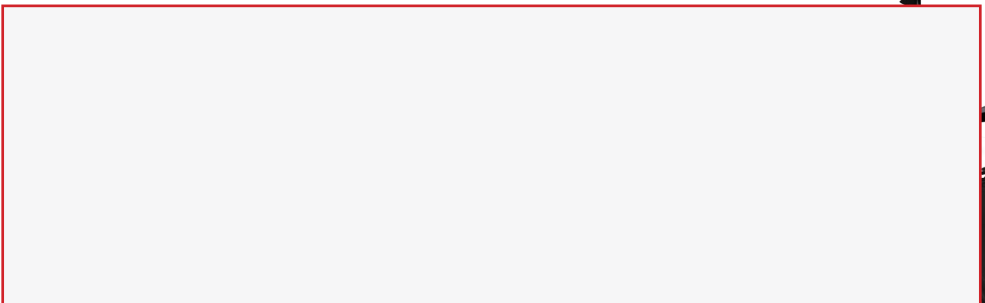
Chapter Five:

The GOD of forgiveness

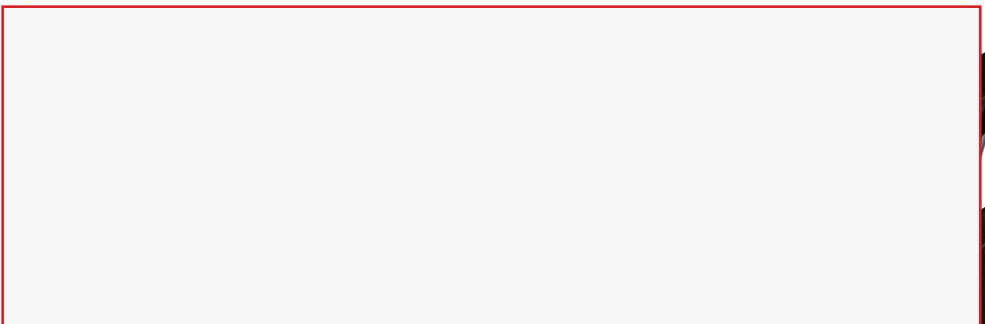
Explain the biggest problem which every one of us has. How does it affect our relationship with God? Why cannot God simply ignore it?



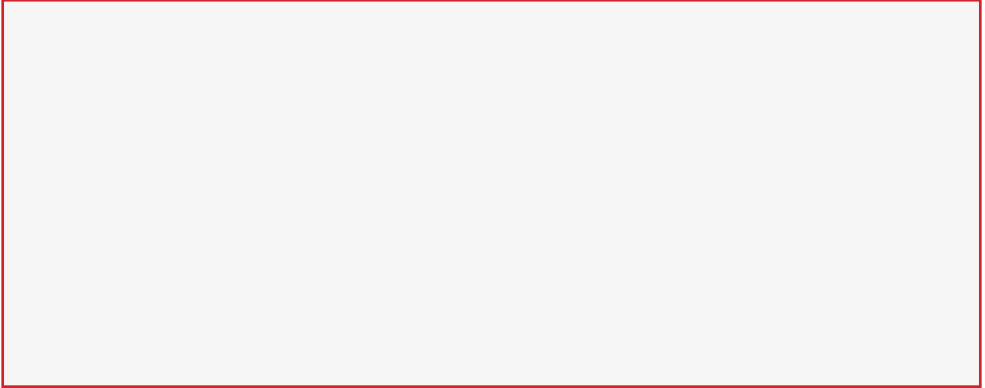
What is the solution to this problem of sin? What does God require us to do? What does it mean to repent?



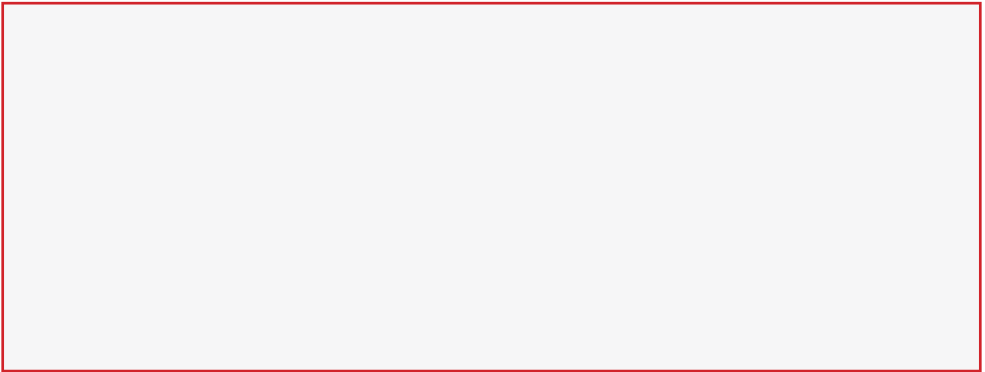
What is the key message of the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14)?



What are the consequences for those who choose not to accept God's forgiveness?

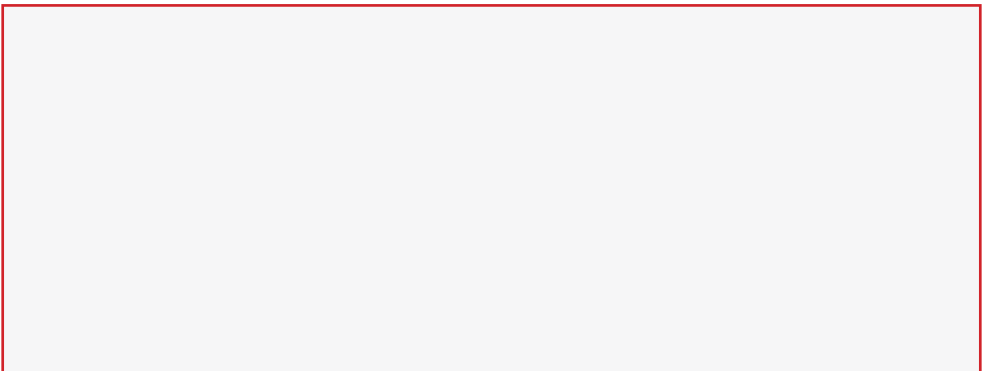


Which Bible verses quoted in this chapter have you found helpful, if any?



What, if anything, did you find challenging in:

- Billy McCurrie's story and
- Rachael Denhollander's story



Thinking Personally

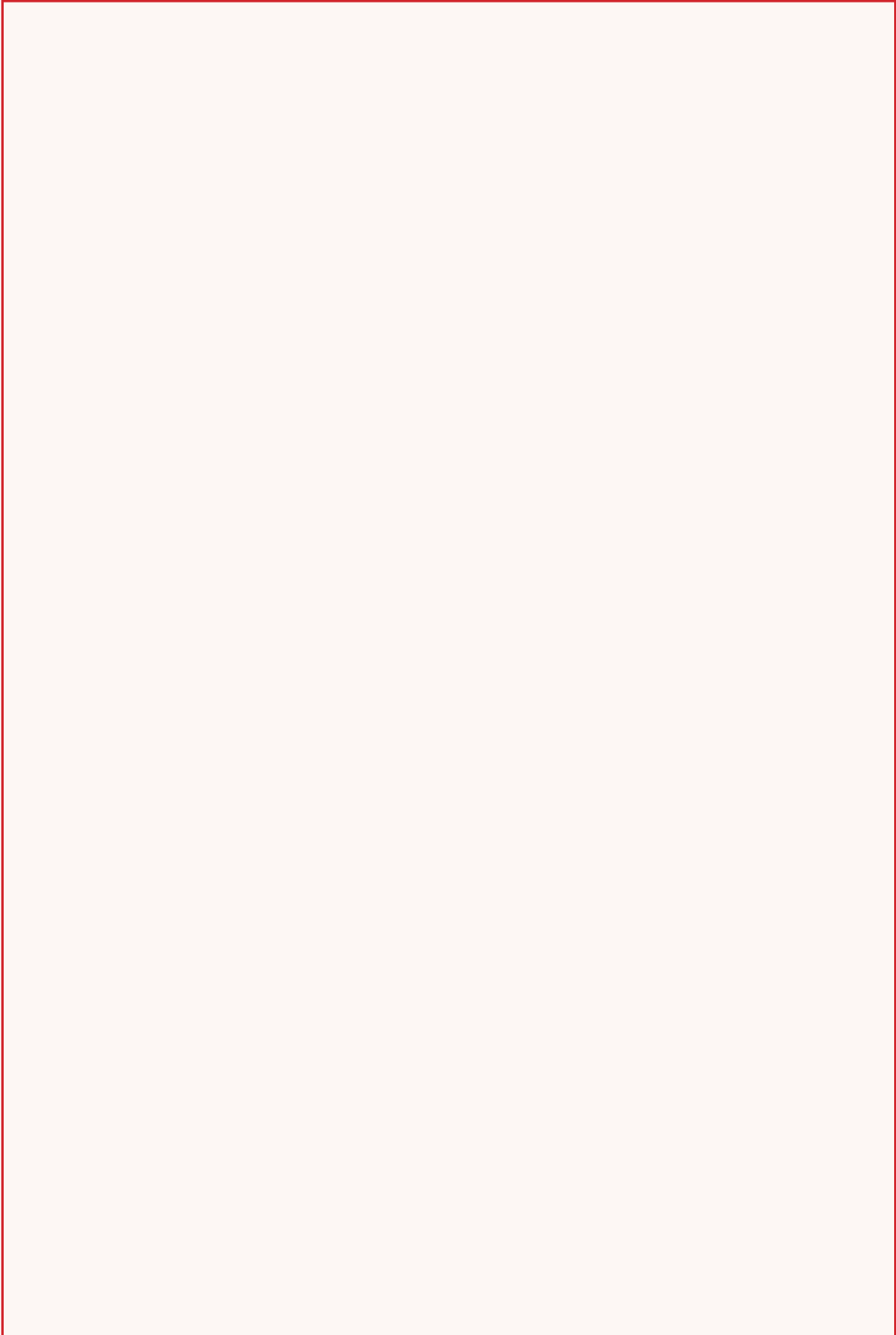
Do you accept your need of God's forgiveness? Have you asked God to forgive you?



Can you identify, in any way, with John Newton's life or with his hymn, *Amazing Grace*?



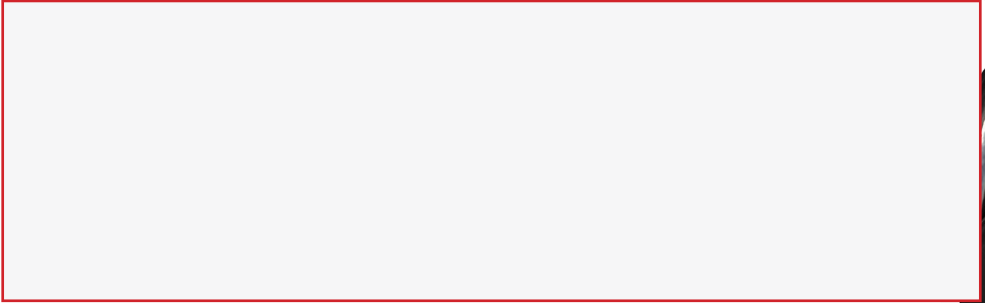
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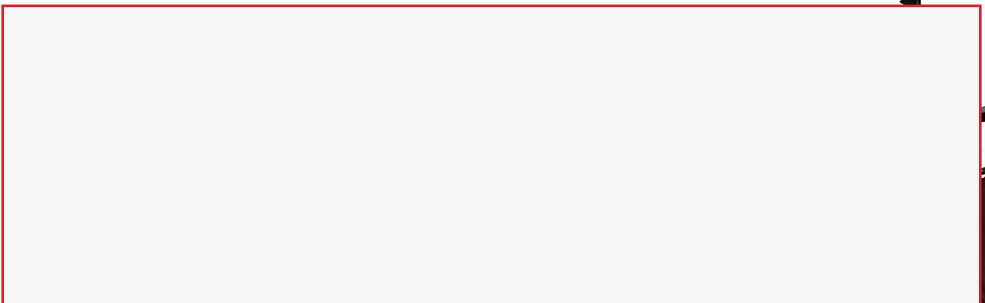
Chapter Six:

The BIBLE on forgiveness

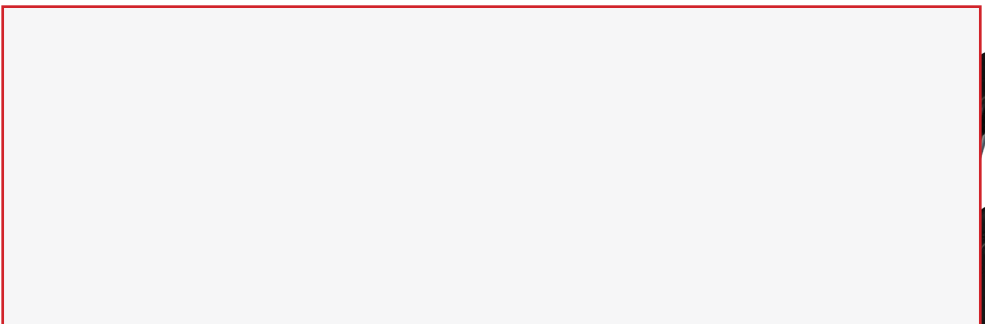
What does the Lord's Prayer teach about forgiveness? What does J I Packer say about this teaching?



Why did Neville Lawrence decide to forgive those who murdered his son? Do you think it is a legitimate reason to forgive?



What did King David experience, firstly, before he confessed his sin to God and, secondly, after he confessed?



What was Jesus' purpose in telling the parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:21-35)?

Which Bible verses quoted in this chapter (or words from the hymn) have you found helpful, if any?

Thinking Personally

Read Romans 12:17-19.

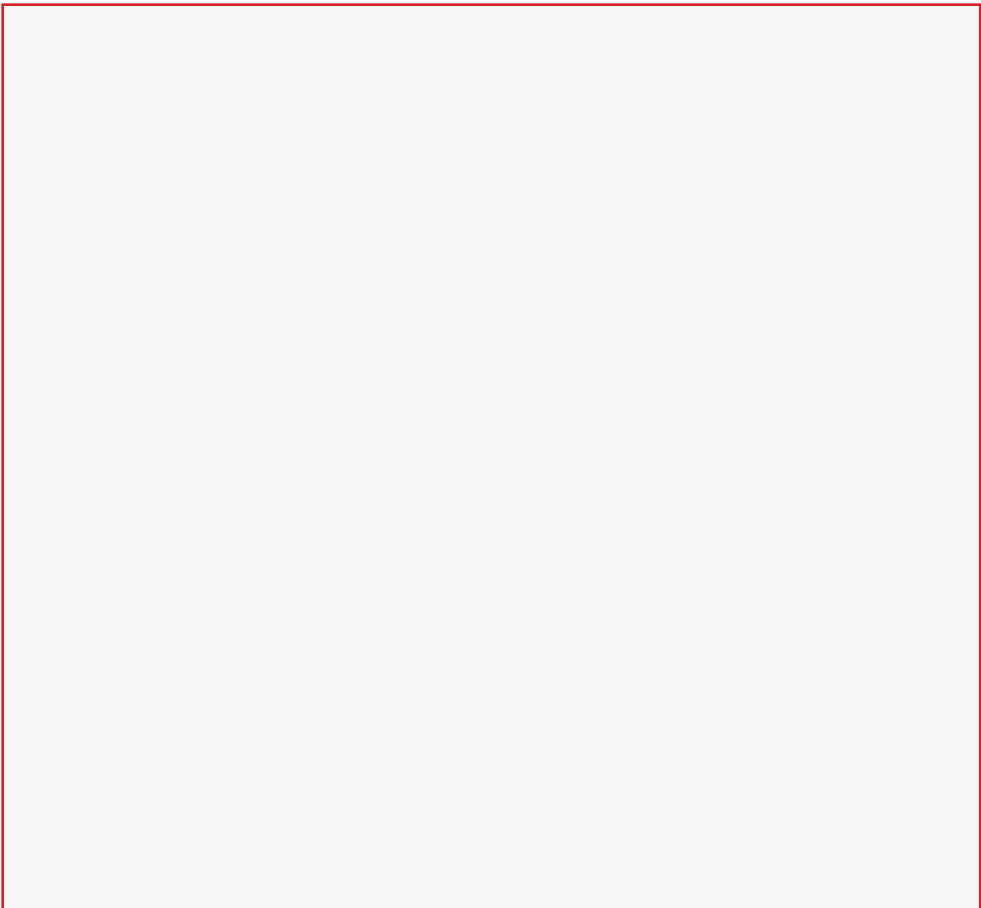
Do you find it hard to follow Paul's instruction about vengeance – that we must leave God to avenge?

Is there anyone with whom you are finding it difficult to live at peace? If so, is there anything you can do to try and establish peace?

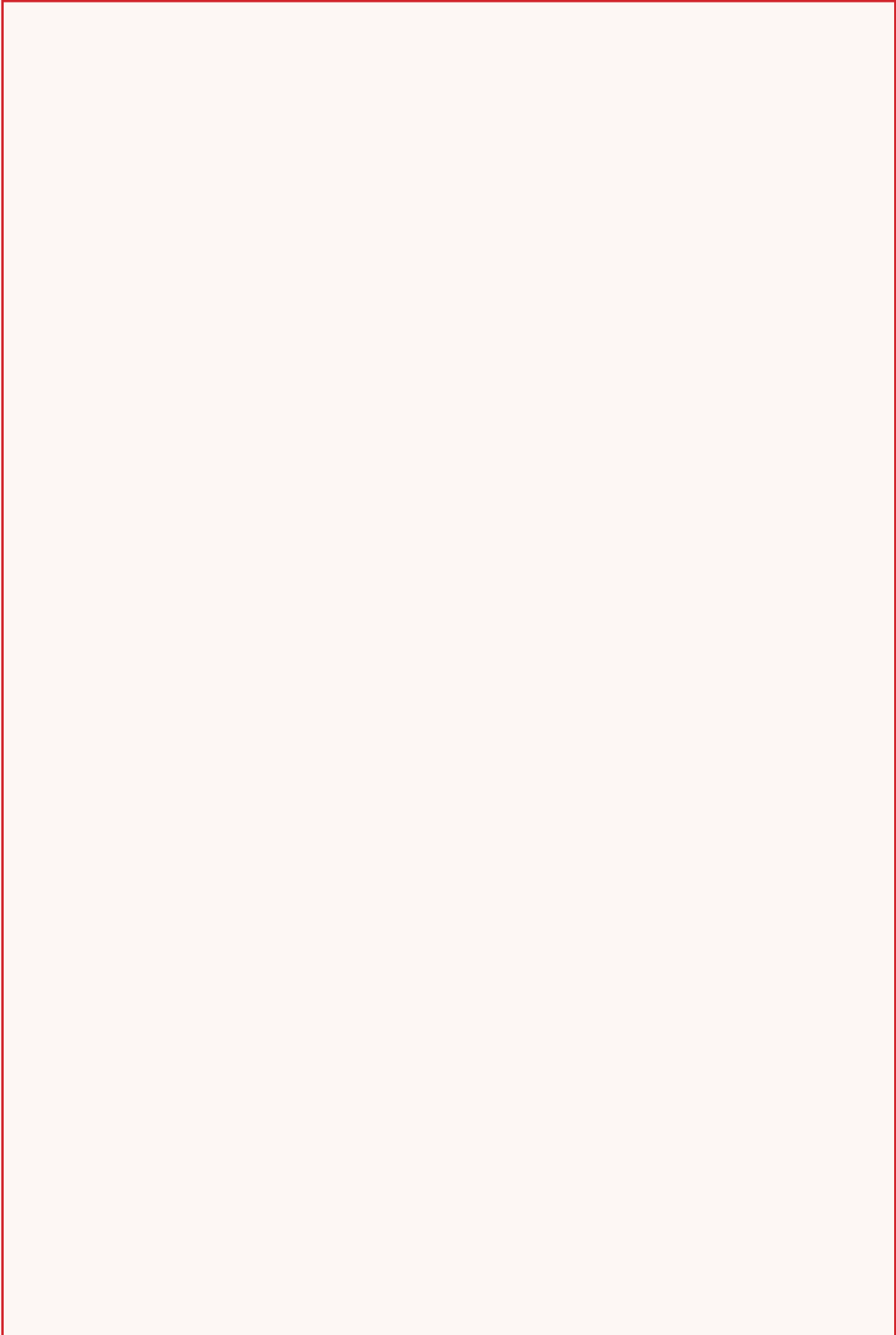
Supplementary Questions for Christians

If you are a Christian (having received forgiveness of your sins through repentance and through trusting in Jesus Christ who died for your sins), you may find these further questions helpful.

1. Is there anything which you have done which you have chosen not to confess? If so, why not confess it now?
2. Do you ever doubt whether God really has forgiven you? Can you identify with any of the reasons, suggested by the author, which cause people to doubt that God is willing to forgive them? If so, which Bible verse(s) do you need to hold on to?
3. Are you holding on to any shame? If so, how do you need to be released from it? Would you find it helpful to seek support from a Christian leader?

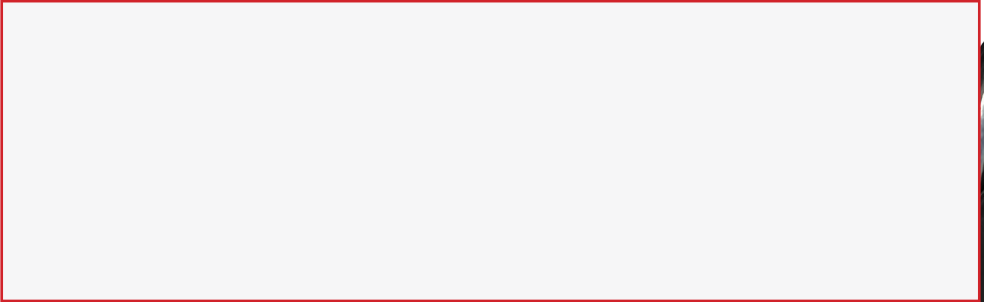


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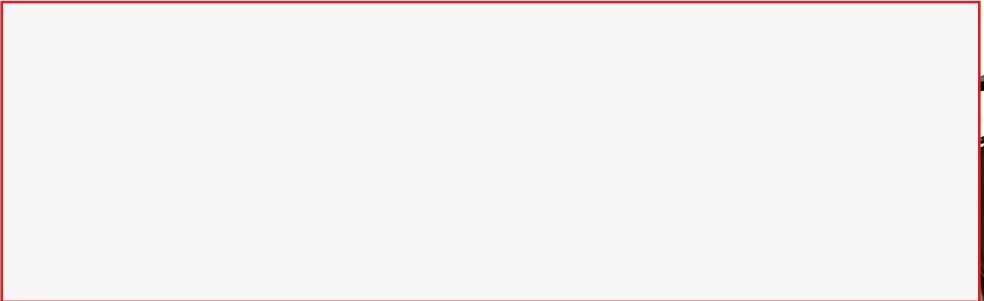


Chapter Seven: RESTORATIVE JUSTICE (RJ) and forgiveness

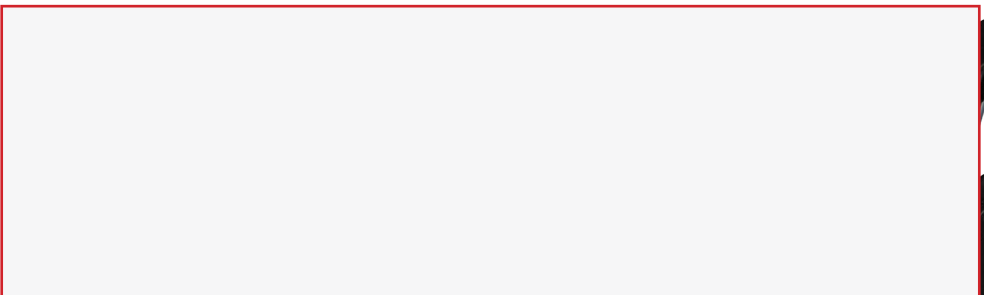
How can RJ benefit, firstly, victims and, secondly, offenders?



What do you think Will Riley and Peter Woolf each gained most from their RJ meeting?

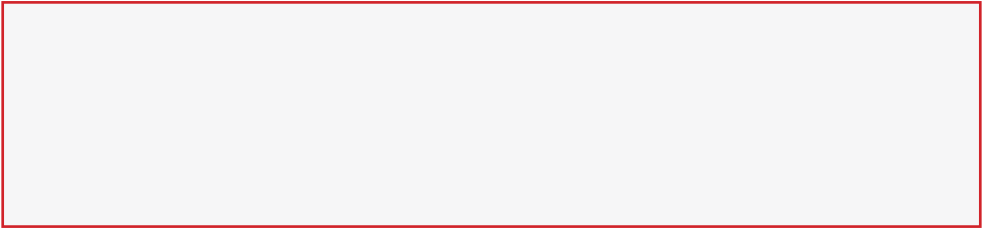


Paul holds the view that you have to believe the apology is genuine before you can forgive. What is your view on this?

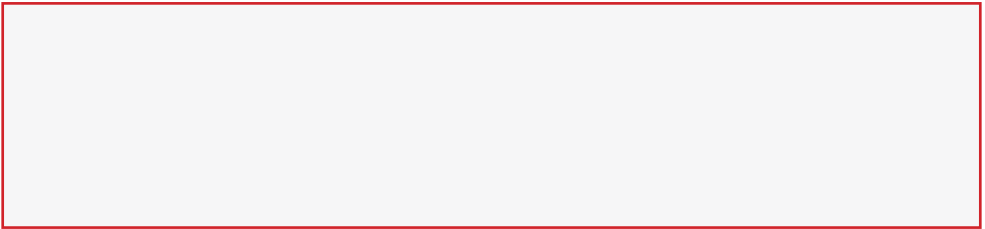


What was it that the following wanted most from their RJ meetings?

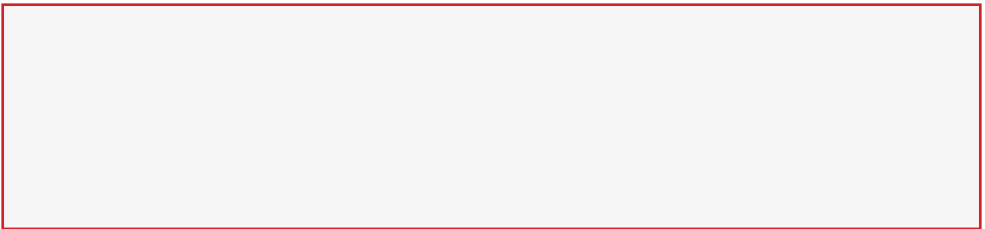
- Laura



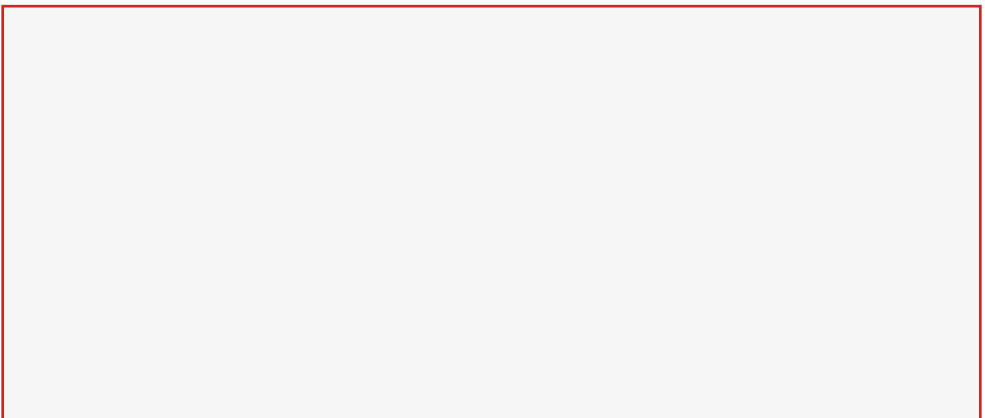
- Ray and Vi Donovan



- Jo Nodding



Which two stories have you found most powerful? Why?



Thinking Personally

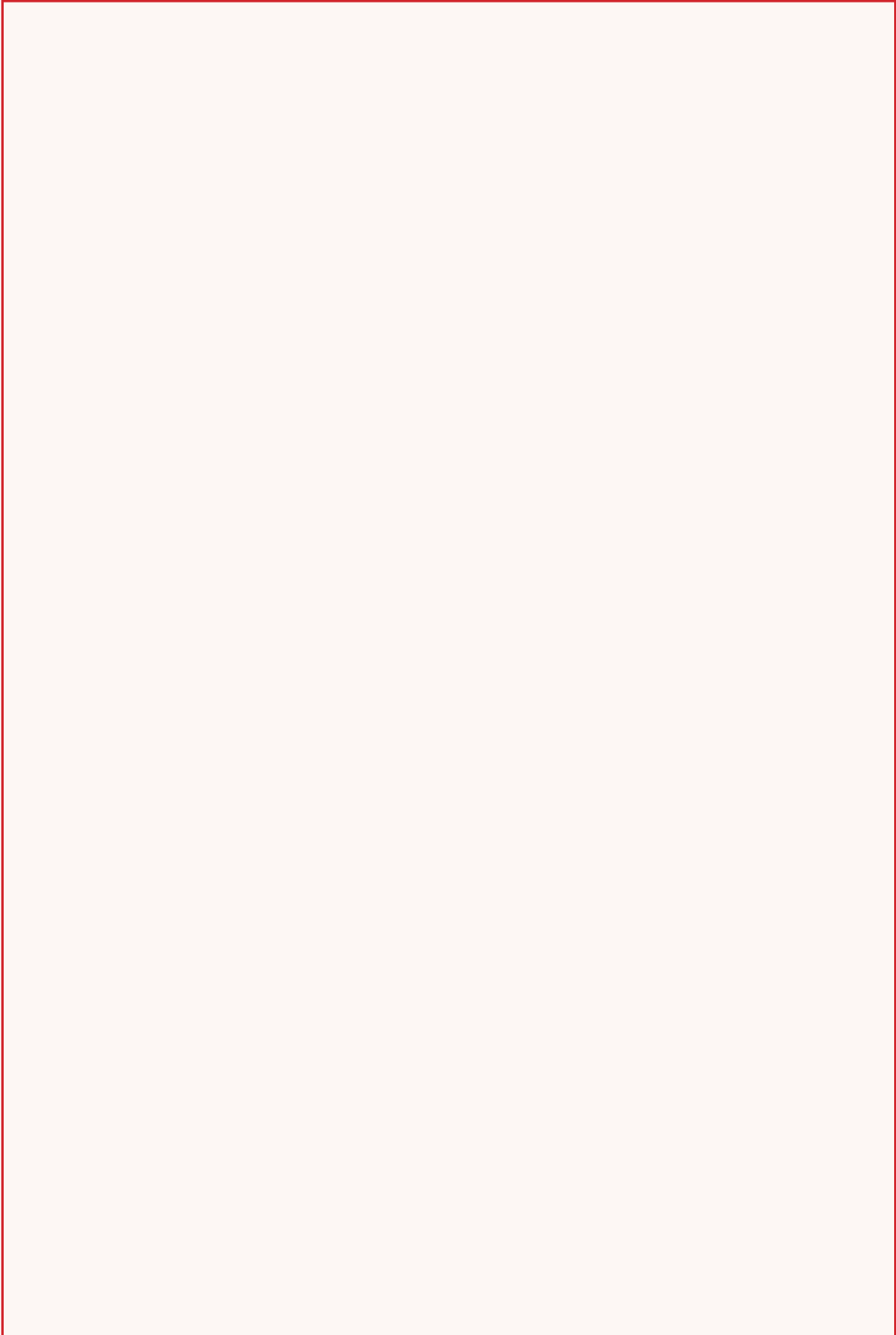
Although restorative justice conferences are becoming more popular, they are still quite rare. If you were ever given the opportunity to take part in a RJ conference (with someone who has hurt you or someone whom you have hurt), how would you feel about it?

How do you think it would benefit you, if at all?

How do you think it might benefit the other person?



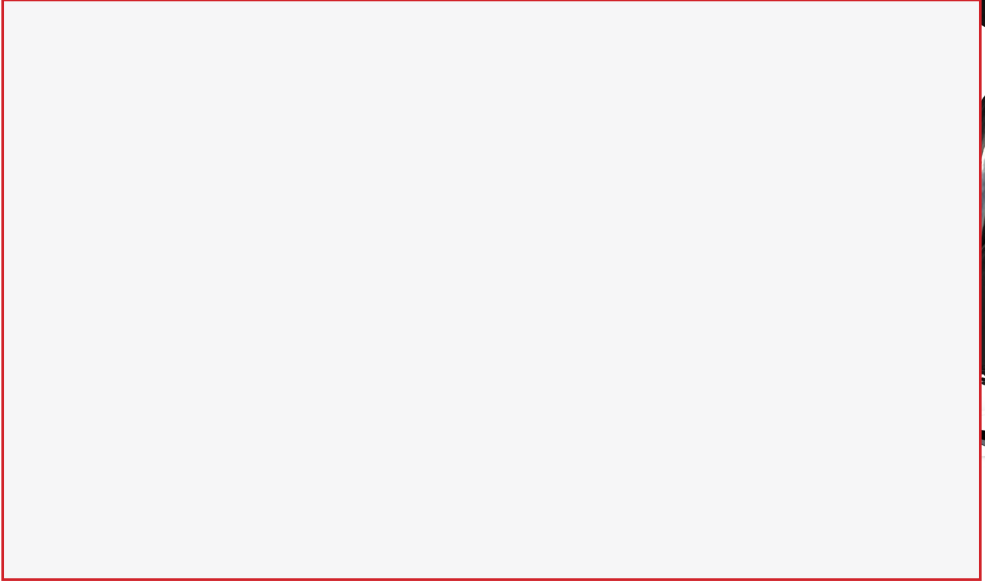
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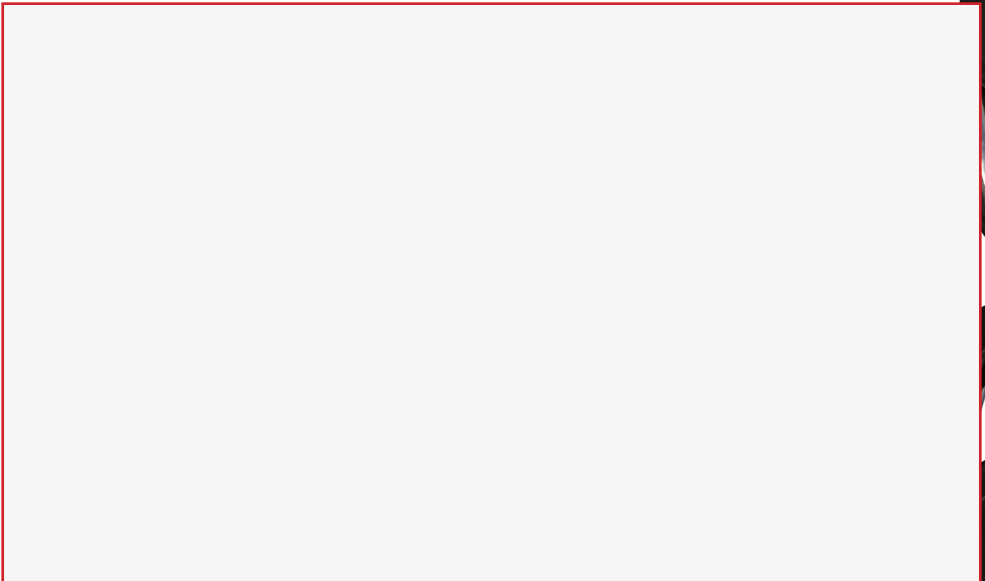
Chapter Eight:

STORIES of forgiveness

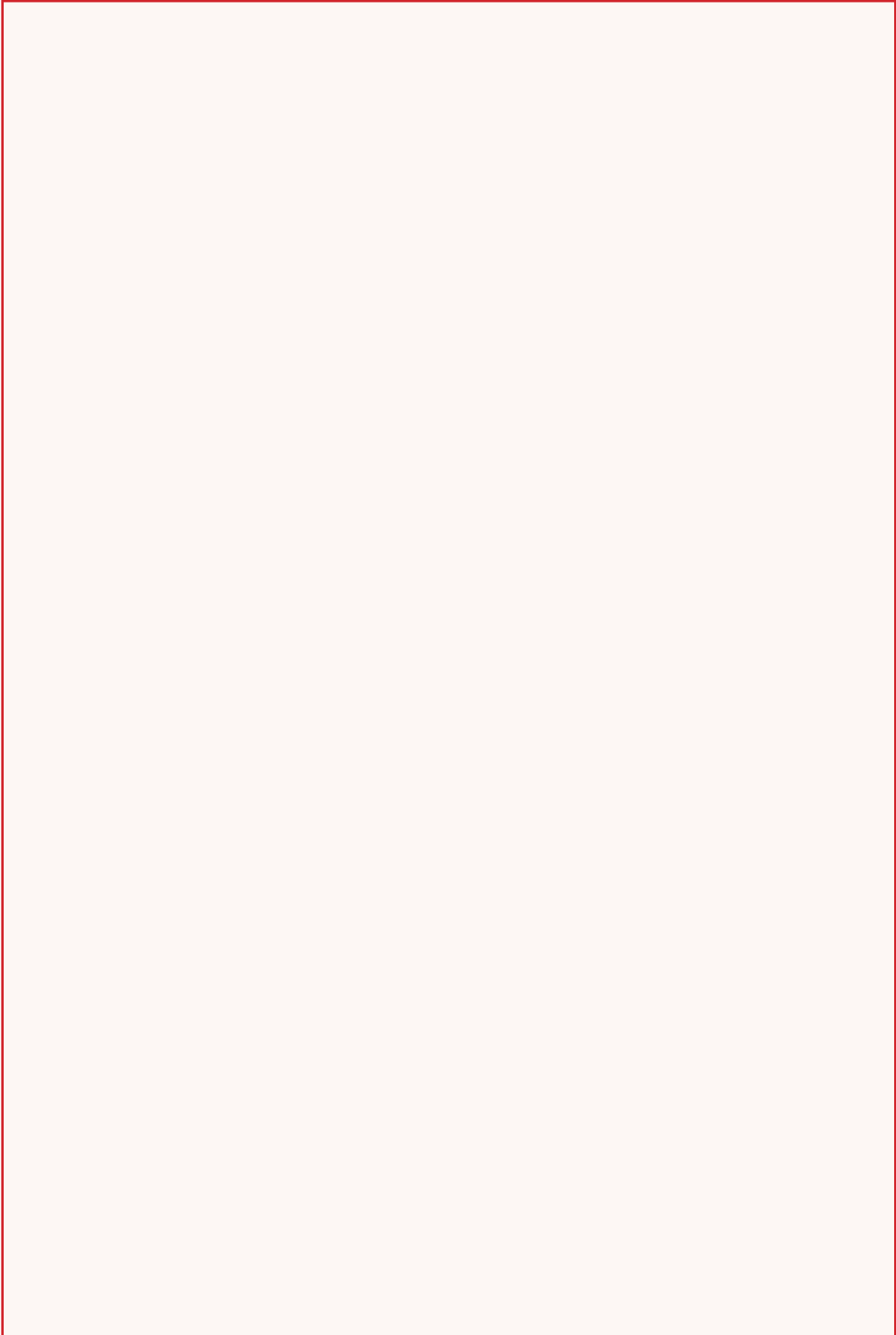
Which two stories impacted you most? Why?



Which quotes (from any of the stories) impacted you most?



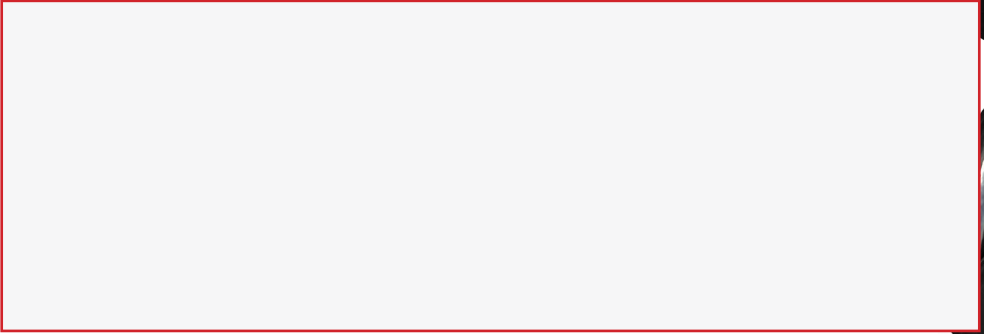
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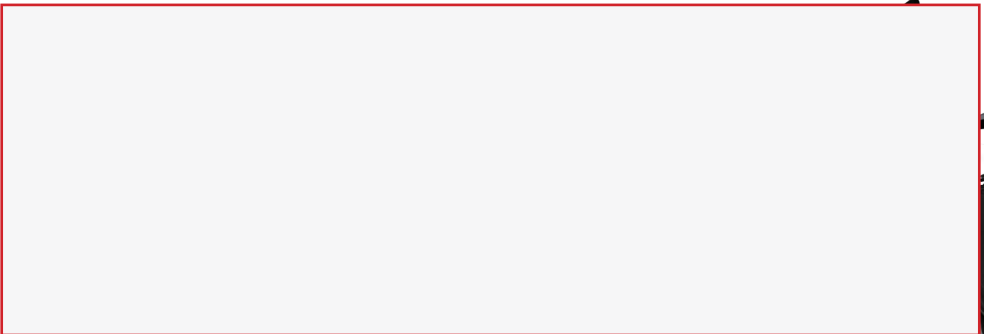
Chapter Nine:

A FINAL STORY of forgiveness

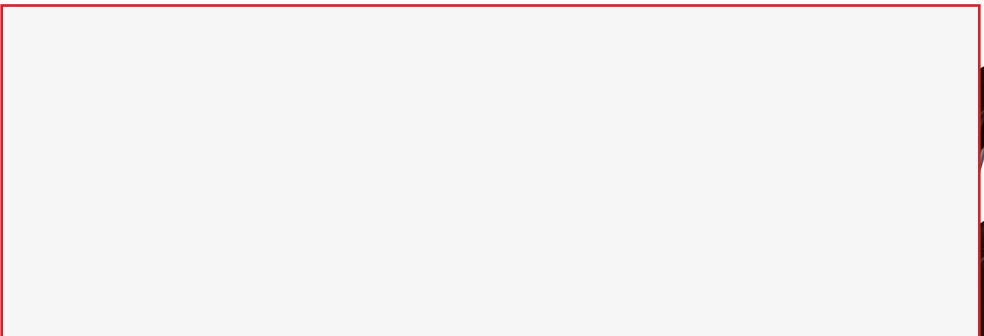
What caused Kim Phuc Phan Thi to decide to become a Christian?



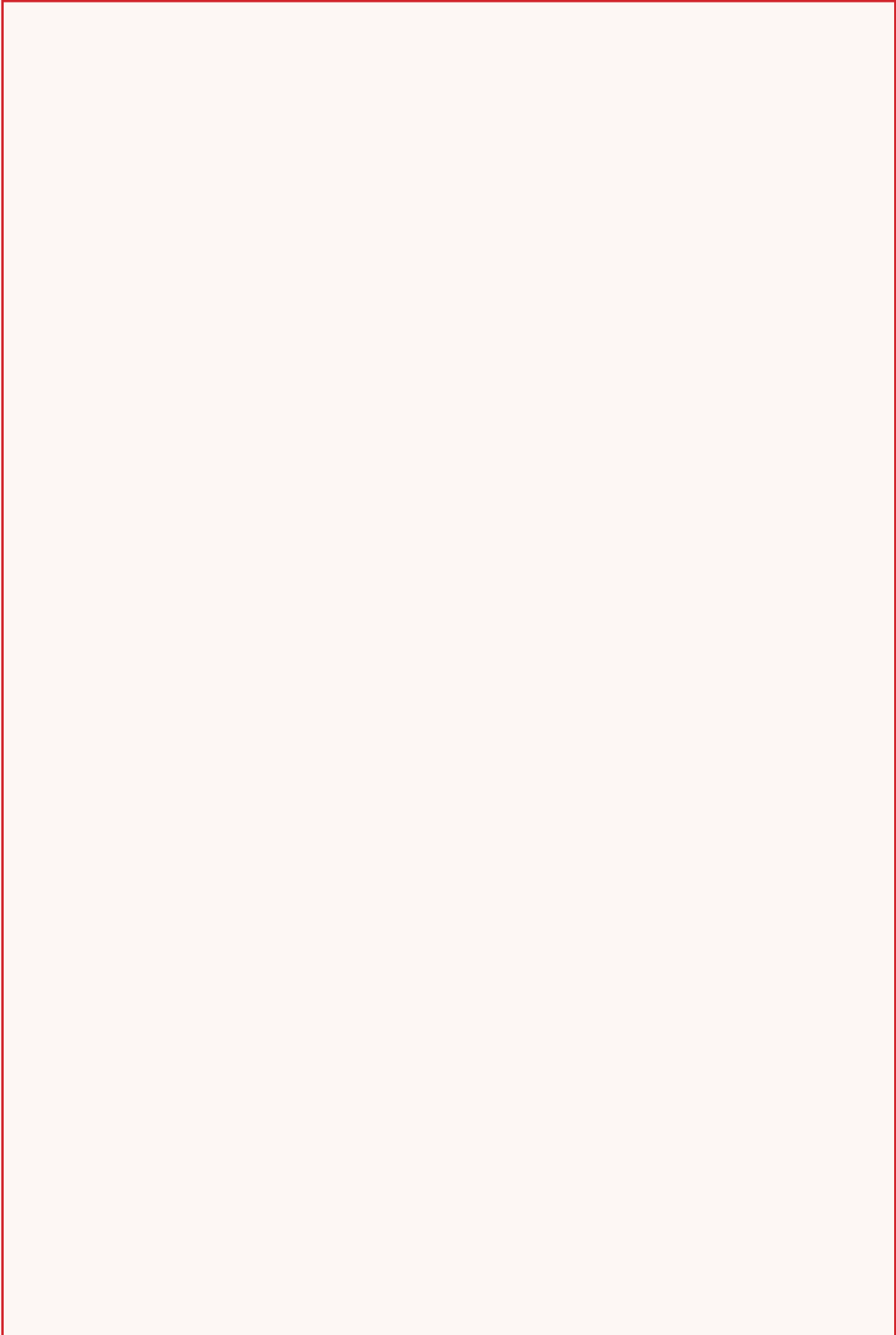
How significant was her faith in her decision to forgive? Do you think that you must have a faith to be able to forgive such horrendous acts of violence?



What was your reaction to Kim Phuc Phan Thi's journey of forgiveness?



Notes



Review and Next Steps

Has this book changed your understanding of what forgiveness is (and what it is not)? If so, how?

Having considered the issue of forgiveness and completed this study guide:

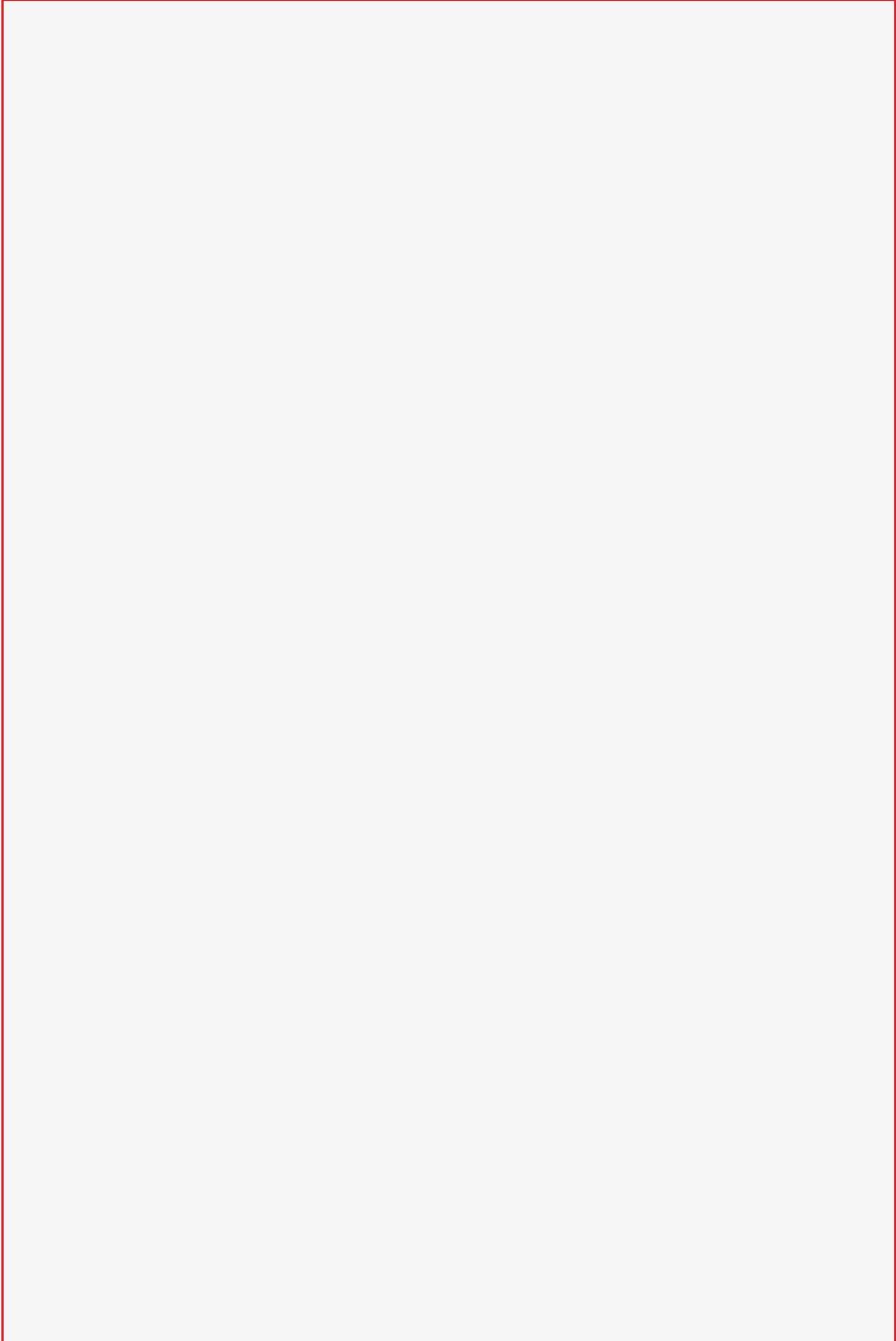
- do you think you are more likely to forgive people who hurt you? If so, why?

- do you think you are more likely to say sorry to people you hurt, asking them to forgive you? If so, why?

- do you think you are more likely to be able to 'forgive yourself'? If so, why?



Final Notes and Comments



Thinking Personally – Next Steps

Making Peace and Finding Peace

Read through the ‘Thinking Personally’ notes you have made as you worked through this study guide. Make a note here of:

- the steps you would like to take, or need to take, to help others to find healing or to find healing yourself,
- the people who may be able to help you take those steps,
- how and when you will take the first steps.

Continue over



Making Peace with God

Our greatest need is to make peace with God. Only then will we truly have peace ourselves. If you do not already enjoy this peace (through trusting in Jesus) and would like to understand more, arrange to speak to a Christian leader or contact us.

Appendix:

Selected Bible Passages

God's Nature is to Forgive

Psalm 32:5

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." And you forgave the guilt of my sin. (King David's confession.)

Psalm 103:12

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."

Psalm 130:3-4

If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

Isaiah 1:18

"Come now, let us settle the matter," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool..."

Isaiah 43:25

"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more..."

Micah 7:18-19

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Stories of Forgiveness from the Old Testament

Genesis 33 – Jacob and Esau

Genesis 37, 42-45 – Joseph and his brothers

2 Samuel 11-12 – David's adultery and murder of Uriah

Jesus on Forgiveness

Matthew 6:14-15

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Luke 6:27-28

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

John 8:10-11

A woman accused of adultery

Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Matthew 18:21-22

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times..."

Matthew 18:21-35 – The parable of the unmerciful servant

Luke 15:11-32 – The parable of the prodigal son (the forgiving father and the angry brother)

Luke 23:34

As Jesus is crucified -

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

John 21:15-19 – Jesus restores Peter after his denial.

The Apostle Paul on Forgiveness

Acts 9:1-31 – Saul's conversion as God forgives him

Ephesians 1:7

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.

Ephesians 4:32

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Colossians 1:13-14

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 3:13

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.



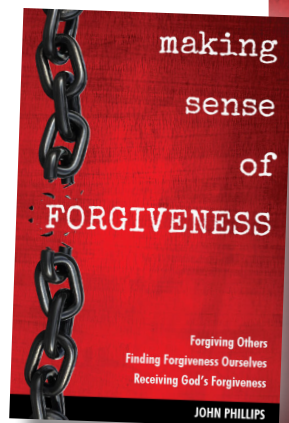
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making sense of FORGIVENESS

Study Guide



This study guide to our book **making sense of FORGIVENESS**, has been produced for those wishing to think about forgiveness more deeply, especially if troubled by not being able to forgive others or by guilt for the harm they have caused.

It also looks at the Bible's teaching on forgiveness.

The guide is suitable for use privately and, also, within a group setting.

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