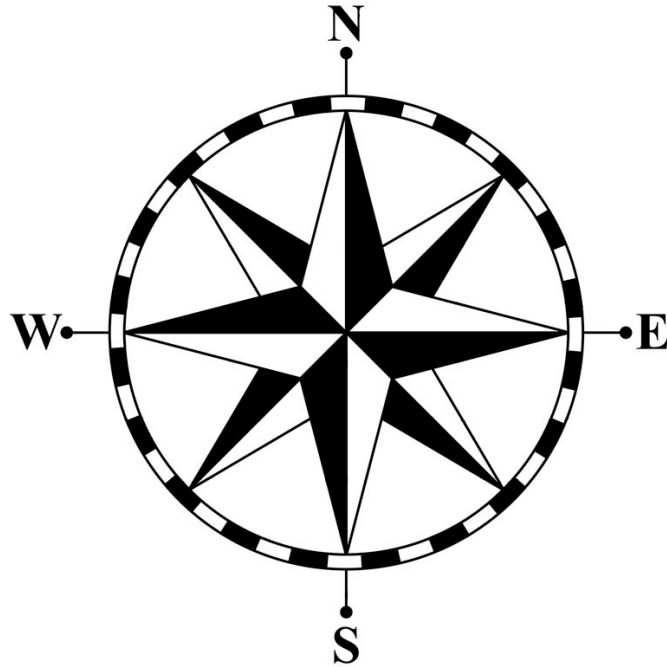


*Moving Forward:  
Six Steps to Forgiving Yourself*



**Self-Directed Learning Workbook**

*2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*

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## *Introducing the Program*

Every person will, at some point, condemn himself or herself. At times, it is because we do something that violates our personal or moral beliefs, fail at an important task, treat people that we care about wrongly, or even witness something that we later wish that we had tried to stop. Although what we've done may have happened a long time ago, our past experiences continue to shape how we think, act, and relate to others even today. Sometimes we just cannot let it go. In this workbook, you will work through practical exercises designed to help you responsibly forgive yourself for a time when you did something that wronged another person. This is a way of forgiving yourself if you are still bothered by what you did or its consequences. By learning and practicing this method, you will reconnect with what you value and reclaim a sense of self-acceptance.

Clinical psychologist and professor, Everett L. Worthington, Jr., Ph.D., established the method that was adapted to create this workbook in a book that he wrote in 2013 that is entitled, *Moving Forward! Six Steps to Self-Forgiveness and Breaking Free from the Past*. In addition to providing insight from a career of scientific inquiry into forgiving others and oneself, Dr. Worthington shares experiences from his own life to meet the reader as a fellow traveler on the path to self-forgiveness. You can learn more about Dr. Worthington and (if you desire) order the book that he wrote by visiting <http://www.forgiveself.com>. You can also read about the evidence that supports the efficacy of this workbook to alleviate feelings of guilt and shame, promote self-forgiveness, and improve your health and sense of well-being in life in the following scientific articles.

Griffin, B. J., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Lavelock, C. R., Greer, C. L., Lin, Y., Davis, D. E., & Hook, J. N. (2015). Efficacy of a self-forgiveness workbook: A randomized controlled trial with interpersonal offenders. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 62*, 124-136.

Davis, D. E., Ho, M. Y., Griffin, B. J., Bell, C., Hook, J. N., Van Tongeren, D. R., DeBlare, C., Worthington, E. L., Jr., & Westbrook, C. (2015). Forgiving the self and physical and mental health correlates: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 62*, 329-335.

Griffin, B. J., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Wade, N. G., Hook, J. N., Davis, D. E., & Lavelock, C. R. (2015). Rumination and Mental Health: Trajectories of change over the course of explicit self-forgiveness intervention. Manuscript under editorial review.

## *Do you struggle to forgive yourself?*

**What?** We designed this workbook to help you learn six steps that will equip you with a method to forgive yourself for an offense that you committed against another person—one that still might bother you even after some time has passed. The easiest way for you to learn this six-step method is to think about a particular thing you might have done for which you continue to condemn yourself. That is, are you bothered by guilt, remorse, and shame associated with a specific event in your life? Do you feel like a failure or something worse? Do you have trouble getting the offense out of your mind or does it continue to come up in your relationships? By practicing the method in this workbook on one specific offense, you can later apply what you've learned to other experiences. In fact, with a little effort, you could become a skilled self-forgiver by engaging in values-based living and accepting yourself as a flawed but valuable person, and you might assist others in the difficult but essential process of forgiving yourself. In this workbook, you'll learn what we call *responsible* self-forgiveness. This isn't just letting yourself off of the hook. Instead, it takes you through steps aimed at righting wrongs you might have done and seeking to reduce the impact of any wrongdoing you might have done to another person.

**Who?** This workbook is designed to equip people to forgive themselves for perpetrating an offense that hurt someone else and that they still regret or to deal with their own harsh self-judgments. There are things that we all regret—like not achieving to the level we would like. But most people have also experienced times when they flat-out messed up and hurt someone else. Individuals who still experience chronic self-condemnation or self-blame associated with a specific interpersonal offense and who are willing learn and practice the six-step method proposed in this workbook will benefit most from this workbook. 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 one of the most difficult things people encounter. That is, are you ready to face down your own failures or the times you've fallen short of your own or others' expectations? Do you have enough self-control to work through this workbook? Research has shown that the people who benefit the most from this treatment are those who remain focused, spending adequate time and effort on each exercise. If you've got this far, we think you are one of those

people who will really benefit from working through the entire workbook. You've taken the biggest step by just committing to start it.

**How?** Perhaps you've tried to forgive yourself for some transgression before but emotional self-forgiveness has eluded you. That is, you still *feel bad* about what you did. 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 excuse yourself or condone (which means, saying that what you did is really okay) your behavior without facing up to your mistakes—by using a six-step process that has been developed in the laboratory of life. It has been refined in counseling. And it has studied scientifically in a study of over 200 people who completed an earlier version of this workbook. The results of that study have been vetted scientifically, and the report of the study has been reported in the prestigious journal, the *Journal of Counseling Psychology*. In addition, others are using this method throughout the world. They are testing it in group counseling, individual therapy, and as a self-directed workbook. This is a new and improved workbook based on two additional years of research in a hot new psychological science field. We believe this workbook will help you even more than the first workbook helped the people in that scientific study.

**When?** Now is the best time to start to recapture your positive sense of self. Now is the time to get yourself on the road to freedom from the regret. Now is the time to break the negative thought patterns and emotional distress that links your past experiences to your present choices.

If you are doing this workbook for a scientific study, then this workbook must be completed in **two weeks** in order for you to receive credit for participating in the study. Completing the sections should take about six or seven hours total (depending on the seriousness with which you work through the exercises, how much you reflect on the experiences recommended in the workbook, and your rate of work). So, work at your own pace, but work seriously if you want to really benefit. Once you start a section, try to finish it on the same day. We know from the past studies we and others have done that if you complete the workbook in this two-week period, and if you take these complete the exercises seriously and thoughtfully, you will succeed in forgiving yourself.

If you are doing this workbook as a supplement to individual or group therapy through a community therapy practice or part of a veterans' treatment program, you also 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 commit enough time in a reasonably short period (say a week or two) to working through a program to have a sense of the flow of the whole program. That 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—or what is called "spaced practice." So, it is the balance that is crucial. You'll have the most success if you don't just do it all in one sitting. Reflect on the parts. Come back to it the next day. You'll benefit from working through the workbook regardless of how you do it, but you'll get the most out of it if you balance "massed" and "spaced" practice.

So, that suggests that several strategies exist to work through the workbook. One is to hurry through it in six or seven hours and just do the exercises but not spend a lot of time reflecting on them. Perhaps you might dedicate a Saturday to this, or you might work on it from 6:00 PM until you finish a section every night for a week. 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 even more about the exercises. You'll write more because you know that people learn through writing. We think faster than we write, so by writing more, you spend more time thinking about it than if you merely talked it out. If you do the workbook in multiple sittings, look back over the material you've already written (so it's fresh on your mind) each time you begin again. Perhaps you'll even write more during your review. At the end, you'll sit back and flip through the whole workbook again and reflect on what you've learned.

With knowledge of what this workbook is, how it works, who it's for, and when it's most effective, you are now equipped to receive the most significant improvements in exchange for the time that you invest. We wish you well in your journey to forgive yourself.

## *Step One*

### *Recall an Offense*

## *Step One*

### *Recall an Offense*

The first task is to identify a single offense that you would like to focus on for the purpose of mastering the technique presented in this workbook. It is important that you select an offense that is concrete rather than abstract. Be as specific as you are able. For example, instead of choosing an offense like “I’d like to forgive myself for how I treat my partner,” describe a specific time when you said something mean to your partner, didn’t do what you said you would do, or a specific instance when you were unfaithful to your partner. Despite your motivation for completing this workbook, most people tend to report offenses that occur in the context of relationships that are important to them. If you’re having trouble deciding on an offense, think about who is close to you. We most frequently wrong the people to whom we are closest – our partners, families, friends, coworkers, etc. However, you might also choose someone that you don’t know as well.

The offense that you identify should also be one that continues to bother you. Perhaps your feelings of guilt about what you done won’t seem to go away. Or you feel ashamed of part of who you are – you cannot accept that piece of yourself no matter what others might say. Even though an offense may have occurred long in the past, its influence on how you think about yourself or your relationships to others is as strong today as it has ever been. Of course, the offenses we condemn ourselves for range in severity. Some are extreme and some are almost harmless. To master the technique presented in this workbook, it is best if you choose an offense that is moderately severe. Don’t choose an offense that means so little to you that you have almost forgotten about it, and don’t choose an offense that is so painful that just thinking about it will cripple you. Your mastery of this technique is like building a muscle. You wouldn’t walk into the gym and start with so little weight that you receive no benefit, but you also would not start with so much weight that you would be injured.



Now that you’ve selected an offense, think about what caused you to act the way that you did. What were you thinking at the time? What was going on



around you? Were you pressed for time, reacting to a time when someone harmed you, or compelled to act the way that you did by some other influence? Also, be sure to consider the consequences that may have happened immediately after the offense occurred (e.g., my sibling was injured) but also the consequences that persist even today (e.g., my sibling doesn't trust me). Having identified an offense, its causes, and its consequences, you are now ready to begin.

### *Exercise 1A*

### *Recall an Offense*

**Instructions:** Take a moment to reflect on your experiences and try to identify a single event that went against your personal beliefs. You may have memories of the event that you can't forget, feel guilty and ashamed when you think about it, and have to deal with problems that it causes in your life today no matter how long ago it occurred. In the space below, write a paragraph (3-5 sentences) about what you did that violated your values.

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*Exercise 1B*  
***Identify the Consequences***

**Instructions:** Take a moment to reflect on your experiences and try to identify the past and present consequences of your offense. Using the list below, place an “X” next to each of the ways that the event you described impacts your life now. Although the event may have occurred a long time ago, select reactions that you may have had then as well as how you feel in the present.

- Feeling Guilty about What I’ve done
- Feeling Ashamed of Part of Myself
- Feeling Angry toward Others People
- Feeling Angry toward Myself
- Blaming myself
- Feeling Disappointed that things didn’t turn out like I hoped
- Having Difficulty Trusting Others (e.g., family members, friends, etc.)
- Having Difficulty Trusting Myself
- Doubting my Religious/Spiritual Faith
- Believing that I’ll Never Change
- Feeling Out of Control
- Feeling a Loss of Meaning or Purpose
- Grieving because I lost something that was Important to Me
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## *Exercise 1C*

### *What is Self-forgiveness?*

Once you've identified an offense for which you would like to forgive yourself, it is important to ask yourself "What is self-forgiveness?"

Write your definition of self-forgiveness:

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In this workbook, we assert that self-forgiveness is made up of two related but different processes. First, self-forgiveness involves making a decision to connect back to values-based living. When we violate our values we often experience negative offense-related emotions like guilt, shame, anger, disappointment, remorse, regret, etc. These emotions can feel overwhelming so we might make a *decision* avoid people or situations that are associated with the offense. By making that decision, we also disengage from our values. It is therefore important that *responsible* self-forgiveness includes making a decision to connect to your values by accepting responsibility that is yours, seeking to make amends or restitution, and resolving to live according to that values in the future.

Second, self-forgiveness involves experiencing the emotional restoration of a positive sense of self. When we wrong another person, we initially experience a decrease in self-esteem, self-acceptance, and self-regard. This can be a good thing when the threat to our sense of self motivates us apologize, confess, and make amends. However, for some people, their sense of self doesn't recover after the offense occurred, perhaps if they are unable to find a way to make amends. They experience a persistent feeling that they are not a valuable person, are unforgiveable, or no longer belong with the people that are most important to them. Thus, *responsible* self-forgiveness also includes a restored positive sense of self in which you are able to live with respect for yourself as an imperfect but valuable person.

So, *responsible* self-forgiveness includes (1) making a decision to affirm your values and (2) experiencing the emotional restoration of a positive sense of self. We call this the two-factor model of self-forgiveness. As is shown in the figure below, we can use these two components to distinguish self-forgiveness from other reactions that people sometimes have after they wrong another person.

**Two-Factor Model of Self-forgiveness**

Affirmation of Values

		Affirmation of Values	
		Low	High
Positive Self-regard	Low	<b>Self-neglect</b>	<b>Self-punish</b>
	High	<b>Self-excuse</b>	<b>Self-forgive</b>

Let's talk about differences between self-forgiveness and other ways that people sometimes react to wrongdoing that they perpetrate. On one hand, if an individual affirms their values but does not recover their emotional sense of positive self-regard, then they punish themselves to atone for the offense. On the other hand, if an individual recovers their emotional sense of positive self-regard but does not affirm their values, they excuse themselves of blame for a wrongdoing. If an individual who perpetrates an interpersonal harm neither affirms their values nor recovers their self-regard, then they neglect themselves. It is important to consider the consequences of each of these methods of coping with wrongdoing. Self-punishing might repair your relationships but leave you feeling ashamed; Self-excusing might repair your sense of self but sabotage your relationships; and Self-neglecting might threaten both your relationships and sense of self.

Self-forgiveness, as we stated earlier, is when you both (1) make a decision to affirm your values and (2) experiencing the emotional restoration of positive self-regard in the aftermath of perpetrating an offense. As you might expect self-forgiveness has positive intra-personal (i.e., within you) and positive inter-personal (i.e., between you and others) consequences. It is important that you keep both of these two processes in mind as you complete this workbook in order to responsibly forgive yourself.

Now that you know what self-forgiveness is, how would your life be different if you went to sleep tonight and woke up tomorrow having forgiven yourself completely?

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The last thing to keep in mind is that the decisional and emotional components of self-forgiveness don't always occur simultaneously. In fact, without an initial drop in your emotional sense of self you would likely have no motivation to affirm your values by making amends. Conversely, you might continue to feel guilty or ashamed at times even after you've made a decision to forgive yourself, just like you might make a decision not to seek revenge against a person who harmed you even though you feel your heart racing, muscles tightening, and breath shortening when you that person again. Don't worry! When we forgive others and when we forgive ourselves, our physical sense of emotional forgiveness can lag behind our decision to forgive.

*Exercise 1D*  
*Self-forgiveness Contract*

**Instructions:** When you are ready to make a decision to forgive yourself, complete the contract below. It is OK to complete the contract even if you sometimes feel guilty or ashamed. These feelings may come and go even after people make a decision to forgive themselves, and we will address them in an upcoming section of the workbook. What is important is that this contract signifies that you have decided to accept responsibility for your actions and to accept yourself as an imperfect but valuable person.

**I, \_\_\_\_\_, declare that on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ in the year \_\_\_\_\_, I forgive myself for what I have done or left undone. By this I mean that I accept responsibility for my actions, without blaming others for my decisions or blaming myself for things not in my control. However, I will not punish myself to atone for my actions; instead, I pledge to treat myself like someone who is imperfect, but also who is valuable and able to learn from mistakes in life. Although I cannot change the past, I will try to make choices today with respect for myself and for others. I thus declare myself forgiven.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Witness**

## *What Did You Get Out of This Section?*

Write one (or more) thing(s) that you got out of *Step One: Recall an Offense*. 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. What are the two components of *responsible* self-forgiveness?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. We can't change the past, but we can change how the past affects our present choices. How does forgiving yourself free up your present choices from being determined by your past experiences?

## *Step Two*

### *Repair Relationships*



## *Step Two*

### *Repair Relationships*

To self-forgive responsibly, the next step is to make amends with those whom we have harmed. When we treat others wrongly, they experience injustice. Victims of our offenses might even feel entitled to restoration at our own expense. 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.

The discrepancy between the way a victim perceives a relationship after an offense and the way that they would like it to be restored is called the ***injustice gap***. The bigger the offense is, the bigger the injustice gap will be. A simple apology on behalf of a perpetrator may resolve the injustice gap that results from a trivial transgression. However, significant offenses can



create an injustice gap that is so large that it cannot be bridged by even the most eloquent and sincere apology. In these situations, an attempt to make amends or to seek forgiveness may receive a response such as “no not ever” or “just not yet.” Whether by forgiveness, revenge,

legal recourse or another method, victims desire to resolve the injustice gap they perceive. If you've wronged another person, it's your job to make an effort to reduce the injustice gap and restore equality to the relationship. How your effort is received is partially up to people outside of your control, but your job is to make an effort.

A similar process occurs when we damage our own character or fail to live up to our personal or moral standards. We cannot escape the feeling that we've acted unjustly. 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 or isolating ourselves socially. Indeed, our shame, guilt, and other negative offense-related emotions are connected to what we value. If we disengage from these emotions rather than work to resolve them, then we disconnect from the very values that were violated. This is unfortunate because our values are often what is most important to us and to our relationships.

So, part of making a decision to affirm values that may have been violated by your offense is accepting responsibility for your actions and seeking to make amends. When we don't do those things, we cannot meaningfully interpret or successfully resolve our offense-related emotions like guilt and shame. We begin to feel like other people and perhaps even that which we believe is Sacred (e.g., God, nature, humanity in general) will condemn us. It is that shame that can keep us from accepting forgiveness from others or from the god(s) in which we believe, both which are important catalysts for self-forgiveness.

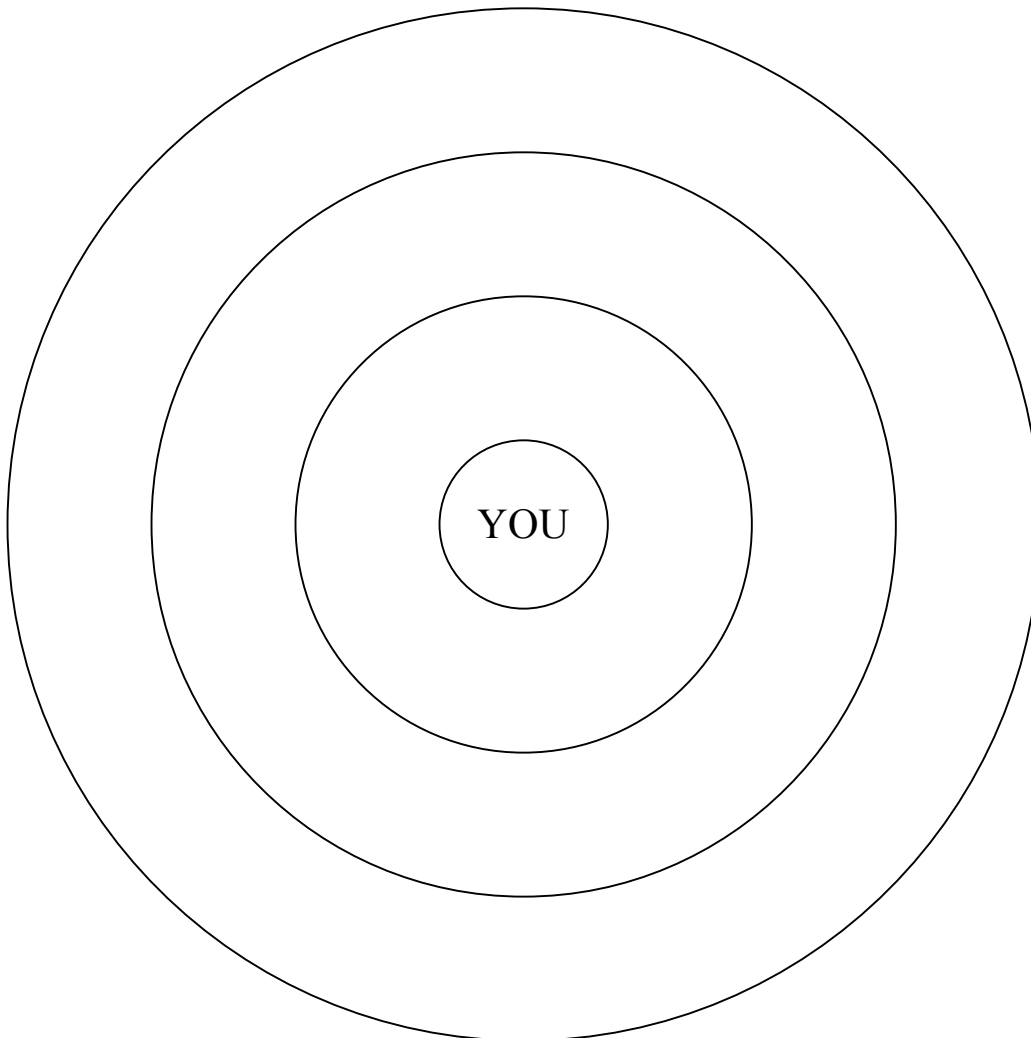


In summary, other people and that which we believe to be Sacred are both crucial to the process of self-forgiveness. Focusing on ourselves leads to self-blame and shame, and we cannot simply ignore the consequences of our actions. Instead, we must acknowledge the importance of others' needs. By this our actions, coupled with our words, we communicate that we value those we have harmed while also respecting ourselves.

## *Exercise 2A*

### *Assessing the Damage*

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 circles. Each circle represents those to whom you are close. For example, you might imagine that your family or close friends immediately surround you in the closest circle to you while coworkers and acquaintances remain further out from the center. Add a textbox or 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 2B*

### *Injustice Gap*

In your journey to reconnect with your values, you've got to cross the injustice gap. That means, you'll have to accept responsibility, without blaming your actions on others or blaming yourself for things outside of your control. Keep in mind that the injustice gap is not only in your mind; it is also in the mind(s) of the victim(s) of your offense. This complicates how we go about repairing relationships. Moreover, the amount of injustice resulting from an offense as perceived by a victim is often more than the injustice perceived by a perpetrator.

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, and rate how severe you believe that pain is.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mild			Moderate			Severe

How severe is the guilt and shame you experience as the transgressor?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mild			Moderate			Severe

Recall that evidence suggests that the size of the injustice gap that you have rated according to the perspective of the person you hurt or offended likely under-estimates how large the victim of your offense believes the injustice gap to be.

If it is possible and safe for you to be in contact with the victim of your offense, write down a few things you might do to make amends that would shrink the injustice gap in the mind of the person you might have offended.

Ex. *I could send them an apology note.*

1.

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2.

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3.

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If it is not possible or safe for you to be in contact with the victim of your offense, write what other things you might do to make amends that does not involve the victim(s) of your offense.

Ex. *I could write an apology note and read it to someone I trust who was not involved in the offense.*

1.

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2.

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3.

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## *Exercise 2C*

### *Assessing the Hurts*

Empathy is the key to forgiving others and ourselves. If you have empathy for others, you will respect them. Also, empathy for what the experiences of people that you may have hurt will transform your feelings of guilt and shame into motivation to repair your relationships and build healthier interpersonal bonds not despite your failures but because of them. A relationship that has been tested and recovered is stronger than one that has never been tested! So, 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.

**How are the reactions you described in Exercise 2C similar to what was felt by the person you harmed?**

## *Exercise 2D*

### *Elements of a Good Confession*

It not only helps people you might have offended or harmed if you accept your responsibility, express a sincere apology, attempt not to offend or hurt them again, but it also helps you to make that confession. It is hard to confess your responsibility to others, but it shows yourself that you are serious about accepting responsibility for your actions. 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. (Remember, usually the person you hurt thinks that the offense was more serious than you do, so doing more than you think is necessary is very helpful.)

Step Five: Make up your mind to sacrifice. To make up for what you did, it is necessary to make some costly sacrifices. Sacrifice in silence. Complaining about what you are doing or expecting recognition for it means you'll take away a lot of the power of the sacrifice.

Step Six: Make an explicit request of forgiveness.



What if you can't apologize and can't restore relational equality? Perhaps you hurt a stranger (this often happens with things like military combat, or accidents). You cannot ever really restore that relationship as it was. Or perhaps you did an irreparable harm to someone (i.e., damaged their reputation, was responsible for an injury, or harmed the person in a way that can't be healed or repaired). Are you stuck? No. You can still make an imaginary confession, pretending that the person is before you and you are talking to the person. To the extent that you can really get into the imagination, this will help. The mind and body cannot tell the difference between a very engaging experience in real life or in your imagination. So, you can promote some healing even if the person can't be addressed in person. If you are in this situation, try it now.

Did you write out or say aloud your confession? (If you do, it will have more impact.)

What is your evaluation of this? Did it help?

## *Exercise 2E*

### *The Empty Chair Exercise*

One intervention used by therapists to help people 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 previous exercise made the strongest impact on your transgression?

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

## *Exercise 2F*

### *Dealing with Distress*

In one 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. Excessive self-blame 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 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 about it.

Fortunately, Fisher and Exline also investigated the strategies used by individuals who appeared free from 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 at least one sentence about your 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 . . .
  
  - c. To show that I am sorry, I have apologized or confessed to a specific person who reacted by . . .
  
  - d. Based on the reactions of this other person (these other people), my feelings make me feel (more or less, circle which one if either) able to work toward forgiving myself because...
  
3. We must cultivate repentance and humility in ourselves.
  - a. My actions made others feel . . .
  
  - b. Others' needs are important to me because . . .
  
  - c. God, nature, or humanity forgives me because . . .

### **Reference**

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 2G*

### *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.
  
- 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?

## *What Did Your Get Out of This Section?*

Review this section. 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 try to do something to make up for how your actions may have harmed others is not self-forgiveness at all. It's excusing yourself. If you go back to the two-factor diagram of self-forgiveness (page 12), you will see that affirming your values is a critical element of forgiving yourself. Accepting responsibility for your actions and doing things to repair relationships that are may have been hurt is an important part of affirming your values.

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. Accurately assessing your level of responsibility can be difficult. The goal is to accept responsibility for your actions without blaming others for your actions or blaming yourself for things that are outside of your control
2. In order to be meaningfully interpreted and successfully resolved, our emotions like guilt and shame need an outlet to be expressed. This outlet is naturally through amend making behavior. We can make amends through apologizing or confessing to the person we harmed, but we can also make amends by sharing about our experience with a trusted other. That is sometimes it is impossible or unsafe to be in touch with a victim but that should not perpetuate our self-condemnation. We need only find another outlet.

## *Step Three*

### *Rethink Rumination*

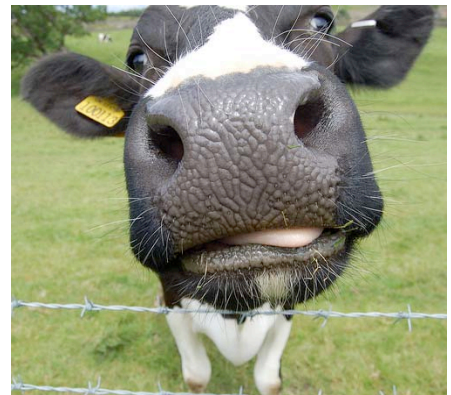
## *Step Three*

### *Rethink Rumination*

In Step Two, you learned about how part of making a decision to affirm your values is accepting responsibility for your actions and acting on the amend-making motivations that accompany negative emotions. In Step Three, you will begin to work on experiencing the emotional restoration of positive self-regard. Specifically, you will focus on rumination. Rumination is a pattern of thinking in which people passively and repetitively obsess about an offense and its consequences. Individuals who struggle to forgive themselves ruminate on memories of their past mistakes, rigidly adhere to unattainable perfectionistic standards, and have anticipatory anxiety in which they fear being unable to live according to their values in the future.

Rumination has been linked to an array of problems. It intensifies and prolongs distress; it inhibits problem solving, and it weakens social support. Rumination has also been associated with feeling anxious and depressed. In the aftermath of perpetrating an offense, people who ruminate about something they did dwell on emotion-based questions and get stuck in unproductive patterns of thinking. When we ruminate, we focus on and exaggerate the worst parts of our lives.

Rumination is a repetitive problem. The word “ruminate” comes from the Latin word *ruminare*, which means “to chew again.” In fact, a similar word is used to describe a type of mammal, like a cow, goat, or sheep, that breaks down its food by regurgitating previously swallowed food (known as cud) to chew it again. Likewise, although failures and mistakes are an inevitable part of life, people sometimes mentally “regurgitate” and “chew on” their problems again. When we ruminate about our failures and mistakes, it costs us dearly. Rumination is a link that binds our past experiences to our present choices. When we ruminate, the influence of our past experiences on our current mood and relationships becomes even stronger.



We also include in this step an evaluation of the expectations you are trying to meet. Rumination is closely linked to perfectionism – that is, the tendency



to hold yourself to excessively high standards that are rarely met. Do you expect perfection from yourself? If so, those expectations are probably not realistic, and part of your process to gain a new sense of positive self-regard will be discovering that you are an imperfect but incredibly valuable person.

Both rumination and perfectionistic standards are part of the psychological self-repair you need to address. Whereas we focused on repair social and spiritual damage that sometimes results from perpetrating wrongdoing against another person, the current step considers a third area of repair—your own psychological self-repair.

## *Exercise 3A*

### *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 obsess too much 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 beat myself up about what was said.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 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 a lot about who might not accept me if they knew have 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? Do you ever feel fatigued, have headaches, experience stomach discomfort, or have trouble sleeping due to rumination? How would your life be better if you were able to control your rumination?

## *Exercise 3B*

### *Exposing Unrealistic Expectations and Standards*

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 self-blame 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 expectations for yourself.

Write down two expectations or standards for yourself that you want 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.

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 3C*

### *Assessing Faulty Beliefs and Processes*

The roads to self-condemnation are many. People employ different kinds of faulty thought processes. 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
Mild			Moderate			Severe

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
Mild			Moderate			Severe

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
Mild			Moderate			Severe

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
Mild			Moderate			Severe

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
Mild			Moderate			Severe

## *Exercise 3D*

### *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 mood or emotion 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 mood or emotion does this memory inspire?

As you can see, how you think can affect how you feel. In fact, psychologists refer to *experience-dependent neuroplasticity* as your ability to strengthen specific circuits in your brain by participating in certain activities. If you spend your time ruminating, then the circuits activated by unpleasant experiences will be the strongest. However, if you train your brain think about your ability to learn from your mistakes, to make use of opportunities for growth, and to respect yourself, then these circuits will strengthen.

*Exercise 3D*  
*Strategies to Rethink Rumination*

Next, you need action plan so that the next time you notice a ruminative thought, you can quickly take control.

1. First, recognize your repeated patterns and change them – patterns of thinking, not single thoughts, produce the greatest impact on your emotions. Write an example of a ruminative thought you sometimes have.
- 
- 

2. Second, learn to interrupt the flow of ruminative thoughts. The longer you wait to interrupt, the more difficult it will be. For example, try a breathing exercise. Instead of ruminating, place your hand on your stomach, take a deep breath in through your nose so that you feel your diaphragm push your hand out, slowly exhale through your mouth, and repeat.
3. Be aware of what won't help – Think about what to do rather than what not to do. You can't simply not think about something negative; you must replace it with something else. Instead of telling yourself to avoid certain thoughts, be prepared with positive thoughts that you may focus on when ruminations arise. List three positive thoughts that you could say when your ruminative thoughts return.

a.

b.

c.

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.



### *What Did Your Get Out of This Section?*

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

### *Ideas from Step Three to Consider*

Rumination is a link through which your past experiences influence your present choices, identity, and relationships. Restoring your sense of positive self-regard will weaken this link and free your values, and not your past experiences, to guide your present choices.

### *Ideas from Step Three to Consider*

1. To what extent do you believe you are capable of failure, imperfection, and evil?
  
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 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 Emotional Self-Forgiveness*

Self-forgiveness doesn't happen overnight. Even though you've already made a sincere decision to try to forgive yourself for the offense, you might still experience self-condemning emotions such as guilt, shame, sadness, fear, or anger. For this reason, we distinguish between decisional and emotional self-forgiveness. Making a decision to affirm your values is an important part of the process of responsible self-forgiveness. However, it is unlikely that you will feel immediately better after deciding to affirm your values. Making a decision is the first step, and you must strengthen your decision by working toward emotional self-forgiveness.

Thus, the fourth step in self-forgiveness process is to REACH Emotional Self-Forgiveness. This involves using elements of the REACH Forgiveness method, which has been used to successfully promote forgiveness of others in victims of harm across the globe (Wade, Hoyt, Kidwell, & Worthington, 2013).

The following exercises are designed to help you replace self-condemning emotions with positive, growth-oriented emotions. Although you may not have been ready to emotionally forgive yourself prior to starting this workbook, you are now in a better position to do so given that you have identified an offense



(Step 1), accepted responsibility for your actions and tried to make amends (Step 2), and practiced letting your present values being a stronger influence on your choices in comparison to your past failures (Step 3). To the extent that you have moved forward through these previous steps with thoughtful attention and concentrated effort, it is possible now for you replace those negative self-condemning emotions with a positive sense of self.

One of the most replicated findings of the scientific literature on forgiveness is the connection between emotional forgiveness and health. Chronic condemnation of self and others threatens our health. It is stressful to harbor negative emotions, especially when people and situations function as triggers of that condemnation. When we constantly condemn ourselves or

others we experience more depression and hostility, less satisfaction with life, and are at higher risk for cardiovascular and immune system problems. Some evidence even suggests that forgiving yourself is related to mortality in some cases (Krause & Hayward, 2013). So, in replacing self-condemning emotions with self-forgiving emotions you respect yourself by acknowledging that your mistakes make you no less valuable as a person.

## *Exercise 4A*

### *The Burden of Self-condemnation*

Feeling self-condemnation is like carrying around a weight. The weight can cause you pain, exhaust you, occupy your attention, and yield no benefit for you. Your understanding will be improved if you get a very physical understanding of this by participating in the following exercise.

**Instructions:** 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. 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 a book. 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 if you could let go of this weight. Likewise, remember that holding the burden of self-condemnation is causing you pain, and chronic self-condemnation doesn't help you do anything productive to repair the damage caused by your offense. Try to hold your arms out with the weight in your hands as long as you are able. Once you've held the weight out as long as you are able, drop your hands. What a relief!

**What changes did you notice in your body as your hands and arms dropped to their natural position and were relieved of holding the weight?**

**What relief you might experience by figuratively letting go of condemnation in the same way that you physically let go of the weight? Remember the relief you feel, and embrace it when you are ready to forgive yourself.**

*Exercise 4B*  
*Experiencing Self-Forgiveness in Literature*

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

**Instructions:** 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**

*The worst loneliness is to not be comfortable with yourself.*

Mark Twain

Word:

Phrase:

**Quote 2**

*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 3**

*We are supposed to forgive everyone; everyone includes ourselves.*

Denis Waitley (Inspirational Speaker)

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 (Inspirational  
Speaker)

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:

## *Exercise 4C*

### *Finding Forgiveness*

People use similar methods to reduce injustice that results from being hurt of hurting others. But, not all approaches are ultimately beneficial. Several attempts to reduce injustice are described below. Two options are accurate definitions of forgiveness. Other descriptions are not quite right or are obviously wrong. Circle the correct definitions of self-forgiveness.

1. Telling yourself that what happened wasn't that bad and moving on
2. Forgetting that anything bad happened and pushing the event or relationship out of your memory
3. Restoring trust to your relationship
4. Accepting an excuse or explanation for what someone did or is doing to you
5. Emotional restoration of a positive sense of self
6. Tolerating negative things that you do or continue to do
7. Blaming and confronting the person who hurt you
8. Getting someone who hurt you to believe that everything is still okay
9. Letting the person you hurt get even with you
10. Deciding to connect with and affirm your violated values



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 hurt someone, 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. 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 restore trust in a relationship after an offense occurs. This is not forgiveness. You can *forgive* and reconcile the relationship or *forgive* and not reconcile if reconciliation is dangerous or impossible.
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 occurs when you experience emotional restoration of a positive sense of self.*
6. **Tolerating** negative things will prevent you from learning from your mistakes.
7. **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 if it is not done well.
8. **Deception** is getting someone you hurt to believe everything is okay.
9. **Revenge** is getting even. It's punishing yourself not forgiving yourself.
10. *Decisional forgiveness occurs when you decide to affirm your violated values by taking responsibility and making amends.*

*Exercise 4D*  
*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-blame or 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.

*Exercise 4E*  
*Altruistic Gift of Self-Forgiveness*

Emotionally forgiving yourself is like giving yourself a gift. As we mentioned previously, scientific evidence suggests that people who practice self-forgiveness have better mental health, report fewer physical health problems, and have higher quality relationships. But, you must see yourself as worthy to receive such a gift. In the space provided, imagine that you are writing a letter to yourself to accompany your gift of self-forgiveness. What would you say to let yourself know that they are worth the value of the gift that you have chosen to give? Write at least 4-5 sentences to explain the gift and state why it is important to you to give the gift.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ (your first name),

## *Exercise 4F*

### *Commit to Emotional Self-Forgiveness*

Now that you've given yourself the gift of self-forgiveness, you can commit to the change that is taking root in your thoughts and emotions. Although occasional feelings of guilt or shame may surface when you encounter a trigger (e.g., the victim of your offense), the offense and associated distress will no longer direct your thoughts or behaviors. In order to symbolize this change, do the following.

1. Use a pen to write a brief description of your offense on your hand. You might write a single word such as "HURT, GUILT, SHAME, etc."
2. Now try to wash it off by washing your hands with soap and water. Were you able to get all of the ink off? Although most of the ink has faded, can you still see the outline of what was written?

**Instructions:** Answer the following questions about your experience.

How might washing the ink from your hands symbolize the self-forgiveness process that you have engaged in over the course of this workbook?

What is needed for the residual ink to be washed away?

### *What Did Your Get Out of This Section?*

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

### *Ideas from Step Four to Consider*

1. Although wounds heal in time, time does not heal wounds. Actions heal wounds! So far, you have learned 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 six steps to responsibly forgive yourself.
  - a. Recall an Offense
  - b. Repair Relationships
  - c. Rethink Rumination
  - d. REACH Emotional Self-forgiveness
  - e. Rebuild Self-acceptance
  - f. Resolve to Live Virtuously
  
2. Which step do you think is the most difficult for you? Which is the most important?

## *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. And, one of the most difficult battles is learning to accept yourself as a flawed but valuable person. We must ask ourselves, “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 – our real self and our ideal self. 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. Many people live with the assumption that they are a good person or believe that they are doing the right thing, and in a moment life goes off the tracks and we’ve



done something that we never thought we could do. We realize that we are capable of doing something that we never thought would happen (e.g., cheating on a romantic partner). 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.). When transgressions cause us to foreclose on life, 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 as who we are becomes closer to who we want to be.

## *Exercise 5A*

### *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 5B*  
*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 of Jews like Dinur. 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.”

**Instructions:** 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 5C*  
*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 5D*

### *Consider This*

There is a difference between accepting yourself and condoning things you may have done that wronged another person. Studies that we and others have done show that individuals who persistently feel ashamed – that is, they generally devalue who they are as a person – is associated with increased likelihood that the perpetrator will commit a similar offense in the future. But if you accept yourself as a person who is morally aware (e.g., able to know when you've done wrong) but also who is able to experience moral growth (e.g., able to learn from one's mistakes), then you are more likely to live according to your values in the future.

**How do you believe moral growth looks differently for someone who is able to accept themselves in comparison to someone who has difficulty accepting themselves?**

## *Exercise 5E*

### *Person in the Mirror*

Look at yourself in the mirror. What you see is the face of a person who has been hurt and at the same time the face of a person who has hurt others. You see the face of a person who has felt guilt directed toward their behavior or shame directed toward yourself. But, you also see the face of one who has emerged victorious over self-condemnation.

**Has your commitment to completing this workbook and to resolving your offense in particular changed how you see yourself? If so, how?**

### *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. 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.
2. Being able to accept yourself as a valuable person, though you see the flaws and failures, is not just a state of feeling okay about yourself. It is a skill. You can get better at that skill if you practice it. It's like any other skill. At first, we aren't good at it. As we practice, we can improve.

## *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. Wrongdoing can cause people to morally disengage, to lose sight of their values, and to foreclose on any effort to lead a virtuous and good life. But it does not change the core of who we are. Therefore, we must instead responsibly forgive ourselves by (1) connecting with our values and (2) restoring our positive sense of self.

By responsibly forgiving ourselves, we set ourselves up to live a meaningful and purposeful life in the future. It is likely that immediately after the offense that you described in this workbook occurred, you felt like that experience was a strong influence on your current decisions and relationships. If you were starting something new or in a similar situation, your mind may have recalled your past failures and mistakes and that memory might have directed your present behavior. The final decisional component of self-forgiveness is ensuring that your present behaviors and choices are guided by your what you think is most important in life and in your relations (i.e., your values) rather than being determined by simply your past experiences.



In the following exercises, you will be asked to clearly identify your values and to think about simple and practical ways that you can incorporate those values into your life. You will also be encouraged to reflect on your past experiences from a new perspective – a growth oriented perspective that shows just how far you've come!

## *Exercise 6A*

### *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 before that helped you deal with times when you were challenged to live according your values?

What have you learned from the offense that you described for the purpose of this workbook?

What positive consequences have resulted from your offense?

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

## *EXERCISE 6B*

### *Reconnecting to What's Important*

**Instructions:** Personal values are the things that you value most in life. Even though we may not talk or think overtly about our personal values, they guide our choices by giving us a sense of purpose and meaning in life. In the space below, identify your Top 5 personal values and write a brief sentence about what each value means for you. If you're stumped, look at the next page for a list of common values from which you might choose.

Value	What It Means to You
Ex.) <i>Integrity</i>	<i>It is important to me to keep my word.</i>
1)	
2)	
3)	
4)	
5)	

Once you have identified your Top 5 values and what they mean to you, share about how you could incorporate your values into your “New Normal” with a member of your group, a therapist, or a significant other in your life.



## Common Personal Values

Below is a list of values that people sometimes have. You can select values from this list, or you can use this list to help generate your own ideas

Autonomy	Humility	Reliability
Balance	Humor	Resourcefulness
Benevolence	Imagination	Respect
Compassion	Independence	Responsibility
Confidence	Integrity	Righteousness
Courage	Justice	Sacrifice
Creativity	Kindness	Self-control
Duty	Leadership	Self-discipline
Empathy	Love	Service
Equality	Loyalty	Spirituality
Faith	Money	Stewardship
Fairness	Nature	Teamwork
Family	Openness	Thankfulness
Forgiveness	Parenthood	Tolerance
Equality	Peace	Trust
Freedom	Patience	Truth
Forgiveness	Patriotism	Understanding
Gratitude	Perseverance	Vitality
Growth	Privacy	Wisdom
Honesty	Prosperity	
Hope	Relationships	

## *Exercise 6C*

### *Dedicate Yourself to Being More Self-Forgiving*

As we stated at the beginning of your journey, completing this workbook is about learning a method. Responsible self-forgiveness is not a feeling; it is a skill. You may recall that we defined responsible self-forgiveness as (1) making a decision to connect with and affirm your values and (2) experiencing the emotional restoration of a positive sense of self. Each of the steps you've completed so far aligns with one of these two aspects of self-forgiveness. On one hand, recalling a specific offense and accepting responsibility for its consequences, repairing your relationships, and resolving to live virtuously are all things that you do when you make a decision to affirm your values. On the other hand, rethinking rumination, REACHing emotional self-forgiveness, and rebuilding self-acceptance each facilitate the return of your positive sense of self.

**Instructions:** Let's reflect on your experience in order to generalize what you've learned to benefit you in the future. Pick one exercise from each section of the workbook that you believe was the most helpful for you and give a reason why you think that it is important to you.

For example, from this section you might write the following:

Exercise Number: *Exercise 6B*

Reason: *The exercise helped me establish a new normal so that my choices are governed by my current values and not my past experiences.*

1. Recall an Offense

***Exercise Number:***

***Reason:***

2. Repair Relationships

***Exercise Number:***

***Reason:***

3. Rethink Rumination

***Exercise Number:***

***Reason:***

4. REACH Emotional Self-forgiveness

***Exercise Number:***

***Reason:***

5. Rebuild Self-Acceptance

***Exercise Number:***

***Reason:***

6. Resolve to Live Virtuously

***Exercise Number:***

***Reason:***

*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?

## *Exercise 6D*

### *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 and perhaps that which I believe is Sacred.	1	2	3	4	5
--	---	---	---	---	---

I can better identify and avoid ruminative negative thoughts since completing the workbook.	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

I have a sense of emotional 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
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**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.*