Grace Abounds Biblical Counseling

Accountability and Forgiveness Worksheet

Reconciliation Action Steps and the Choice to Forgive

Relationships break when we sin against each other or hurt each other, and they are restored when we deal with it God's way. This worksheet has three parts: the inner process of responding rightly to our own sin, the seven Reconciliation Action Steps that carry that process into the relationship, and the choice to forgive. Two worksheets follow, for working through a real situation. Scripture quotations are from the ESV.

Part 1: Responding Rightly to Our Own Sin

This is the inner process, what should happen within a person who has sinned:

1) **Objective Moral Guilt** should lead to **Feelings of Remorse**
   - Guilt is not just a feeling. When we break God's moral law, we are guilty whether or not we feel it. Conscience is God's gift to make us aware of that guilt, and healthy remorse is the conscience responding rightly.
   - *Romans 2:15* – "They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them."
2) **Feelings of Remorse** should help drive **Repentance**
   - Remorse is meant to move us, not just to make us feel bad. Godly sorrow is grief over having offended God and hurt others, and it pushes us to turn from the sin and toward Him.
   - *Psalm 51:17* – "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."
3) **Repentance** starts with **Confession**
   - Repentance begins by agreeing with God about what we did, naming it honestly instead of hiding, excusing, or minimizing it.
   - *Psalm 32:5* – "I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah"
4) **Confession** leads to **Reconciliation**
   - Honest confession opens the way to restored fellowship, first with God, and then with the people we have sinned against.
   - *James 5:16* – "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."
5) **Reconciliation** is Preserved and **Trust** is Rebuilt through Sustained Repentance and Progress
   - Restored fellowship is kept by continuing change, not by a single apology. Trust is rebuilt as real progress is demonstrated over time, and that takes perseverance.
   - *Galatians 6:9* – "And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."

Where the Process Can Break Down

A person can get stuck at any link in the chain:

- **Guilt without remorse.** We excuse it, blame others, or do not care, and the conscience grows hard.
- **Remorse without repentance.** We feel awful but never change, sorry for the consequences more than the sin.
- **Repentance without confession.** We quietly try to do better but never own it, so the relationship stays broken.
- **Confession without lasting change.** We say the right words, but without real progress trust cannot be rebuilt.

The good news. *1 John 1:9* – "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Part 2: The Reconciliation Action Steps

The inner process now has to be worked out between people. These seven steps put it into practice in a relationship, so each one involves what we do toward the other person.

Each of you will sometimes be the offender and sometimes the offended. Whenever you are the one who has sinned against or hurt someone, you walk through these steps for that person. Whenever you are the one who was sinned against or hurt, you walk through the steps that are yours.

1) **Confrontation** – the Offended Brings the Offense to the Attention of the Offender
   - *Matthew 18:15* – "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother."
2) **Confession** – the Offender Admits to the Offense and Agrees it was Wrongful and/or Hurtful
   - *Proverbs 28:13* – "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy."
3) **Contrition** – the Offender Apologizes for the Offense and Asks for Forgiveness, Empathizing with the Suffering of the Offended
   - *2 Corinthians 7:10* – "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death."
4) **Forgiveness** – the Offended Accepts the Apology and Chooses to Forgive such that Fellowship is Restored
   - *Colossians 3:13* – "…bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."
5) **Repentance Begins** – the Offender Commits to Change Their Behavior
   - *Psalm 119:106* – "I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to keep your righteous rules."
6) **Repentance Demonstrated** – the Offender Makes Good Faith Effort to Change and Makes Real Progress, so that Trust is Rebuilt
   - *Acts 26:20* – "…but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance."
7) **Celebration** – the Offender and Offended Thank God for Victory Provided
   - *Luke 15:7* – "Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

Moral Wrongs and Hurt Feelings

A moral wrong should always lead to repentance. An emotional hurt is different. We should seek to minimize the hurt we cause, but we still do what is right, even if doing right hurts the other person's feelings.

- *Proverbs 27:6* – "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy."

Forgiving and trusting are different. Forgiveness is a choice the offended makes (Step 4). Trust is built as progress is demonstrated (Step 6).

When safety is at risk. If a person is prone to acting in bad faith, whether through hostility, ongoing mistreatment, manipulation, or the like, do not go through these steps with them. Seek godly support to rightly ensure safety. You can still choose to forgive before God (Part 3) without reconciling. If anyone is in immediate danger, call 911.

Part 3: The Choice to Forgive

When you have suffered moral wrong and/or emotional hurt, use this sentence as the pattern:

I choose to forgive (name) **for** (sinful and/or hurtful action or inaction) **as it impacted my life** (in practical ways), **influenced me to think** (messages) **and provoked me to feel** (emotions).

Here is some info to keep in mind:

1) **Forgiveness is a choice.** It is something that is done or not done. You are taking the whole situation and nailing it to the cross and letting Jesus deal with the person.
   - *Colossians 2:13–14* – "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross."
2) **We forgive specific people.** If you know their name, say it.
   - *Mark 11:25* – "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses."
3) **Sins are moral wrongs, and hurtful actions are emotional wounds.** Usually the two go together, but you can have one without the other. They can be by commission or omission. It is important to forgive both specifically.
   - *James 4:17* – "So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."
4) **Practical impacts aren't always present, but include them if they are.** ("I forgive my boss, Dave, for taking credit for my work, as it cost me the promotion I had worked toward.")
   - *Genesis 50:20* – "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."
5) **Messages aren't always present either, but include them if they are.** ("I forgive my dad for losing his temper and yelling at me as it influenced me to think that I was a bad son.") Bring those messages to God's truth.
   - *Romans 12:2* – "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."
6) **Connect the choice to forgive with your emotion.** Outside of the choice itself, this is the most important part. As you think about what was done to you, it should provoke emotion. Let it up (feel it), let it out (express it), and let it go (forgive).
   - *Psalm 62:8* – "Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. Selah"
7) **Before you forgive, pray, asking the Holy Spirit to help you.** It can be emotionally intense, but it is very healthy spiritually and emotionally. A few suggestions:
   - Forgive in manageable amounts that fit the occasion. You do not have to forgive everything in one sitting.
   - Allow enough time and space so you are not rushed or inhibited.
   - Bring tissues.
   - Have supportive people be aware and available if needed.
   - *Romans 8:26* – "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."

Forgiveness is not always a one-time event. Forgiving does not always lead to an immediate change of feelings. Also, since life impacts, messages, and feelings can continue to emerge, forgiveness might need to be extended multiple times.

Accountability and forgiveness are never completed by willpower. Both are gifts of grace, received from the God who first forgave us.

Worksheet: Accountability

About Part 1: The Process

1) Think of a time you sinned. When you recognized your guilt, what did you feel? Remorse, defensiveness, indifference, or something else? Why?

2) How do you tell godly grief from worldly grief (*2 Corinthians 7:10*, in Part 2)? Which do you tend to experience, and what does it lead you to do?

3) Where do you tend to get stuck in the process: guilt without remorse, remorse without repentance, repentance without confession, or confession without lasting change? Give an example.

4) How easy is it for you to confess to another person (*James 5:16*)? What makes it easier or harder, and who is safe to confess to?

About Part 2: The Reconciliation Action Steps

5) Think of a time you were the offender. Which of the Reconciliation Action Steps did you complete? Which did you skip? What was the result?

6) Think of a current or past situation where someone else offended you. Have you brought it to their attention (Step 1)? If not, what is keeping you from doing so? Is it something you should simply overlook (*Proverbs 19:11*), or does it need to be addressed?

7) Write out a confession for a situation where you are the offender. Be specific about what you did or failed to do, acknowledge the hurt, and ask for forgiveness without “if,” “but,” or “maybe.”

8) What will you do differently going forward (Step 5)? Who will help hold you accountable?

Worksheet: Forgiveness

Pray first, asking the Holy Spirit to help you. Copy this page to use again for each person you need to forgive.

1) **Who am I forgiving?** (Use their name.)

2) **What did they do or fail to do?**
   - **a)** The sin (moral wrong, by commission or omission):
   - **b)** The hurt (emotional wound):

3) **How did it impact my life in practical ways?** (If any.)

4) **What messages did it influence me to believe?** (If any.) What does God say that is true instead?

5) **What emotions did it provoke me to feel?** Let them up and out, then let them go.

6) **My statement of forgiveness.** I choose to forgive (name) for (action) as it impacted my life (practical impact), influenced me to think (messages), and provoked me to feel (emotions).

7) **After forgiving:** What has changed in me? Is there anything I need to take to God again? How can I thank Him for the victory He provides (Step 7)?