

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

Forgive and Forget

Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve

by

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1. Smedes invites you to join him on a journey to finding the answers to all of the questions and doubts about forgiveness. Chances are that you are exploring this topic because you are having a hard time forgiving a specific person in your life. Hone in on that one person who comes to mind when you think about deep hurt. Who is this person? How did they hurt you? Was it an unfair hurt? Do you think that you were able to forgive them? If yes, what was the sign for you that you were beginning to forgive?

2. How do you relate to this story of a baker and his wife?
At some point in our lives, most of us have said that we have forgiven someone when really in our heart we knew it was not true. When have you found yourself in this situation? What were your motivations for publicly forgiving that person while privately holding onto the hurt? Looking back, can you see if this particular hurt has festered and affected your life in a negative way or have you been able to truly forgive that person?
3. On page 5 Smedes lets us know that we must make a clear distinction between hurts that call for forgiveness and those that do not. Discuss a time when you confused a hurt that does not call for the miracle of forgiveness for one that does. Did you attempt to forgive? What happened? Were you successful?
4. As Smedes urges on page 9, match his list of unfair hurts in Chapter 1 with your own experience.
5. Smedes breaks pain into seven categories (four shallow and three deep). Of the four shallow offenses (annoyances, slights, disappointments, and coming in second), which do you relate to most? Which category sparks a personal memory for you of a time when you were hurt by someone, but not deep enough to put you into the crisis of forgiveness? Of the three categories of unfair hurt that are deep enough to call for forgiveness (disloyalty, betrayal, and brutality), which one do you relate to most? What was your experience with this deep hurt? Did it cause you to come face to face with the crisis of forgiveness? What action did you take?

6. On page 22 Smedes writes, “Only an unearthly saint or an unfeeling oaf gets far in life without hating someone.” Discuss a situation in which you have attempted to hide your hate for someone because you didn’t want to be seen as the bad guy. How did this denial of your feelings affect your life?
7. Smedes recalls the background story of the play *The Black Angel* by Michael Christopher on pages 24 and 25. What experience have you had, if any, with the kind of hate Smedes describes? How has this experience affected your life and your relationships? How has it affected your relationship with the person who caused the pain?
8. On page 29 Smedes shares with us a clear symptom of the onset of forgiveness: “You will know that forgiveness has begun when you recall those who hurt you and feel the power to wish them well.” Have you ever successfully forgiven someone who could care less about your forgiveness? How did that make you feel? Is there someone who you thought you forgave in your past, but when you think of them, you still cannot wish them well?
9. Discuss a time in your life when a great deal of time passed between a falling out and forgiveness. How were you able to come back into each others lives? What had changed? How had both of your roles in life changed? Were you able to reestablish an actual relationship?
10. Smedes relates an experience he had while visiting family friends in the country. Smedes overheard a boy he thought was his friend saying critical things about him. Has this ever happened to you? How did it make you

feel? Have you ever done this to someone else? Discuss that situation. Did they forgive you?

11. On page 56 Smedes defines the difference between accepting and forgiving this way: “We accept people for the good they are, we forgive them for the bad they did.” Describe an example of each from your own life.
12. Smedes lists three types of people who are hard to forgive—invisible people, people who don’t care whether we forgive them or not, and people who seem too evil to be forgiven. Of these three types, discussed on page 53, which have you encountered? Describe the situation. Were you able to forgive them?
13. Of the invisible people Smedes lists on page 63—dead parents, birth parents, and organizations—which, if any, have you been deeply hurt by? Were you able to put a face on the hurt? If yes, how? If not, what will be your next step in healing the hurt this invisible person caused you?
14. Have you ever accepted an apology that should have been repentance, as discussed on page 66? How did that make you feel?
15. Smedes defines confession on page 67, saying “Confession is not for payoffs; it is for healing.” What role has confession played in your life? Has it been for healing or for payoff or some sort?
16. On page 76 Smedes shares an interesting view of humbleness: “People who try to forgive themselves for being wholesale failures are not humble at all; they are really so proud that they want to be gods.” Smedes is calling for a

- very high level of self-awareness in order to forgive ourselves. Have you ever successfully forgiven yourself for anything? What was it? Was it concrete?
17. What are your beliefs regarding whether or not a human can be all evil? How do your beliefs clash with or agree with Smedes' on page 80?
 18. On page 89 Smedes tells the story of how he and his wife, Doris, lost a child. What was your own watershed time to forgive God?
 19. Many of us have felt unfairly hurt by law enforcement, whether it was a ticket that you felt you did not deserve or something more serious like Smedes describes on pages 97 and 98. Think back to that offending officer. Was that hurt deep enough to bring you to the crisis of forgiveness? Can you wish him or her well? If so, how did you forgive him or her? If not, what will be your first step to letting go of that hate?
 20. In Chapter 12 Smedes relates the story of Lena and Ben's messy divorce. Self-awareness plays a large role in Lena's ability to forgive Ben. Discuss a time when your personal view of yourself shifted—when you were suddenly, even if briefly, given the gift of self-awareness. How did this shift affect your ability to forgive?
 21. Finding yourself at a loss for what you have done to hurt another is a common experience. If you have found yourself in a similar situation as the personal experience Smedes describes in this chapter, what did you do to repair the relationship? What would you do differently after having read this?

22. According to Smedes definition, what is the difference between anger and malice? Use a personal experience of your own to illustrate this difference. Have you ever found anger to be constructive? If so, in what way? If not, how has it damaged you and your relationships?
23. Smedes describes a universal experience in that almost all of us have found ourselves wanting to forgive someone—not for what they did, but for who they are. Do you recognize that in yourself? How do you feel after attempting to forgive someone for who they are? How would you do it differently now?
24. Are you a manipulative forgiver? If so, which type? How can you begin to change this behavior?
25. Smedes shares three powerful stories in Chapter 18. Which do you relate to most? Why?
26. Have you ever sought revenge? What had that person done to you and what did you do to them? How did you feel afterward?
27. On page 136 Smedes defines the term *redemptive remembering*. Do you think redemptive remembering is realistic? Why or why not?
28. Describe a time in your life when you have felt the power surge, however temporary, from hate. How long did it last? What were the short-term effects? What were the long-term effects?
29. It is difficult to admit our own role in our pain and to remember when we are hurting that we have, at some point, hurt someone else and made them feel as bad as

or worse than we feel right now. Think back on a time when you were hurt unfairly. Did you feel completely innocent and fully justified in your judgment and anger? How would you change the situation if you knew then what you know now? Can you see now, in retrospect, your own human fallibility? If so, what do you think you contributed? Can you put yourself in the shoes of the person who has wronged you? What do you see?