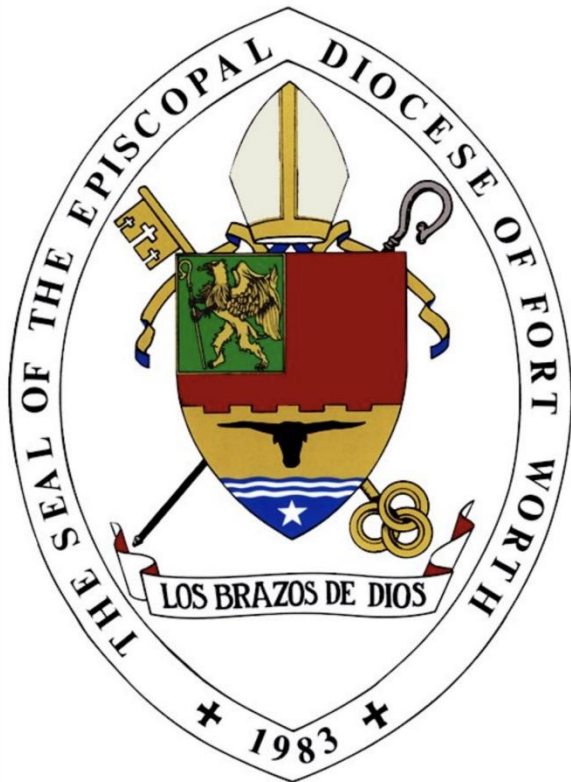


# EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

A lectionary-based Sunday school curriculum for Pre-K through High School



**PROPER  
19  
YEAR A**

**Sunday from  
September 11 to  
September 17**

A free resource created by the Christian Education Commission  
of the Anglican Diocese of Fort Worth

# Sunday School Curriculum for the Sunday from September 11 to September 17, Year A

## **Lectionary Texts:**

Ecclesiasticus 27:30-28:7

Psalms 103

Romans 14:5-12

Matthew 18:21-35

## **Ecclesiasticus 27:30-28:7**

Anger and wrath, these are abominations,  
yet a sinner holds on to them.  
The vengeful will face the Lord's vengeance,  
for he keeps a strict account of their sins.  
Forgive your neighbor the wrong he has done,  
and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray.  
Does anyone harbor anger against another,  
and expect healing from the Lord?  
If one has no mercy toward another like himself,  
can he then seek pardon for his own sins?  
If a mere mortal harbors wrath,  
who will make an atoning sacrifice for his sins?  
Remember the end of your life, and set enmity aside;  
remember corruption and death, and be true to the commandments.  
Remember the commandments, and do not be angry with your neighbor;  
remember the covenant of the Most High, and overlook faults.

## **Psalms 103**

A psalm of David.

- 1 I will praise the Lord.  
    Deep down inside me, I will praise him.  
    I will praise him, because his name is holy.
- 2 I will praise the Lord.  
    I won't forget anything he does for me.
- 3 He forgives all my sins.

- He heals all my sicknesses.
- 4 He saves my life from going down into the grave.  
His faithful and tender love makes me feel like a king.
- 5 He satisfies me with the good things I long for.  
Then I feel young and strong again, just like an eagle.
- 6 The Lord does what is right and fair  
for all who are beaten down.
- 7 He told Moses all about his plans.  
He let the people of Israel see his mighty acts.
- 8 The Lord is tender and kind. He is gracious.  
He is slow to get angry. He is full of love.
- 9 He won't keep bringing charges against us.  
He won't stay angry with us forever.
- 10 He doesn't punish us for our sins as much as we should be punished.  
He doesn't pay us back in keeping with the evil things we've done.
- 11 His love for those who have respect for him  
is as high as the heavens are above the earth.
- 12 He has removed our lawless acts from us  
as far as the east is from the west.
- 13 A father is tender and kind to his children.  
In the same way, the Lord is tender and kind  
to those who have respect for him.
- 14 He knows what we are made of.  
He remembers that we are dust.
- 15 People's lives are like grass.  
People grow like the flowers in the field.
- 16 When the wind blows on them, they are gone.  
No one can tell that they had ever been there.
- 17 But the Lord's love  
for those who have respect for him  
lasts for ever and ever.  
Their children's children will know  
that he always does what is right.
- 18 He always loves those who keep his covenant.  
He always does what is right for those who remember to obey his commands.
- 19 The Lord has set up his throne in heaven.  
His kingdom rules over all.
- 20 Praise the Lord, you angels of his.  
Praise him, you mighty ones  
who carry out his orders and obey his word.

21 Praise the Lord, all you angels in heaven.

Praise him, all you who serve him and do what he wants.

22 Let everything the Lord has made praise him  
everywhere in his kingdom.

I will praise the Lord.

### **Romans 14:5-12**

Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God. We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God."

So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

### **Matthew 18:21-35**

Peter came and said to Jesus, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that

debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

### **Overview of the Texts:**

The readings for this Sunday are all about forgiveness and not judging others. As Christians we are called to give out the same mercy and forgiveness that we have received so freely and undeservedly from Christ himself. We are admonished in the Gospel reading that if we cannot exercise forgiveness, we will be judged as harshly as we deserve and as we have judged others. Even the Lord's Prayer contains this sentiment in the lines "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Obviously this is a very important concept that our Father wants us to learn.

PreK – Kindergarten Lesson Plan:

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**Opening Prayer:** Lord's Prayer

### **Supplies & Preparation:**

Supplies: small card board boxes, paints, paint brushes, water cups, newspaper/scratch paper, slips of paper. (in lieu of paint, the children can use stickers, tissue paper and glue, or markers.

Preparation: If tissue paper is used, you may wish to tear it into small pieces ahead of time. You might also wish to procure smocks of some kind – old shirts, garbage bags with head and arm holes pre-cut, or store bought smocks.

### **Lesson:**

- Read the Gospel reading or tell the story in kid friendly language
- Ask the children if they thought it was fair that the man whose debts were forgiven went out and treated his own debtor with such unkindness. Ask them how they would like to be treated in this situation.
- Talk about God's great mercy and how he forgives us even though we sin again and again. He is always ready to take us back if we just ask Him to by telling him what we did, how sorry we are, and asking His help to not do it anymore.
- Ask the children to think of something they did that they need to say sorry to God for. Children this young rarely recognize that they have ever done anything

wrong. Encourage them to think of something by giving suggestions (have you ever not minded your parents, fought with a sibling, broken a rule, etc.). Then ask them to silently talk to God about what they did - tell Him their sin, ask for forgiveness. Now ask them if there is anyone who has done something that made them mad or sad. You may need to make suggestions here as well (has anyone called you a name, taken your toy away, or hurt you?). Now ask them to forgive this person. You can ask them all to think of the person and then say together, "I forgive you." Or you can ask them to do this in their heads.

**Craft:** Forgiveness Box. Give each child a box to decorate. Let the boxes dry (if needed) on the newspaper. Give each child a few slips of paper. Explain that the box is to help them learn to forgive. They can write down the things that they need to forgive (drawings of what happened work well for this age) on the slips of paper and then place them in the box asking God to help them forgive the person.

**Closing Prayer:** The Our Father

Elementary Lesson Plan:

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**Opening Prayer:** Lord's Pray, Hail Mary, and Glory Be

**Supplies & Preparation:**

Supplies: small card board boxes, paints, paint brushes, water cups, newspaper/scratch paper, slips of paper. (in lieu of paint, the children can use stickers, tissue paper and glue, or markers.

Preparation: If tissue paper is used, you may wish to tear it into small pieces ahead of time. You might also wish to procure smocks of some kind – old shirts, garbage bags with head and arm holes pre-cut, or store bought smocks.

**Lesson:**

- Read through the Gospel reading to familiarize the children with the story.
- Select children to play the roles and help them act out the story by narrating and letting them repeat their lines or just act out what is being said.
- Have the children do the forgiveness visualization exercise listed in the Pre-Reader section.

**Craft:** Give each child a box to decorate. Let the boxes dry (if needed) on the newspaper. Give each child a few slips of paper. Explain that the box is to help them

learn to forgive. They can write down the things that they need to forgive (drawings of what happened work well for younger ages) on the slips of paper and then place them in the box asking God to help them forgive the person.

**Closing Prayer:** The Collect of the Day

#### Junior High / Senior High Lesson Plan

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**Opening Prayer:** Lord's Prayer, Apostles' Creed, and Hail Mary

#### **Supplies & Preparation:**

Supplies: A Bible Concordance, Bibles. (For the alternate activity, obtain a recording of the talk mentioned below).

Preparation: You may wish to select a few example passages about forgiveness to help the students get started. (For the alternative activity, you may wish to listen to the talk ahead of time to either edit it for time if needed, or to prepare some discussion questions). For a non-audio option, make copies of the attached chapter and group discussion.

#### **Lesson:**

- Read the Gospel.
- Challenge the students to find other places in the Bible where forgiveness is discussed. See if they can think of Old Testament (for example: Joseph and his brothers, David, or Jonah) and New Testament examples. What does Jesus say about forgiveness? You may wish to bring a concordance for the students to look up passages referring to forgiveness and mercy. If you or your parish do not have a concordance, you can look one up online and print off the sections that refer specifically to the terms you wish the children to use (forgiveness, forgive, mercy, pardon, atonement, etc.). If there is time, the students can discuss modern applications of these lessons in forgiveness.
- Alternative Lesson Plan: Listen to Rob Rienow's "The Power of Forgiveness," available at [https://youtu.be/o7VYF\\_DmXEw?si=YFQ1LXbPtHqH5qPG](https://youtu.be/o7VYF_DmXEw?si=YFQ1LXbPtHqH5qPG)
- If you prefer non-audio materials, you could read the attached chapter that includes group questions. See below for the chapter from Rob's work.

**Closing Prayer:** The Collect of the Day

Rob Rienow, *Healing Family Relationships* – Used with permission 8/24/2026  
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

## **Chapter 1**

### **The Power of Forgiveness**

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:17–18

A happy, loving, peaceful home. Can you think of any earthly blessing greater than this? I want more happiness, love, and peace in my home. I believe God wants that too. Many people have told me they would trade all their money and success for loving relationships at home.

At the beginning of creation, God carefully and intentionally established the institution of the family. More recently, He carefully and intentionally created *your* family. He chose your parents for you. He chose your siblings for you. At this point, some of you are saying, “God, what were you thinking? I support your whole idea of the family, but the combination of people you put in my house just isn’t working!”<sup>1</sup> The challenges in our families are not a surprise to God. He desires to use all those struggles and conflicts to draw us closer to Him, and to experience His gift of forgiveness and reconciliation.

The purpose of this first chapter is to establish some essential foundational points about the nature of forgiveness and reconciliation. In the sections that follow, we will explore personal and practical ways to pursue peace and healing in our family relationships.

### **The Crucible of Family Relationships**

Your family is like a crucible. A crucible is a ceramic pot into which you put impure metal and then under high heat the impurities separate from the metal and can be removed. Under the intense heat of family relationships, our real character is revealed—the best and, far too often, the worst. Who we are at

home is who we really are. Our true nature and character show up when we walk into our home and close the door. Why is it that I can easily go through a whole day at work without losing my patience with my co-workers, but then lose my cool with the kids within ten minutes of arriving home? Because home life is real life.

Consider how great God's divine plan is! The intense heat of our family relationships draws out the things in our character that need to be sanctified. These ugly traits and behaviors come out at home with those whom God created to love us unconditionally and stick with us, no matter what. Isn't that a great plan? Can you imagine if our temper, impatience, and selfishness came out at work, school, or church? We would not last long at any of those places.

By God's design, the heat of our family relationships brings everyone's character flaws to the surface. Put bluntly, family relationships reveal a lot of sin. This is part of God's plan, so that we might grow in faith, character, and godliness. But none of this growth will happen without an essential ingredient—*forgiveness*. If we desire greater happiness, peace, and love in our homes, we must become experts in giving and receiving forgiveness.

## **Bitter Roots**

In Hebrews 12:14–15, God tells us, *“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.”*

The call here is to “strive for peace with everyone,” and if we are to do that with our family members, we must “see to it . . . that no root of bitterness springs up.” God gives us a planting analogy for relationships and the effects of bitterness and unforgiveness. A family conflict starts with sin. It is a seed of offense and hurt. Sometimes, when we experience hurt and rejection from someone at home, we tell ourselves, “I’ll just take the high road here and let it go. Time heals all wounds.” While there can be value in choosing not to be easily provoked, it is simply not true that “time heals all wounds.” If you get a deep gash in your arm, you would not look at the open flesh and say, “No problem. I’ll just let that go. Time heals all wounds.” With major wounds, time without treatment leads to infection and far worse.

In the same way, if you plant a seed and then walk away and forget about it, what is that seed going to do? It is going to grow roots, sprout into a plant, and eventually bear fruit. The same thing happens when a seed of hurt is planted in our hearts. Unless we specifically address it through an intentional forgiveness process, it will grow a “root of bitterness.” Notice, then, that a root of bitterness always grows up to do two things. First, what grows from that root is going to cause trouble; and second, it will defile many. To *defile* means to pollute or corrupt. We see that second ugly effect in our home on an ongoing basis. Two people get into a conflict, and before we know it all nine of us are going at it! Bitter roots do indeed spring up to cause trouble and corrupt many. This is why it is so urgent that we deal with the seed, and any roots, before they produce their destructive fruit.

A few years ago, I was leading Visionary Family Conferences in Malaysia, and while I was there I learned Southeast Asia is home to one of the fastest-growing trees in the world. It is called the *falcataria moluccana*, or batai tree. When the seeds of the tree are planted, a year goes by without any sign of life. In the second year, a shoot appears . . . and the tree can grow more than 20 feet in the first season. From there it can reach as high as 120 feet.<sup>2</sup> They say you can hear it cracking as it grows. What was happening during that first year? Above the surface, nothing was visible, but below the surface, roots were growing hundreds of feet in all directions. The tree was gathering nutrients and strength for its eventual burst upward.

A seed of hurt can work just like the seed from this plant. It goes in the ground and, although unseen, it immediately goes to work developing the tree’s root system. Then, perhaps well after it has been forgotten, out blasts an ugly tree, which will eventually yield defiling fruit. Some of our current family conflicts are the result of seeds of hurt, and roots of bitterness, which were planted long ago.

### **The Call to Forgive**

One of the most powerful Scriptures on forgiveness is also one of the shortest. God says in Colossians 3:13, “*As the Lord forgave you, so you must also forgive.*” Here God compares His forgiveness of our sins to our forgiveness of others.

Think of a specific family member with whom you have had conflict. Let’s apply this passage to that relationship. Imagine an old-fashioned scale,

the type of scale that balances two platforms. Objects can be placed on opposite sides, and the scale will reveal which object is heavier.

While this may not be a pleasant exercise, I would ask you to think about this family member who has hurt you. Make a pile, on one side of the scale, of all the things the person has done to wound you. On the other side of the scale, make a pile of all the sins you have ever committed against God. Which side is heavier? To which side does the scale tip? The point here is not to minimize the wounds you have received from your family. For some of us, those wounds are serious and grievous. However, the sins committed against us are greatly outweighed by the sins we have committed against God. In this simple verse in Colossians, God directs our attention to His extraordinary forgiveness of our sins, which He made possible through the death of His Son, and then He calls us to follow His example and forgive those who have sinned against us.

## **Forgiving My Father**

My greatest struggle in family forgiveness was with my father. Our story will be woven through the pages ahead. In the Introduction, I shared with you that my father's infidelity led to my parents' divorce. As a fifteen-year-old, I was bitter and angry at what he had done to Mom and how his bad behavior had separated our family. At the time, I had some well-meaning Christian friends who encouraged me to forgive my dad. That was certainly godly counsel. The problem was, it came across to me as overly simplistic and sounded like a "spiritual pat answer." While I am sure this was not my friends' intent, it felt to me as though they were saying that hatred, anger, and bitterness were little "switches" in my heart, and that I should just go down there (wherever "there" is) and turn them off. I should simply choose not to be angry, bitter, and resentful. If I just "give it to Jesus," then everything would be fine.

If anger and bitterness were just light switches we could "turn off" with the force of our will, that would be an easy choice to make. But we all know reality is more complicated. I was a twisted mess of emotional and spiritual confusion. I didn't feel ready to forgive my father. He had not asked for forgiveness. I did not have warm feelings for him. He had not done anything to warrant my ever trusting him again.

God used my youth pastor, Ken Geis, to shepherd me through this dark

time. Over the course of a few months, he shared with me, from the pages of Scripture, the path of true forgiveness. No pat answers. No quick fixes. No rose-colored glasses. Forgiveness is an intentional process, in the power and grace of God, where God sets us free from bitterness, anger, and hatred—which prepares us for the possibility of reconciliation.

Forgiveness and reconciliation is a three-phase process, and I will summarize it here. I don't want you to be overwhelmed. What can be written in just a few pages may take years for the Lord to accomplish. In the chapters ahead, we will consider the small steps God would have us take toward this vision of family healing.

## **Three Phases of Forgiveness**

### ***Phase 1—Forgiveness with the will***

If we are commanded to forgive, then forgiveness must involve a choice. It begins with an act of the will, with obedience to Christ. Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. At this point, we are confronted with numerous obstacles. I don't "feel ready" to forgive my brother. My sister has not taken responsibility for her bad behavior. My mother-in-law has not apologized and asked for our forgiveness. Even if I choose to forgive my dad, he is just going to continue with his toxic behavior. While all those factors are important, and painful, they are not relevant to this first phase of forgiveness. In this phase, feelings are not your friend and can actually keep you from taking a real step toward healing and freedom. If you wait until you "feel ready" to forgive, you may end up waiting your entire life.

How do we take this first step toward forgiving a member of our family? I encourage you to get alone with the Lord for thirty minutes. Take out a sheet of paper and at the top write, "It hurt me when . . ." What you write on this paper will only be for you and the Lord. In fact, when you are done you will throw the paper away.

Ask the Lord to bring to your mind specific things your family member has done or said over the years which have hurt you. As those things come to mind, write them down. It doesn't matter if your list is long or short. Just write down events and moments that hurt you. When your list is complete, choose through prayer to forgive him or her for each individual item.

My prayer regarding my father sounded something like this: “Lord, I know you want me to forgive my father. Honestly, I don’t feel ready to do it. He has not asked for forgiveness or acknowledged how much he hurt me and our family. But I know you want me to forgive him so that my heart will be free of hatred and bitterness. So . . . I choose to forgive him for cheating on Mom. I choose to forgive him for putting random women ahead of our family. I choose to forgive . . .” When you are done, throw the paper away (or burn it if that makes you feel better!).

Here is what happens when we take this first step of forgiveness. Imagine an old wooden bucket. Over the years, your family drops in glops of thick mud. These are the hurts and wounds you have experienced. Now, because your bucket is filled to the rim, any time someone in your house drops in another glop—boom! You are so filled with hurt and resentment from the past that any new offense causes everything to overflow. When we make the choice to forgive, it is like taking a hammer and smashing a hole in the bottom of the bucket. When we tear the hammer out, a nice big glop of mud comes out with it. Now, instead of 100 percent full of past hurt and resentment, we are only 95 percent full. As I have counseled hundreds of people through this process, many experience an immediate “lightening” of their spirit. While it may be only 5 percent, they sense a bit of emotional breathing room, something they haven’t felt for a long time.

But we still have a problem. We still have 95 percent of our old bitterness and anger in the bucket. That leads us into phase two.

### ***Phase 2—Forgiveness with the heart***

In Matthew 18:35, Jesus calls us to forgive our brother “from the heart.” The heart is God’s territory. He is the one who has the power to change our hearts. So, if we want our hearts changed, we have to ask God to do it. If we want that old bucket drained of all that bitterness, anger, and resentment, we must open our hearts to Him.

The second phase of forgiveness is a daily prayer. Your prayer may sound something like this: “Lord, I have chosen to forgive my dad. It was not easy to do, and I still don’t have anything close to warm feelings toward him. I am afraid to do this because I don’t want to get hurt again. But I chose to forgive him out of obedience. Now, I ask you to heal my heart. I don’t want to hate him. I don’t want to be filled with anger and resentment. I don’t want

his bad behavior to poison my life. I ask that you cleanse my heart of all those things so that I can be free . . . free to love you, and even to love my dad.”

I was in phase two for *six years*. It was six years of praying daily, “God, heal my heart. Take away my anger and bitterness.” Slowly and mercifully, God drained and cleaned out my old bucket. Later in our journey together I will share how God ultimately replaced my anger and bitterness toward my father with compassion.

### ***Phase 3—Reconciliation***

The final phase of forgiveness is when a relationship is healed and reconciled. But here is a hard truth—it is possible for God to bring us to a place of complete forgiveness without the relationship being fully healed. It may be that the family member who has hurt you never repents, never takes responsibility or changes his or her behavior. Reconciliation is not sweeping things under the rug and pretending they never happened. Reconciliation is not enabling or tolerating ongoing abuse. In the upcoming chapters, we will explore what true reconciliation looks like, and how the Lord can accomplish it. Our responsibility before the Lord, and to our family, is to do everything in our power, as far as it depends on us, to forgive and to *seek* reconciliation. In Romans 12:18, God says, “*If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*” We can’t control the attitudes and actions of our family members. They may have no interest in forgiveness or reconciliation. But, as far as it depends on us, we can still seek healing.

### **How Many Times Do I Need to Forgive?**

When a family member does something that hurts our feelings a couple of times, it may not feel like a big deal to forgive them. What if they do it ten times? Fifty times? Now it is a different story. You may remember that Jesus’ disciples asked Him about this. “Then Peter came up and said to him, ‘Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times’” (Matthew 18:21–22). Peter thought that forgiving his brother seven times for something was quite generous. Jesus blasted that out of the water when he called Peter to forgive seventy-seven times. This, of course, was not meant to be a literal number. Seventy-five, seventy-six, almost there! It was a call to a lifetime and lifestyle of forgiveness.

I once heard a powerful seminar by Jerry Root, a professor at Wheaton College. He emphasized how the call to forgive is first and foremost a choice we make for our own freedom and wholeness. He shared this illustration: If you have rats in your house, you don't get rid of them by eating a box of rat poison. That course of action won't do anything to the rats and might just kill you. Holding on to bitterness and anger hurts us far more than the person with whom we are in conflict. Jerry asked, "How many times should we say no to eating rat poison?" Every time. All the time. "Seventy-seven times." Choosing forgiveness is choosing freedom.

### **Are You Ready to Take a Step?**

The first step toward freedom is making the choice to forgive. Flip back a few pages and reread the section on "Phase 1—Forgiveness with the will." It may take about thirty minutes with you and the Lord to take this first step of obedience. However, for those of us who have experienced significant family trauma, it can take years before the Lord brings us to a place where we are ready or feel able to do this. If that is where you are right now, be honest with yourself and honest with God. But don't stop reading. God loves you and He will not abandon you. He will make the next step clear, then give you the strength to follow through. I believe the Lord led you to read this book because He wants to begin and accelerate healing in your life.

Perhaps you are ready to take this first action step of forgiveness. Find a quiet time to meet with God and boldly choose to obey His call to forgive. Write your list. Pray through it, then tear it up and throw it away. You have then taken a step on the path toward healing.

### **Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

1. When you were growing up, how did your family handle conflict and family problems?
2. Forgiveness is not easy. What may be holding you back from choosing to take the first step of forgiveness?
3. What relationship in your family is most challenging for you right now? Take time and pray specifically for God to bring healing and hope to that relationship.