I. **Letting Go and Forgiving**

A. *To “let go” is an important part of a victim’s healing*
   1. Saying “I am letting this go” sounds good but until you’ve learned how the process works you may become defeated before you begin.
   2. “Letting go” does not mean you forget or dismiss the abuse happened or excuse it.
      a. It does not mean your abuse wasn’t bad enough to hang on to.
      b. It does not mean you cover up the sin.
      c. It does not mean immediate reconciliation.
   3. “Letting go” does allow you to experience a better quality of life after abuse.
      a. It helps you to turn a negative into a positive.
      b. Letting go facilitates your physical and emotional healing.
      c. Letting go allows you to replace your unhealthy anger with productive healthy anger.
      d. Letting go frees up your time and produces energy and creativity
      e. Letting go allows you to experience Peace and Joy in spite of your painful past.
   4. The “letting go” process usually begins after you have told your story and examined the damage the abuse has done to you
      a. For many, letting go only happens after they have exhausted other avenues, and failed.
      b. Victims may feel that their abuser deserves their hate and animosity forever, and do not want to let it go, but in reality hanging on only prolongs our own pain.
   5. Learning to let go is a difficult process for it is a natural response to hold a grudge or want to get even with the one who has hurt you so badly.
   6. The truth is, you can never get even for what your abuser did to you.
   7. The best way to totally eliminate the negative influence your perpetrator has had over you is to mentally let go of the situation.
      a. Lift it up and give it to God and never take it back again.
   8. Some may interpret letting go as letting the abuser off the hook, but in reality it gets the VICTIM off the hook from depression, anxiety, fears, ill health, nightmares and a host of other problems.

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| Letting go happens when you are Convinced that holding on to the past only ADDS to your pain and dysfunction. |
| Letting go happens when you are Ready to move on, and want to get your abuser out of your head and your bed. |
| Letting go means you agree to Mentally let go of the ill feelings and bad memories your abuser brought you so you will have time and energy for the really important things in life, like your relationships and future. |

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B. **FORGIVENESS is a deep divine experience from God** for we cannot let it go on our own.

1. Many crimes against humanity are impossible to forgive without the intervention of God. Often, victims must ask God to help them be “willing” to forgive.
   a. When we release the person to Him and ask for forgiveness for our negative feelings against those who hurt us, God works that miracle of forgiveness in
our heart.
b. Forgiveness produces a wonderful freedom like we’ve never known before.

2. To forgive only out of fear of displeasing God or others, shortchanges the most important reason.
a. The motive to forgive should be to obey God and to do what’s best for you.
b. The task becomes easier when we understand fully its benefits and that God will help us do it.

3. The victim receives the advantages of forgiving, not the abuser.

4. The abuser doesn’t know what is transpiring in your heart and if they have not dealt with their sins, they most likely don’t really care.

![Box: If the perpetrator goes to jail, the victim should NOT feel guilty or responsible. There are consequences to sinful behavior, choices, and crimes, and your abuser needs to face them.]

5. After you have made the decision to forgive or let go you may feel a void or emptiness.
a. You spent a lot of time hating or wishing evil on him or her so Satan may try to temp you into picking your hate and self-pity back up. Don’t allow it! He’s out to defeat you.
b. This void or hole needs to be quickly filled with positive thoughts, activities, and conversations with God.

6. Forgiving your abuser does not mean you have to hang out with them as they may not be trustworthy to be with.
a. They need to prove they are trustworthy over time.
b. If your abuser was/is a pedophile, he or she will always need supervised visits around children as they may not be safe to be with.
c. Forgiving does NOT NECESSARILY mean reconciliation with the abuser.

7. Forgiveness is something that we do IN OUR HEARTS
   a. We release someone from a debt that they owe us
      a. Only ONE party is needed for Forgiveness: ME
         (1) The person who owes me a debt DOES NOT HAVE TO ASK MY FORGIVENESS
         (2) It is a Work of GRACE in MY heart
      b. RECONCILIATION is NOT always achieved.
         (1) God FORGAVE the world, but the whole world is NOT RECONCILED to Him.
         (2) Although He may have FORGIVEN ALL people, ALL people HAVE NOT OWNED their sin and appropriated His forgiveness
         (a) That would be reconciliation.

8. Forgiveness takes ONE; RECONCILIATION takes TWO.
a. We do NOT open ourselves up to the other party UNTIL we have seen that he/she has truly OWNED his/her part of the problem.
b. True repentance is much more than saying “I’m sorry”; it is changing direction.
   (1) You need to clearly communicate that, while you have forgiven him/her, you do NOT trust him/her for he/she has NOT PROVEN
him/herself trustworthy.

c. **God is your model.**
   (1) He DID NOT WAIT for people to CHANGE their BEHAVIOR before He stopped condemning them.
   (2) He is finished condemning, but that does NOT mean that He has a relationship with all people.
   (3) People must CHOOSE to OWN up to their sin and REPENT, then God will open Himself to them.
   (4) RECONCILIATION involves **two**.
   (5) **Do NOT think that because you have forgiven that you HAVE to RECONCILE.**
      (a) You can offer reconciliation, but it MUST be contingent upon the other person owning her behavior and bringing forth trustworthy fruits of repentance and change.

9. **Victims have a right to confront their abusers** and those who did not protect them, and give them a chance to be remorseful.
   a. If that is decided, be prepared to face the possibility that they may not be remorseful.
   b. They may be defensive and angry. If they are remorseful and ask for forgiveness, hopefully, you can forgive them.
   c. **It is God’s goal that we be reconciled with our PAST.** But, it is not necessary to tell those you have already forgiven that you forgave them if they have not repented and changed, and have asked for your forgiveness.

10. Confronting gives back power for some. But you **already know the truth** and so does your abuser even if they do not admit it. The truth will come out on judgment day and woe to your abuser!
   a. **If** you choose to confront them, **ALWAYS take along a safe person for your witness and protection.**

   **You cannot fix the past:** you cannot go back and change what already has been done; you cannot act as if it never happened. **However, you CAN be set FREE from the past.** You can become a NEW person in Christ, having a new identity and forgiving those who offended you.

Choose to be **FORWARD-Focused, NOT PAST-POSSSESSED.**

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<th>Traumatic childhood experiences can have a continual debilitating effect upon present life or every day living. You <strong>MUST deal with the past,</strong> but you <strong>CANNOT allow it to cripple</strong> you emotionally by constantly dwelling on it.</th>
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**Receive your healing.**  **Forgive yourself.**  **Forgiveness is GRACE – unmerited!**

11. **Forgiveness is NOT forgetting.** Forgetting **may** be the result of forgiveness, but it is never the means of forgiveness.

   **Causing** an injury puts **YOU BELOW** your **ENEMY.**
   **Avenging** an injury makes **YOU EVEN** with **HIM.**
   **Forgiving** him sets **YOU ABOVE** **HIM.** But more importantly, it sets you **FREE!**

12. Forgiveness is difficult for us because it pulls against our concept of justice.
a. We want revenge for offenses suffered, but we are told never to take our own revenge. (Rom. 12:19)
b. “Why should I let them off the hook?” you may ask.
c. That is precisely the problem – YOU are still hooked to them, still bound by your past.
d. You let them off YOUR hook, but they are never off God’s. He will deal with them fairly – (something we cannot do).
e. “But you don’t understand how much this person hurt me!” you may protest. But don’t you see, they are still hurting you!

You do not forgive someone for their sake; you do it for YOUR SAKE so you can be FREE.
Your need to forgive isn’t an issue between you and the offender; it’s between YOU and God.

13. The victim is justified in their anger, yet the only way to heal and walk past the abuse into healthy relationships is to forgive her abuser(s).
   a. I have never met a victim who initially wants to forgive her abuser, however part of that problem is in what we believe about forgiveness.

14. Forgiveness is scorned in certain recovery circles. It is currently politically correct to be “offended,” as it promotes the victim role, unrealistic thinking, and excuses self-responsibility.

Forgiveness doesn't mean a victim forgets what happened to her.
Forgiveness doesn't mean a victim resumes a relationship with her abuser.
Forgiveness doesn't mean that you forget about pressing criminal charges.
Forgiveness means you recognize that your abuser deserves eternal judgment and tell God that you trust Him to handle the judgment.

In other words, you recognize that your abuser deserves eternal punishment, but you are willing for God to be in control of that punishment.

“The best manner of avenging ourselves is by not resembling him who has injured us.”
Jane Porter

“Hating people is like burning down your own house to get rid of a rat.” -H.E. Fosdick

15. When you REFUSE to FORGIVE someone, you STILL WANT SOMETHING FROM THAT PERSON, even if it is revenge that you want
   a. UNFORGIVENESS keeps you TIED to that person FOREVER!
   b. If you do NOT FORGIVE, you are DEMANDING something your offender does not choose to give, even if it is only confession of what he did
   c. This “TIES” him to you and ruins boundaries

16. REFUSING TO FORGIVE a family member is one of the main reasons people are stuck for years, UNABLE TO SEPARATE from their dysfunctional families

17. It is much better to receive grace from God, who has something to give
a. **Forgiveness ends your suffering** because it *ends the wish for repayment* that is never forthcoming and that makes your heart sick because your hope is deferred.

   IF I am NOT FORGIVING someone, then I’m STILL in a DESTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIP with them.