



FORGIVEN TO FORGIVE SERIES

EMOTIONAL FORGIVENESS – MODULE 5 STUDENT HANDOUT

E: Empathize with the Offender (Without Excusing Sin)

Session Aim

To learn how to develop empathy toward the offender as a broken human being, without minimizing or excusing the wrong, and to allow this empathy to begin softening the heart toward emotional forgiveness.

Key Scriptures (KJV)

(Luke 23:34)

“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do...”

(Ephesians 4:32)

“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”

(Matthew 9:36)

“But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.”

(Romans 5:8)

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

(James 3:2)

“For in many things we offend all.”

1. What Does “Empathize” Mean?

In the REACH process, E stands for “Empathize.”

Empathy means:

- Trying to understand what it might be like to be the other person.
- Seeing them as a human being shaped by their own history, wounds, and sinful nature.
- Recognizing their brokenness, even while acknowledging their responsibility.

Simple definition:



- “Empathy is choosing to see the offender as a broken person, not just as the one who hurt me.”

Important:

- Empathy is not agreement.
- Empathy is not approval.
- Empathy is not saying “it was okay.”

Group questions:

1. When you hear the word “empathy,” what comes to your mind?
2. Why do you think empathy feels difficult when the injustice gap is large?

2. What Empathy Is NOT

To do this step correctly, you must avoid confusion.

Empathy is NOT:

- Excusing sin (“They had a hard life, so it’s fine”).
- Denying the offence (“It really wasn’t that bad”).
- Blaming yourself for what they did.
- Removing responsibility from the offender.

Truth must remain:

- What they did was wrong.
- They are accountable before God.

At the same time:

- They are also a sinner in need of mercy.

(James 3:2)

“For in many things we offend all.”

Group questions:

1. Which of these confusions about empathy do you struggle with most?
2. Why is it important to hold both truth (they sinned) and compassion (they are broken)?

3. Why Empathy Is Essential for Emotional Forgiveness

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Without empathy:

- The offender may harden even more in their wrong behaviour
- The offender remains a “one-dimensional villain,” and not a broken person too.
- Anger and contempt remain dominant.
- Emotional forgiveness cannot grow.

With empathy:

- The offender is more likely to respond less defensively
- Anger begins to soften into sorrow or compassion.
- You begin to see: “This person is not just evil; they are broken.”
- The emotional climate of your heart begins to change.

This reflects Christ:

(Matthew 9:36)

“But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion... as sheep having no shepherd.”

Empathy does not remove justice.

- It makes the offender more likely to reflect on their behaviour
- It changes your posture from hatred to compassion.

Group questions:

1. How does seeing someone as “broken” rather than just “bad” affect your emotions?
2. What is the difference between contempt and compassion in how you view a person?

4. The Ultimate Example: Jesus on the Cross

(Luke 23:34)

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do...”

Jesus:

- Does not deny the sin (“they do”).
- Recognizes their blindness (“they know not what they do”).
- Responds with intercession, not retaliation.

From a Oneness perspective:



- The same God who was offended by sin was manifest in flesh, experiencing human rejection and injustice.
- Yet He responded with compassion, not vengeance.

This is the pattern:

- Truth + understanding = compassion
- Not truth + pride = condemnation

Group questions:

1. What stands out to you most about Jesus' response on the cross?
2. How does His response challenge your natural reaction to being hurt?

5. How to Practice Empathy (Practical Steps)

Here are practical ways to begin developing empathy:

1. Consider their story
Ask:
 - What kind of environment might have shaped this person?
 - What wounds or patterns might they be carrying?
2. Recognize human weakness
 - People act out of fear, pride, insecurity, and sin.
 - Sometimes people hurt others because they themselves are deeply wounded.
3. Remember your own need for mercy
(Romans 5:8)
“...while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”
 - You have also offended others and needed forgiveness.
 - This humbles the heart and opens the door to compassion.
4. Separate the person from the act
 - “What they did was wrong.”
 - “But they are more than their worst act.”
5. Pray for them (even if it feels unnatural)
(Matthew 5:44)
“...pray for them which despitefully use you...”

Group questions:

1. Which of these practical steps feels most difficult for you? Why?
2. Which one do you think you could realistically begin this week?

6. A Guided Empathy Exercise

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You can do this quietly in the group or as homework.

Step 1: Name the person (privately, do not share if unsafe)

“Lord, I bring before You _____.”

Step 2: State the truth

“What they did was wrong. It hurt me deeply.”

Step 3: Ask God for insight

“Lord, help me to see this person the way You see them.”

Step 4: Consider possible factors (without excusing)

“Maybe they were acting out of fear... insecurity... selfishness... patterns they learned...”

Step 5: Acknowledge shared humanity

“Lord, I also have sinned and needed mercy.”

Step 6: Ask for a new heart posture

“Give me a heart that sees them as broken, not just as my offender.”

Write a short reflection:

7. Common Struggles in the Empathy Step

You may feel:

- “If I empathize, I’m letting them off the hook.”
- “They don’t deserve understanding.”
- “This feels unfair.”

These are real struggles.



Important truths:

- Empathy does not cancel justice. God still judges righteously.
- Empathy is about freeing your heart, not rewarding their behaviour.
- You are not saying, “They deserve forgiveness.” You are saying, “I choose to move toward forgiveness because God forgave me.”

(Romans 12:19)

“Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.”

Group questions:

1. Which of these struggles do you relate to most?
2. How does trusting God as Judge help you take a step toward empathy?

8. Personal Reflection With God

Take a few minutes before the Lord.

1. “Lord, when I think about this person, my strongest emotion is:”

2. “The hardest thing for me about empathizing with them is:”

3. “Lord, help me to see them not just as the one who hurt me, but as a broken person in need of Your mercy.”

Write a short prayer:

9. Memory Verse and Practice for the Week

Memory verse:

(Ephesians 4:32)

“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”



Suggested practice:

- Once this week, take 10–15 minutes and:
 1. Bring one offender before God.
 2. State clearly what they did (truth).
 3. Ask God to help you see them as a broken person (empathy).
 4. Pray for them in a simple way, even if it feels difficult.

Optional:

- Share with a trusted believer:

“I am working on the empathy step in forgiveness. Please pray that God will soften my heart without compromising truth.”

This module moves you from seeing only the offence to seeing the offender as a human soul. It prepares your heart for the next step, where forgiveness is offered as a gift flowing from the mercy you have received in Christ.