

Forgiveness Exams  
2: Seeking Understanding

The Practice of Understanding  
Seeing Childlikeness in Others

This practice is a second *TUF(R)* forgiveness examen that focuses on rehumanizing others by seeing the “child” inside of their public persona. This involves imagination and is NOT intended to be a psychological analysis of the other. Rather, your imaginative images of them as a child are to be held loosely, used only to rehumanize the one who has hurt you.

- I. Physically\* focus your gaze on someone that has hurt or offended you. This doesn't have to be their eyes, but it can be. Sometimes watching quietly when the other person doesn't know you're there can be very powerful.
- II. Take note of the person's body type, bone structure, hair, skin, clothing, jewelry, glasses, rings, purse, cell phone case; essentially, any object that is part of their public persona. Also, facial expressions, posture, gestures, and tone of voice (if they are speaking).
  - a. Imagine this person as a child. What did they look like? What was their physical presence? Ask, quietly to yourself, in a curious and compassionate way - *What happened to you?\**
  - b. Let your heart, if it will (don't force this) feel love and compassion for this young child.
- III. Now attend to the person's behavior (you can do this while watching them in action or by simply observing them when they are relatively inactive, for example, looking from behind in a church pew). Are they active or passive? Do they lead or follow? Are they compassionate or judging? Serious or relaxed/fun? Do they seem to be structured or freewheeling? (add your own to this list)
  - a. Once again, imagine this person as a child. Were they always this strong? Or, quiet and withdrawn? What did their five-year old facial expressions look like compared to the face you see today? Ask, quietly to yourself, in a curious and compassionate way - *What happened to you?\**
  - b. Let your heart, if it will (don't force this) feel love and compassion for this young child.
- IV. Reflect on the fact that this individual began life just as you did, in some respects.
  - a. What commonalities might the two of you have shared as children? (Socio-economic, family structure, personality, education...)
  - b. How might your journeys have been different?
  - c. Where is God in all of this?

\*note, once again, that feeling compassion and developing empathy does not excuse this person's adult behavior. However, here we begin, in humility, to recognize their humanity and our own.
- V. Take time to pull all of this together into a human narrative. How has this person's journey (circumstances/events/choices) brought them to where they are today? How has your own journey (circumstances/events/choices) brought you to where you are today? Without excusing hurtful behavior,

is it now possible to better understand how this person (or yourself) made choices to act hurtfully? This last question is complex. To help you with this, you might consider a phrase such as: *As an adult you could have made different choices (and are thus responsible for your actions), but I also understand how life brought you to this place and how your own suffering and fear led to this decision and action.*\*\*\*

\*I think this is most powerful if you can couple your imagination with being physically near the other person when doing this exercise. However, you can also do this as a purely imaginative exercise with physical proximity.

\*\**What happened to you*, can easily become a one-up attitude (What happened to you, you poor sad person?). Be careful of not putting yourself above the other. Also, remember that what you find by watching the other could be positive (You seem so free from worry).

\*\*\*Remember that understanding someone doesn't excuse "bad" or hurtful behavior.

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