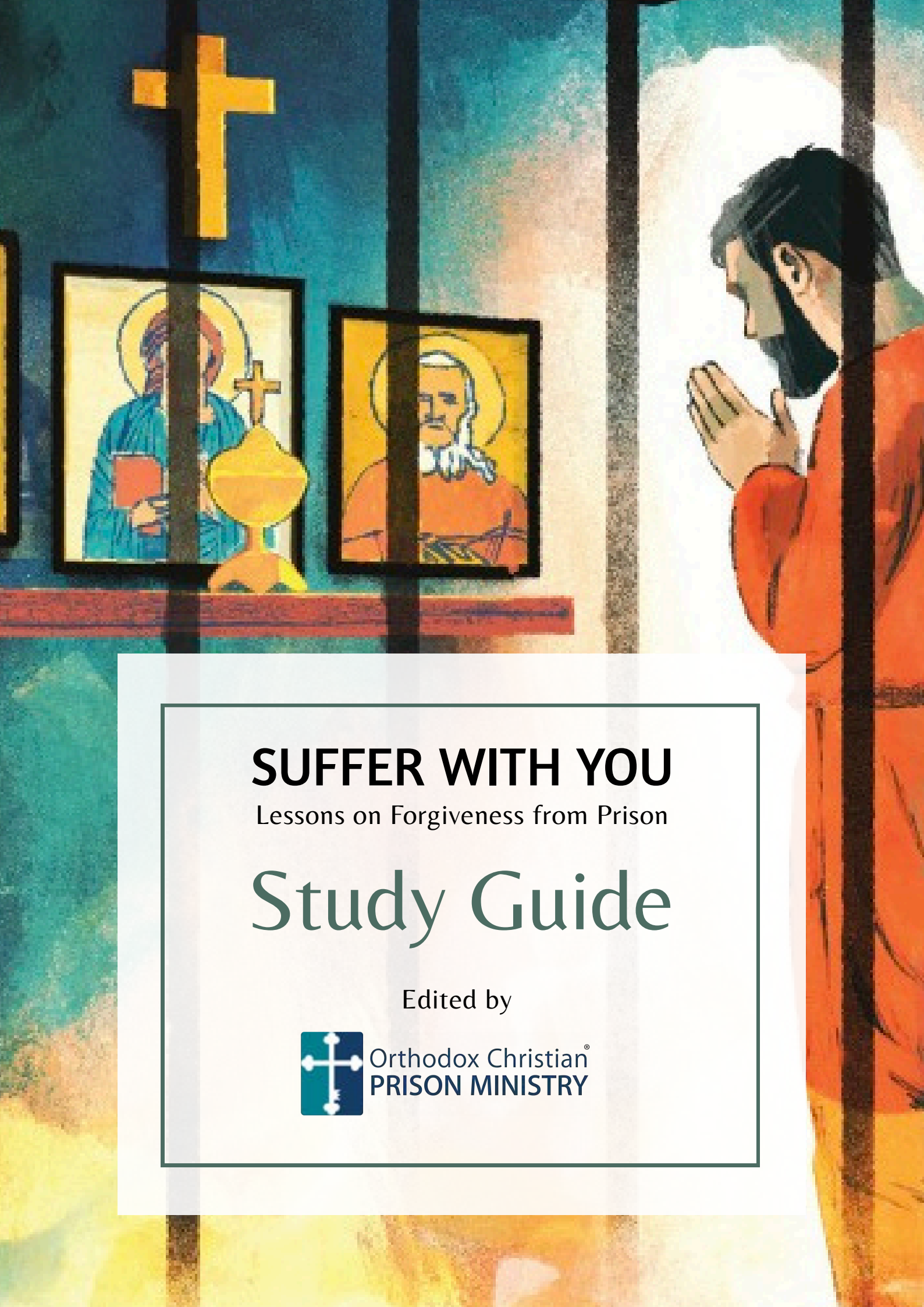




SUFFER WITH YOU

Lessons on Forgiveness from Prison

Study Guide

Edited by



Orthodox Christian[®]
PRISON MINISTRY

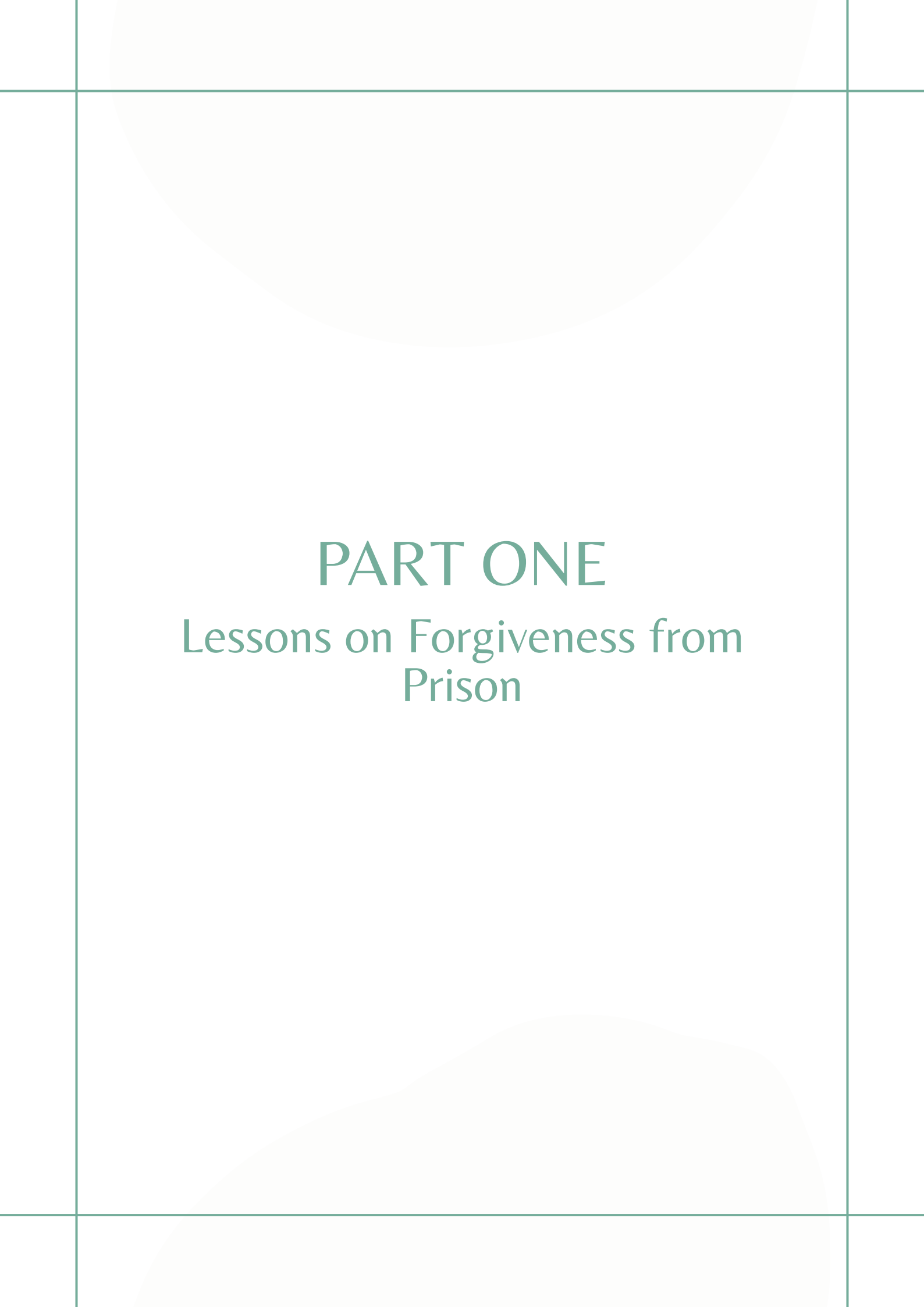
INTRODUCTION

Thank you for choosing to read *Suffer with You: Lessons on Forgiveness in Prison* as it was originally designed to be read: in community. We hope this study guide will allow your group to go deeper into these stories, challenging our own notions of forgiveness and leading us deeper into communion with Our Lord, with our brothers and sisters behind bars, and with each other.

JOURNAL

Before we begin reading *Suffer with You*, let's take a moment of journal about some of your initial thoughts on forgiveness. What does it mean to forgive someone? To forgive ourselves? What moments in your life until now have taught you the most about what forgiveness means?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



PART ONE

Lessons on Forgiveness from Prison

SUFFER WITH YOU: Forgiving My Mother's Murderer

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does Jaden say was the most surprising thing to happen to him in his day in the courtroom (p. 1-2)? Why was that so surprising to him?
2. Why do you think Jaden felt it was important to tell the reader that “he let Leonard think about that for eleven years”? (p. 2)
3. What was Jaden specifically afraid of before he wrote his first letter to Leonard? Why? (p. 9)
4. Why did Jaden feel he could understand a little of what Leonard was going through? (p. 10)
5. What has Jaden never asked Leonard? Why? (p. 10)
6. What is Jaden arguing that makes it easier for him to love Leonard? (p. 18) What do you think of this argument? Do you agree? Why or why not?
7. After reading Leonard and Jaden's letters firsthand, what do you make of their friendship? Do you have a friend like Leonard?

JOURNAL

Before Jaden and Leonard were able to become friends, there were a lot of things Jaden was trying not to remember, either purposely forgetting the date of his mother's death or refusing to say Leonard's name "for many years." (p. 6-7) Can you relate to this? Are there any memories you have tried to avoid as much as Jaden did? Why or why not?

[illegible]

I CANNOT CURSE THE PLACE OF MY REDEMPTION: Racial Reconciliation on the Prison Yard

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. After Mikhail's family immigrated to the United States, he describes his newfound freedom as "an American nightmare." What happened to Mikhail because of the "freedom" he was given in Hollywood, and why would this freedom leave "lifelong scars on [his] soul"? (p. 23-24)
2. Mikhail describes in detail how gradually he came to belong to a gang, but what was it that truly made "this way of life so appealing"? And why does he compare this to the Parable of the Prodigal Son? (p. 26-27)
3. What is the miracle that saved Mikhail's life? How does this differ from how we typically think or feel about miracles? (p. 30-31)
4. In prison, Mikhail encounters people with near-death experiences. Which testimony had the greatest effect on him and why? (p. 36-38)
5. What was the most difficult thing Mikhail had ever had to do? And what choice did this, in turn, force him to make? (p. 40-41)
6. How did praying The Canon for Racial Reconciliation change Mikhail? In his words, what did this teach him Christ did "before the foundation of the world"? (p. 45-47)
7. Why does Mikhail call prison "the perfect spiritual arena"? (p. 47-48)

JOURNAL

The darkness and heaviness of the prison cell is also where Mikhail most clearly felt God's redemptive grace. Are there times or places in your life God has led you to before that turned out more redemptive than they seemed at first? If so, how?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

WILL SHE EVER FORGIVE ME?

When Reconciliation is Not Possible

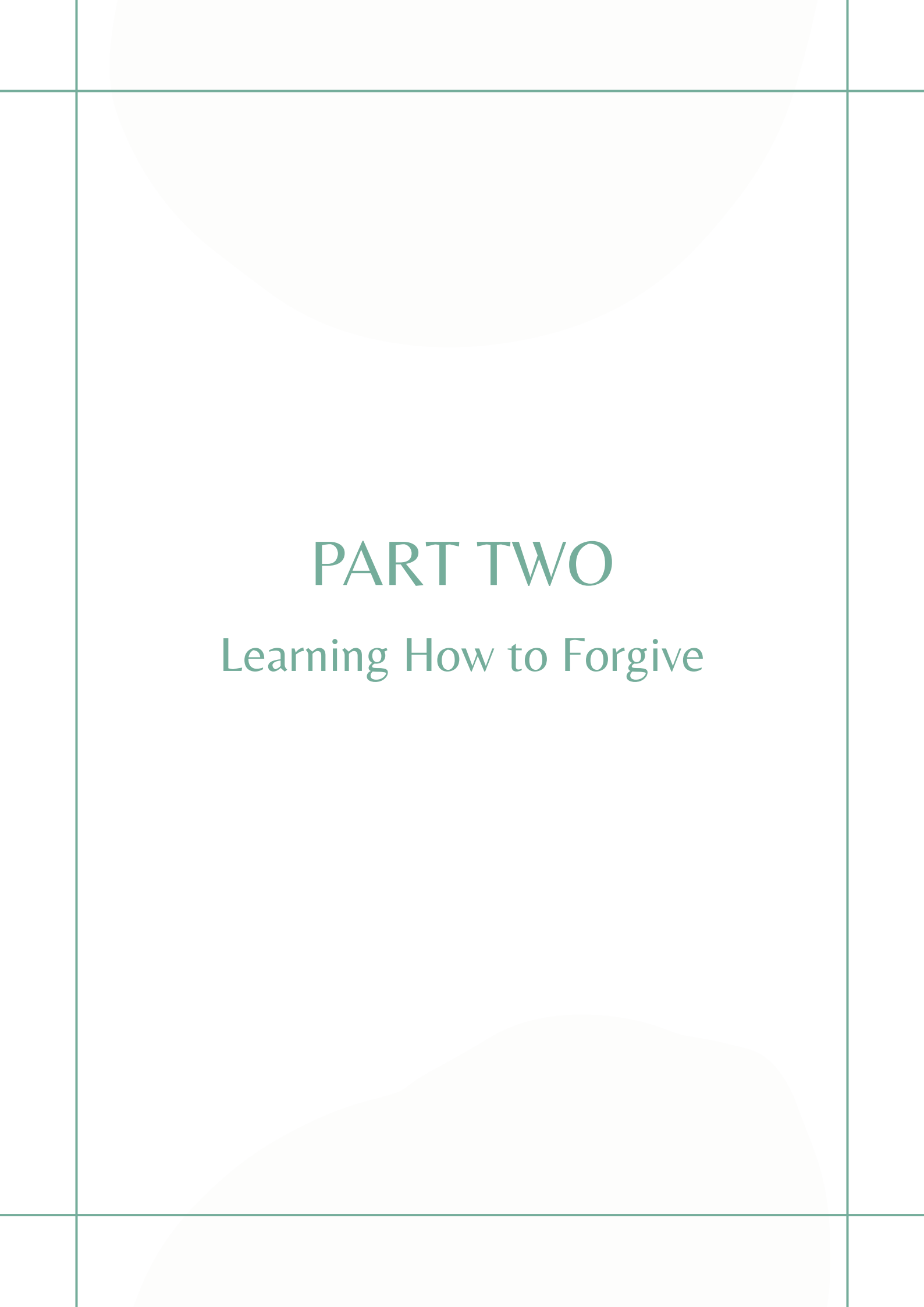
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why was Anatolius “devastated” before daughter’s birthday dinner? (p. 49-50)
2. Why do you think Anatolius restarts his story by giving you his baptismal name? (p. 50)
3. Why was Anatolius angry with Elizabeth? (p. 51-52)
4. How was Anatolius’ sentence different than he expected? What was he allowed to take with him to prison? (p. 51-52)
5. How does Woody challenge Anatolius’ ideas of forgiving himself and others? (p. 53-54) Has someone challenged you like this before, either directly or simply by their example?
6. “With the guide of OCPM and the wisdom of the Church Fathers, I began looking back at the things, events, and people I had been blaming for my downfall.” (p. 59) Anatolius describes how the writings of the Church helped him in a very personal way, encouraging him to face painful patterns from his past. What writings of the Church or the Church Fathers have most helped you in a personal way like this? Why?
7. What could Anatolius not find in the Bible or any writings of the Church Fathers before teaching the Victim Empathy class? (p. 63) Does this surprise you?
8. According to Anatolius, what would continuing to focus on gaining Elizabeth’s forgiveness mean for the rest of his life? (p. 74)

JOURNAL

Anatolius' essay especially complicates our notions of forgiveness, as most of us are so often in the habit of asking other people to forgive us. Embracing Victim Empathy is not easy. Take a moment to journal about some of your thoughts on Victim Empathy: why would this be easy for you to practice in your own life? Why would it be difficult? What would need to change? Are there any people God is especially bringing to your mind after reading this chapter?

[illegible]



PART TWO

Learning How to Forgive

HEALING THROUGH FORGIVENESS: Giving Our Whole Lives as an Offering to God

HOW TO READ THIS CHAPTER AS A GROUP

Part Two of *Suffer with You, Healing Through Forgiveness: Giving Our Whole Lives as an Offering to God*, is a guided reflection and prayer service. The questions included in this chapter may be used as discussion questions and/or journal prompts as you go through the chapter.

As you have been reading *Suffer with You* in community, your book group may choose to read *Healing Through Forgiveness* aloud over two or three meetings, praying and/or journaling as you are prompted. For another option, members in your group might prefer to read, pray, and journal through this chapter individually and then regroup to share about your experiences.

This Study Guide includes blank journal pages to assist in whichever way you would like to approach this chapter.

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[illegible]

[illegible]

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[illegible]

CONCLUSION

Thank you for journeying through *Suffer with You: Lessons on Forgiveness in Prison*. We pray God has blessed this time for you and your book group to shape not just how we see our brothers and sisters behind bars, but to bring you deeper into the difficult and merciful work toward which God is calling each of us: to embrace God's forgiveness and to freely offer forgiveness to others.

What did you think of *Suffer with You*? How was it reading the book in community? If you have thoughts or questions you'd like to share, you can reach us directly at communications@theocpm.org. We would love to hear from you!

NOTES

PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES

CORRESPONDENCE AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Let us know if you're interested in having a pen pal. Write to us any time and a Prisoner Relationship Manager on OCPM's staff will write back! We want to get to know you, answer your questions, and provide access to the Orthodox Church and our community.

PUBLICATIONS

We freely send our publications upon request. Icons and self-directed study courses are available through OCPM on Orthodox Christian theology as an introduction to the Orthodox Faith as well as preparation for Baptism and Chrismation

FOR MORE INFO, PLEASE WRITE TO US:

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