



Forgiveness

Leaders Notes + Activity Ideas

Forgiveness is a frequent topic for sermons and articles, probably because we struggle with it so much. This does not attempt to be another article. This is a collection of back-up material to help leaders teach on this topic.

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Bible references

Genesis 37-50, excluding 38; 48; 49
Luke 11:4 – forgive us as we forgive others
Psalm 103:8-12 - as far as the east is from the west ...
Romans 8:28 – God works everything for good

1 Samuel 18-31 - The story of David and Saul
Luke 7:37-50 - The parable of the two debtors
Matthew 18:21-35 - The parable of the unforgiving servant

What is forgiveness?

Forgiveness is NOT

- Approving what they did
- Denying to yourself that it has hurt you
- Pretending to others that you are fine
- Forgetting - if the offense is big, you may never forget, but you can still forgive.
- Doing nothing to change a situation
- Reconciliation - It takes one person to forgive, it takes two people to be reunited.

Forgiveness IS

- Choosing not to get your own back. Forgiveness says, "I could, but I won't."
- Choosing to be kind when to do so would be an effort;
- Choosing to be unselfish when the opposite is much more attractive.

- Choosing not to dwell on it in your mind. Ask God to help you not to think about it.
- Choosing to let it go. One woman wrote, "I used to replay the video tapes of what he said and did over and over in my mind. Then one day I let it all go and I was free."
- Choosing not to keep talking about it because that will keep it alive and hurting.
- Re-forgiving when it all comes flooding back. Forgiving is not a one-off act, it is an ongoing attitude
- A peaceful state of mind
- Praying that God would bless them

Thoughts

It is impossible to live on this fallen planet without getting hurt, offended, misunderstood, lied to, and rejected.

Forgiveness brings peace and creates the attitude necessary to make a new beginning. It allows people to move on.

You have a straight choice: pain or peace. Hold on to the hurt and it corrodes everything. Replay it in your mind, over and over, and the pain will grow and perhaps become hate. Let the hurt go and, though it may take time, the pain will go. It's forgive or fester.

Forgiveness is not saying that things are okay now, and then going back into an abusive situation. It is not letting someone off the hook by saying, "You didn't do anything wrong."

Some people think that forgiveness is unconditional love with no boundaries or accountability. It is not. Forgiveness is not denial that a hurtful situation exists, and it isn't denying the fact that your feelings are hurt. And forgiveness does not mean you accept the person's behavior.

Having a nature of not forgiving others brings about bitterness, and bitterness has been linked to stress-related illnesses by some medical researchers. By forgiving others, we free ourselves spiritually and emotionally. Forgiveness is an act of our own personal will, trusting God to bring emotional healing.

People who have experienced abuse, trauma, or loss need time to sort things out and let God bring them to the place of forgiveness in His time. God's timing is always the right time for each individual. The act of forgiving others is between us and God. The only time we need to forgive a person face-to-face is at the moment we are asked by that person to forgive them for the hurt they have caused.

Sack of Spuds

... A college professor, teaching on the weight of unforgiveness, asked each of her students to bring a sack of potatoes to class.

For each person they refused to forgive, they had to select a potato and write the date on it beside that person's name. Then for a month, without fail, they had to carry that sack of potatoes with them everywhere they went.

After lugging those sacks around for a while each student began to recognize how much weight they were carrying, the amount of energy it took to focus on their bag, and that they had to be careful not to leave it in the wrong place.

Eventually, as the potatoes began to rot and stink, they realized that getting rid of them was the only sensible move.

Extract from Word 4U 2Day 06 Sep 2012:
<http://www.ucb.co.uk> Word 4U 2Day is

There are things we can do to help those struggling with the forgiveness of others. We can support them with encouraging words and by listening to them. Taking our time and being gentle with them will allow them to progress through the steps of forgiveness the way God wants them to proceed.

It's much easier to forgive others once we realize how much God has forgiven us.

Forgiving can be difficult. We need God's grace to help us. In Hebrew the word "grace / chen" denotes the **stronger coming to the help of the weaker** who stands in need of help by reason of his circumstances or natural weakness."¹

A positive story from a self-help web site:

<http://www.kikiramsey.com/the-keys-to-forgiveness-will-set-you-free/>

The burnt toast story by Abhinav Duggal:

<http://inspiringquotes.in/inspirational-life-story-keys-to-creating-a-healthy-growing-and-lasting-relationship/#more-8439>

Quotes

- Forgiveness is a funny thing. It warms the heart and cools the sting. William Arthur Ward
- I've learned that no matter how good a friend someone is, they're going to hurt you every once in a while and you must forgive them for that.
- Always forgive your enemies - nothing annoys them so much. Oscar Wilde
- Not forgiving is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die.
- "One of the secrets of a long and fruitful life is to forgive everybody everything before you go to bed." Ann Landers
- To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you. Lewis B. Smedes
- Forgiveness is not about forgetting. It's about letting go of another person's throat.
The Shack: William P Young
- To forgive is the highest, most beautiful form of love. Robert Muller
- The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong. Mahatma Gandhi
- When a deep injury is done us, we never recover until we forgive" Paul Boese
- Never forget the three powerful resources you always have available to you: love, prayer, and forgiveness." H. Jackson Brown, Jr.
- The practice of forgiveness is our most important contribution to the healing of the world.
Marianne Williamson
- Forgiveness gives freedom. Freedom makes your heart open toward other people. P. Hanes

Longer/more adult quotes

- Vengeance is having a videotape planted in your soul that cannot be turned off. It plays the painful scene over and over again inside your mind... And each time it plays you feel the clap of pain again... Forgiving turns off the videotape of pained memory. Forgiving sets you free.”
Lewis B. Smedes
- “When you hold resentment toward another, you are bound to that person or condition by an emotional link that is stronger than steel. Forgiveness is the only way to dissolve that link and get free.” Catherine Ponder
- There is an important difference between trust and forgiveness. Forgiveness is letting go of the past. Trust has to do with future behaviour. It must be rebuilt over time. It requires a track record. You are not expected to trust them immediately and you are not expected to continue allowing them to hurt you. Rick Warren
- Don't worry about whether the other person apologizes. Don't worry about whether or not they understand you. Just love them and release them. After a few years they may reach a point where they do understand.
- When we forgive evil we do not excuse it, we do not tolerate it, we do not smother it. We look the evil full in the face, call it what it is... and only then do we forgive it. Lewis B. Smedes
- I believe this is **keeping more people from having power with God** than any other thing — they are not willing to cultivate the spirit of forgiveness.² Moody, D. L.
- Forgiveness is an active struggle, not a passive act of letting anger diminish over time. P. Hanes

Sources

- <http://www.allaboutgod.com/definition-for-forgiveness-faq.htm>
- www.thinkexist.com
- Emmanuel church notice sheet sermon summary
- The Care for the Family web site article on 'The Highway Code for Marriage', by Hilary and Michael Perrot, published by CWR www.careforthefamily.org.uk
- <http://www.ucb.co.uk> Word 4U 2Day is produced by UCB. Free issues are available in the UK and online
- ¹ ESSER, H.-H. *Grace*. In: BROWN, C. (ed.) *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology 2*, Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1976, p. 116
- ² MOODY, D. L. *Prevailing Prayer*, New York : Fleming H. Revell, 1885, p. 59

Credits:

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Games & Interactive Ideas

Game: Get your own back

We did this as a game based on the TV show ‘Deal or no deal’ called ‘Forgive or no forgive’ and two of our young people ran it. Alternatively you could do it as game called ‘Get your own back’. Some groups would enjoy using their imaginations to think of suggestions for ‘getting your own back’ for the situations you present them with. This could provide a good basis for discussion if you wanted to use it like this.

How to play: Think of a range of situations where someone has wronged or upset another person. They need to be examples that your group can relate to. Start with smaller things and go on to cover more difficult situations.

Ask the group or the ‘contestant’ to decide

- Forgive at once
- Forgive eventually
- Don’t forgive
- Pay a forfeit

For example

Your brother/sister borrows your favourite outfit/game & ruins it. Do you

- a) Say “That’s all right, any time!”
- b) Wait until you’ve calmed down, then explain through gritted teeth that you would appreciate it if he/she would ask first before borrowing your things and take better care of them.
- c) Explode in anger and go and

Think of some more detailed / amusing ways of getting your own back as options for the answers.

Activity – Make A Coat of Forgiveness - May suit younger groups

Give them an opportunity to think about everything that is involved with forgiveness (feelings, thoughts, actions, etc). Prepare a large paper-coat, or let them draw and cut one out. They can then discuss and write on that coat everything they think is involved with forgiveness (each element of forgiveness will represent a separate part of the coat). They can work in groups and present their coats to each other.

With this activity we can find out how well they understand the concept of forgiveness. It gives them a chance to put together all pieces, and to present their understanding of this important concept.

Activity - IS / IS NOT (See page

Ask the group to make 2 lists or posters –

Forgiveness IS and

Forgiveness is NOT

Activity – newspaper or biography

Look at some modern / contemporary situations e.g. Corrie ten Boom, a newspaper report or someone know to the group. A personal story would be brilliant.

Discussion groups - suggestions for questions

- What is the importance of forgiveness?
- What types of things are easy / difficult to forgive?
- Is it easier to forgive someone we love or someone with whom we don't have a meaningful relationship?
- Who is affected the most if we don't forgive?
- How does it feel to be forgiven/hold a grudge?
- Is there anything that helps you when you're struggling to forgive someone?

Reflection/Worship/Prayer time - suggestions

1. Write down any situation where you need to forgive someone. (If you can't think of anything, ask God to remind you or pray for someone you know who is struggling with this.)
2. If there are painful memories, ask God to heal that & to help you to forgive them.
3. Pray for anyone who has hurt you. They struggle with life too. It may have been a misunderstanding.
4. Commit yourself to continue to pray for them. It is much harder to hold a grudge against someone we are praying for.
5. If you still have a problem, repeat steps 2-4 at regular intervals and read more on this.
6. Ask God to show you whether you maybe sometimes hurt other people and how to avoid that.

Pray for anyone in the group who is battling with this problem. Pray for healing for them and blessing on the other person. The ability to go and ask someone for forgiveness is also very important. Everyone expects that someone else will come and say "Please, forgive me", but it's much harder to go and ask someone "Can you please forgive me?" Saying 'sorry' can mean so much to people.

Forgiveness Prayer Space Activity / Collage

- ✦ Have a selection of quotes on forgiveness written on coloured papers on the table or floor.
- ✦ Let them pick the one they like best and/or write one of their own.
- ✦ Some groups might like to take turns to read out their quote and say why they like it.
- ✦ They could make up a collage from their favourites.
- ✦ Include space for sorry/forgiveness prayers.
- ✦ Some of the quotes might inspire a picture.

✦ Which of these quotes on forgiveness do you like best?

✦ What do **you** think forgiveness is?

✦ Draw a picture or write a prayer on forgiveness

- + Forgiveness is a funny thing.
It warms the heart and cools the sting.
- + I've learned that no matter how good a friend someone is, they're going to hurt you every once in a while and you must forgive them for that.
- + The weak can never forgive.
Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.
- + Always forgive your enemies -
nothing annoys them so much!
- + Not forgiving is like drinking poison
and waiting for the other person to die.
- + One of the secrets of a long and fruitful life is to
forgive everybody everything before you go to bed.
- + To forgive is to set a prisoner free
and discover that the prisoner was you.
- + Forgiveness is not about forgetting.
It's about letting go of another person's throat.
- + To forgive is the highest, most beautiful form of love.
- + When a deep injury is done us,
we never recover until we forgive.
- + Never forget the three powerful resources you always have
available to you: love, prayer, and forgiveness."
- + The practice of forgiveness is our most important
contribution to the healing of the world.