

Icebreaker

Forgiveness is or can be tricky. Tell of a time when you were a child or younger than you are now and talk about a situation that required forgiveness. Was it difficult to forgive or not? Explain.

Opening Prayer

Dear Lord, maker of the universe, please be with us as you search our hearts. Please help us to open our lives to those around us. Discard our turtle-like shells and allow us to be honest with each other. If there is fear in our souls, calm our anxiety and give us peace. Help us to listen to each other, help us to be authentic, and show us how to love as you taught us from your word. In Jesus' name, amen.

Open It

1. What does it mean to forgive someone? Do you, can you ever wipe the hurt entirely from your memory? Does that mean you've not forgiven the wrong if you can't? What do you think?
2. What if someone called you a liar and an evil person behind your back, never confronting you or asking for your forgiveness? How would you feel about that situation? What would you do?
3. Further, say you found out about what the person said in #2 through another friend; could you forgive the person who wronged you? How would you go about it? What would you do?
4. Does forgiveness require confrontation? Are they related in any way? Explain what you mean.
5. How does not forgiving someone factor into the forgiving equation? What's the relationship?

John 15:12-17 Jesus is talking to his disciples much as if he were talking to us today as Christians. 12 "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. 13 "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. 14 "You are My friends if you do what I command you. 15 "No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. 16 "You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you. 17 "This I command you, that you love one another."¹

Explore It

1. Why did God choose to forgive sinful people? What's the motivation here? How can we make sense of that theological understanding?
2. Is there anything you could do to another person for which there would be no forgiveness? If so, what and why?
3. In **I Cor 6:1-7** it seems to indicate that as Christians, we are foolish to bring lawsuits against other Christians. In v7, it further says it's better to be wronged or defrauded than to get involved in legal wrangling. What does this mean anyway? Does it mean I have no right to what's legally mine?

¹The New American Standard Bible, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

Jesus tells another story about forgiveness. It's likely familiar to you. Instead of just reading it, see if it might become more apparent if a few people act out the parts. Do it as a drama. Have fun with it. You'll need a spokesperson, a woman, Jesus, a Pharisee, and the crowd. Enjoy it!

8:1 BUT Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2, And early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; He sat down and *began* to teach them. 3 And the scribes and the Pharisees *brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the midst, 4 they *said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. 5 "Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?" 6 And they were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and, with His finger, wrote on the ground. 7 But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, "**He who is without sin among you, let him *be the first to throw a stone at her.***" 8 And again He stooped down, and wrote on the ground. 9 And when they heard it, they *began* to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the midst. 10 And straightening up, Jesus said to her, "**Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?**" 11 And she said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "**Neither do I condemn you; go your way. From now on, sin no more.**"² John 8:1-11

Get It

1. Imagine what or how this woman must have felt. Close your eyes for a moment, and think about being caught in a vulnerable situation where you know you did wrong. Imagine many friends or acquaintances all staring at you, knowing the awful deed you did. What are you feeling right now? Do you feel exposed, like someone with no clothes? Explain the pain if you can.
2. It's hard to imagine forgiveness because you are so exposed. Sometimes we're not the condemned but the condemner. Is it easy to notice when people around you are doing wrong? What do you do when you see the wrong? How do/would you handle something like that appearing in v4?
3. Jesus didn't condemn this person caught in sin; He encouraged her to go and sin no more. When was the last time you took an opportunity to tell someone you loved them, even though they were in the wrong? Have you ever had this kind of opportunity? Briefly describe a similar situation.
4. What should we learn from this section of scripture?

Apply It

How can we make forgiveness part of our life? One way is to practice forgiving others. Who has wronged you significantly within the last three or six months, or go back as far as you need to and remember a painful situation? Now devote some significant prayer time to forgiving. Plan to pray about this situation every day for the next two weeks. Commit to forgiving the wrong. After praying about it for two weeks, make a point to affirm the person you have been praying for and allow God to change your heart.

Closing Prayer - please ask about praise reports or issues needing prayer

Heavenly Father, you have forgiven us for our shortcomings, sins, and brokenness as human beings. You didn't have to; you chose to. You decided we were worth it, and you sent your Son to speak to us and help us understand what forgiveness is all about. Send us on our way now, encouraged, refreshed, invigorated, and alive with your love. Keep us safe till we meet again. Amen.

² *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.