



Forgiveness: A Group Study

Description: Small group session discussing forgiveness
Materials: Bibles! And this handout
Course time: 60-90 minutes, depending on discussion.
 Discussion will be more lively if the scripture passages are given out prior to the session so people have time to study them.
 It is *not recommended* that the questions or handouts are given out ahead of time: this is a discovery session that works best when the group's wisdom and experience is combined.

<h1 style="color: #0056b3;">Forgiveness</h1>	
Opening:	The Lord's Prayer
Illumina	In this day of constant lawsuits and incessant demands for legal rights, Paul's command sounds almost impossible. When someone hurts you deeply, instead of giving him what he deserves, Paul says to befriend him. Why does Paul tell us to forgive our enemies? (1) Forgiveness may break a cycle of retaliation and lead to mutual reconciliation. (2) It may make the enemy feel ashamed and change his or her ways. (3) By contrast, returning evil for evil hurts you just as much as it hurts your enemy. Even if your enemy never repents, forgiving him or her will free you of a heavy load of bitterness.
Phillip Yancey: "What's so Amazing about Grace?"	<p>The law of nature admits no forgiveness. Our man-made institutions, politics, finances – all run on this principle.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Umpires do not call ball players safe when they were out because they led a good life that week. • Nations do not publish statements like, "yes, we violated your borders – will you forgive us?" <p>Only people forgive.</p> <p>The nature of forgiveness: "It is not a sweet platonic ideal to be dispensed in the world like air-freshener sprayed from a can. Forgiveness is achingly difficult, and long after you've forgiven, the wound lives on in memory. Forgiveness is an unnatural act. Behind every act of forgiveness lies a wound of betrayal, and the pain of being betrayed does not easily fade away. Forgiving is the most unnatural act a human being ever performs.</p>
W.H. Auden (poet)	I, and the public know What all school children learn, Those to whom evil is done Do evil in return.
Elizabeth O'Conner	"Despite a hundred sermons on forgiveness, we do not forgive easily nor find ourselves easily forgiven. Forgiveness, we discover, is always harder than sermons make it out to be. We nurse sores, go to elaborate lengths to rationalize our behavior, perpetuate family feuds, punish ourselves, punish others – all to avoid this most unnatural act."
Former President Bill Clinton	(while in office) "I've been in politics long enough to expect criticism and hostility. But I was unprepared for the hatred I got from Christians. Why do Christians hate so much?"
It's a BIG topic!	



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<p>Questions About Forgiving</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the purpose of forgiving? • Why is there a need to forgive anything to begin with? • Why should I forgive anybody? • Does God always forgive? • What part does confession play in forgiveness? • If I forgive someone, won't they just do the same thing again? Shouldn't they have to pay for their actions? • How do I get past the feelings and hurt so I can forgive?
<p>The Purpose Of Forgiveness:</p>	<p>1 Peter 3:8-12 (GW) ⁸ Finally, everyone must live in harmony, be sympathetic, love each other, have compassion, and be humble. ⁹ Don't pay people back with evil for the evil they do to you, or ridicule those who ridicule you. Instead, bless them, because you were called to inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ "People who want to live a full life and enjoy good days must keep their tongues from saying evil things, and their lips from speaking deceitful things. ¹¹ They must turn away from evil and do good. They must seek peace and pursue it. ¹² The Lord's eyes are on those who do what he approves. His ears hear their prayer. The Lord confronts those who do evil."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does this passage say you should live relative to other people? • Why does it say you should live this way? • Is there a blessing that goes with living this way? • Only possible if forgiveness is a staple item in your life! • So what does forgiving accomplish?
<p>Why do we do things that need forgiveness?</p>	<p>Genesis 3:17-19, 23 (GW) ¹⁷ Then he said to the man, "You listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree, although I commanded you, 'You must never eat its fruit.' The ground is cursed because of you. Through hard work you will eat {food that comes} from it every day of your life. ¹⁸ The ground will grow thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat wild plants. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow, you will produce food to eat until you return to the ground, because you were taken from it. You are dust, and you will return to dust."</p> <p>²³ So the LORD God sent the man out of the Garden of Eden to farm the ground from which the man had been formed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because we don't know how to act right! • It's a result of the fall, when we choose to decide for ourselves what is right and wrong. My right is sometimes the same thing as your wrong! So we clash with each other.
	<p>Luke 11:4 (GW) ⁴ "Forgive us as we forgive others"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We think of sin as being directed towards God, but scripture is clear that we sin against each other too. • The word 'trespass' means to infringe on someone else's right to something, or to go where you have not been given permission to go by the person who holds that authority. • The Lord's prayer – forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us – is talking about the infringements we make on others and the vice-versa. <p style="text-align: center;">○</p>



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Why should I forgive?	<p>Matthew 6:14-15 (GW) (Jesus answering the disciples about how to pray) ¹⁴“If you forgive the failures of others, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your failures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does this mean my eternal life is conditioned on whether I forgive others or not?• Does this mean I will be forgiven at the same time, or in the same way as I forgive?
	<p>Reason 1 (<i>not in any specific order</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-centered – it is in your best interest to forgive so you will be forgiven.
	<p>Reason 2 - it is a command</p> <p>Matthew 5:38-48 (GW) ³⁸“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹ But I tell you not to oppose an evil person. If someone slaps you on your right cheek, turn your other cheek to him as well. ⁴⁰ If someone wants to sue you in order to take your shirt, let him have your coat too. ⁴¹ If someone forces you to go one mile, go two miles with him. ⁴² Give to everyone who asks you for something. Don't turn anyone away who wants to borrow something from you. ⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I tell you this: Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you. ⁴⁵ In this way you show that you are children of your Father in heaven. He makes his sun rise on people whether they are good or evil. He lets rain fall on them whether they are just or unjust. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, do you deserve a reward? Even the tax collectors do that! ⁴⁷ Are you doing anything remarkable if you welcome only your friends? Everyone does that! ⁴⁸ That is why you must be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.</p> <p>Luke 17:3-4 (GW) ³ So watch yourselves! “If a believer sins, correct him. If he changes the way he thinks and acts, forgive him. ⁴ Even if he wrongs you seven times in one day and comes back to you seven times and says that he is sorry, forgive him.”</p> <p>Ephesians 4:32 (GW) ³² Be kind to each other, sympathetic, forgiving each other as God has forgiven you through Christ.</p> <p>Colossians 3:13 (GW) ¹³ Put up with each other, and forgive each other if anyone has a complaint. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You are commanded to forgive as you have been forgiven by the Lord.
	<p>Reason 3 - God's plan</p> <p>Genesis 45:5-8 (GW) ⁵ Now, don't be sad or angry with yourselves that you sold me. God sent me ahead of you to save lives. ⁶ The famine has been in the land for two years. There will be five more years without plowing or harvesting. ⁷ God sent me ahead of you to make sure that you would have descendants on the earth and to save your lives in an amazing way. ⁸ It wasn't you who sent me here, but God. He has made me {like} a father to Pharaoh, lord over his entire household, and ruler of Egypt.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• There may be more going on than is evident.• God may have brought on the situation as part of His plan.



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	<p style="text-align: center;">Reason 4 - spiritual warfare</p> <p>Job 1:1-12 (GW) ¹ A man named Job lived in Uz. He was a man of integrity: He was decent, he feared God, and he stayed away from evil. ⁶ One day when the sons of God came to stand in front of the LORD, Satan the Accuser came along with them. ⁷ The LORD asked Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From wandering all over the earth." ⁸ The LORD asked Satan, "Have you thought about my servant Job? No one in the world is like him! He is a man of integrity: He is decent, he fears God, and he stays away from evil." ⁹ Satan answered the LORD, "Haven't you given Job a reason to fear God?" ¹⁰ Haven't you put a protective fence around him, his home, and everything he has? You have blessed everything he does. His cattle have spread out over the land. ¹¹ But now stretch out your hand, and strike everything he has. I bet he'll curse you to your face." ¹² The LORD told Satan, "Everything he has is in your power, but you must not lay a hand on him!" Then Satan left the LORD'S presence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are spiritual realities going on which we are unaware of. • Job never knew about the spiritual 'bet'. • We don't know why God allowed satan to go after Job, but we <i>do</i> know that God allowed it. • The battle we fight is not only physical. It has a spiritual reality that may be more important than what we are able to see.
	<p style="text-align: center;">Reason 5 - healing</p> <p>Psalms 103:1-6 (GW) ¹ By David. Praise the LORD, my soul! Praise his holy name, all that is within me. ² Praise the LORD, my soul, and never forget all the good he has done: ³ He is the one who forgives all your sins, the one who heals all your diseases, ⁴ the one who rescues your life from the pit, the one who crowns you with mercy and compassion, ⁵ the one who fills your life with blessings so that you become young again like an eagle. ⁶ The LORD does what is right and fair for all who are oppressed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does this song say that God has done for David? • Forgiveness brings the healing of God into our hearts. • Look at verse 6; what does this song tell you about what God does for you? • If you were to write a song to the Lord about what He has done in your life, what would it include?
<p>Does God <u>Always</u> Forgive?</p>	<p>Numbers 14:18-19 (GW) ¹⁸ 'The LORD...patient, forever loving....He forgives wrongdoing and disobedience....He never lets the guilty go unpunished, punishing children...for their parents' sins to the third and fourth generation....' ¹⁹ By your great love, please forgive these people's sins, as you have been forgiving them from the time they left Egypt until now."</p> <p>Psalms 86:4-8 (GW) ⁴ Give me joy, O Lord, because I lift my soul to you. ⁵ <i>You, O Lord, are good and forgiving, full of mercy toward everyone who calls out to you.</i> ⁶ Open your ears to my prayer, O LORD. Pay attention when I plead for mercy. ⁷ When I am in trouble, I call out to you because you answer me. ⁸ No god is like you, O Lord. No one can do what you do.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It appears that God can forgive and yet still punish. Explain this. • What is the connection between mercy and forgiveness? • God is full of unfailing love and will always forgive because of it.



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<p>What part Does Confession play?</p>	<p>Psalm 51:1-8 (GW) ¹ For the choir director; a psalm by David when the prophet Nathan came to him after David's adultery with Bathsheba. Have pity on me, O God, in keeping with your mercy. In keeping with your unlimited compassion, wipe out my rebellious acts. ² Wash me thoroughly from my guilt, and cleanse me from my sin. ³ I admit that I am rebellious. My sin is always in front of me. ⁴ I have sinned against you, especially you. I have done what you consider evil. So you hand down justice when you speak, and you are blameless when you judge. ⁵ Indeed, I was born guilty. I was a sinner when my mother conceived me. ⁶ Yet, you desire truth and sincerity. Deep down inside me you teach me wisdom. ⁷ Purify me from sin with hyssop, and I will be clean. Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. ⁸ Let me hear {sounds of} joy and gladness. Let the bones that you have broken dance.</p> <p>This psalm was David's written confession to God after a particularly sinful episode in his life. David was truly sorry for his adultery with Bathsheba and for murdering her husband to cover it up. He knew that his actions had hurt many people. Because David repented, God forgave him.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forgiveness cleanses the forgiven; without it you remain under the power of the sin – <i>Whether you were the one who committed it or not.</i> • Confession is an admission that you were wrong. It opens you to learning God's wisdom. • Unforgiven acts rob you of joy, while Forgiveness brings healing. • While God forgives us, he does not usually erase the natural consequences of our sin. • Is there any sin which someone can commit against you that you will not forgive? • Does forgiving those who have sinned against you remove the action or its consequences?
<p>What about Payback?</p>	<p>Romans 12:19-21 (GW) ¹⁹ Don't take revenge, dear friends. Instead, let God's anger take care of it. After all, Scripture says, "I alone have the right to take revenge. I will pay back, says the Lord." ²⁰ But, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink. If you do this, you will make him feel guilty and ashamed." ²¹ Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil with good.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is revenge and, according to this passage, whose job is justice? • It is no credit to be good to friends; who does Jesus require we be good to? • Does that mean we have to allow someone to continue to wrong us? <p>Luke 23:33-34 (GW) ³³ When they came to the place called The Skull, they crucified him. The criminals were also crucified, one on his right and the other on his left. ³⁴ Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing."</p> <p style="color: purple;">Meekness: the picture of what <i>real</i> power acting through love is. Jesus who, with a word, could have spoken the men tormenting him, the human race or even the entire universe out of existence as easily as he spoke them into it – instead uttered words of forgiveness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you think of any circumstance in which mankind can produce justice? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Does a jail sentence or court award correct the wrong? ○ One person injures another; is there anything man can do which wipes out the injury including suffering, mental anguish, emotional stress? ○ Respond to these words from an old song, "I haven't been the same since I had my little crash but I might feel better if you give me some cash." • Why does Jesus alone have the right to extract justice?



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<p>How do I Get past the Hurt so I Can Forgive?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>You don't!</u></p> <p>The question is the problem: we have it backwards. We want to feel better in order to forgive. But healing is a result of forgiveness.</p> <p>Romans 8:37-39 (GW) ³⁷ The one who loves us gives us an overwhelming victory in all these difficulties. ³⁸ I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love which Christ Jesus our Lord shows us. We can't be separated by death or life, by angels or rulers, by anything in the present or anything in the future, by forces ³⁹ or powers in the world above or in the world below, or by anything else in creation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Forgiveness is not based on the sin, how severe it is, or how terrible its consequences may be.• Forgiveness is based on the magnitude of the love of the forgiver.• So what does this passage tell you about the forgiveness extended to you?• What does it tell you about the forgiveness you extend to others?• You must allow the love of the Lord to be a balm which will make it possible for you to forgive.
<p>Truth:</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>The long-term result of a life of forgiveness is that you cease to find fault or allocate blame on others.</i></p>