



The Practice of Forgiveness

Experiences of Forgiveness

The *Practice of Forgiveness* includes fifteen activities that can be utilized in a variety of settings and combined into a variety of program models including the following:

- Intergenerational programs
- Family-centered programs
- Families at home activities (print or digital)
- Children’s programming: classes, vacation Bible school, parent-child, grandparent-child
- Adolescent programming: classes, youth gatherings, and retreats
- Adult programming: independent, small groups, retreats, and large gathering settings
- Social media posts on Facebook and Instagram using the activities
- Online playlists of Forgiveness experiences for different age groups published on a website
- Newsletters
- A “Guide to Forgiveness” booklet (digital and print)
- And much more

Forgiveness Activities

There are fifteen activities on the Practice of Forgiveness that include a teaching plan and the activity. All of the activities are also included on a separate MS Word document so that you can create handouts for sessions, a digital or print booklet, online playlists and activities, social media posts, and more.

- Activity 1. Our Need for Forgiveness
- Activity 2. Why Should We Forgive?
- Activity 3. Forgiveness—True or False
- Activity 4. No Simple Formula
- Activity 5. The Challenge of the Christian Practice of Forgiving
Strategies for Exploring the Christian Practice of Forgiving
- Activity 6. Forgiving Involves Courage
- Activity 7. Forgiving Involves Mercy, Faith, and Love
- Activity 8. Forgiving Involves Restoring Relationships
- Activity 9. The Way of Forgiveness
- Activity 10. The Path Toward Forgiveness

- Activity 11. The Power of Forgiveness (Film)
Strategies for Developing the Practice of Forgiveness
- Activity 12. The Costs and Benefits of Forgiveness
- Activity 13. How Forgiveness Can Grow and Flourish
- Activity 14. Developing the Practice of Forgiveness
- Activity 15. Practice Forgiveness in Daily Life

Children Activities

There are four children’s activities that can be used in a children’s program and family activities. They can be found at the end of this guide and online as a separate file.

1. Forgiving in My Family
2. Jesus Forgives
3. Be a Forgiving Person
4. Try It!—Forgiving

A Learning Process for Christian Practices

The dynamic of forming people of all ages in a Christian practice incorporates four movements, which become the template for designing Christian practices learning programs.

Movement 1. Reflecting on Our Lives

The first movement, *Reflecting*, taps into a basic area of human need that can find meaning and purpose in a Christian practice. Reflecting gives people an opportunity to become aware of how they experience a basic human need and hunger for the Christian practice in their own life. Reflecting also provides space for people to become aware of how they already engage in this practice, and the things that distort or hinder the practice.

Oftentimes this first movement begins with real-life stories (presentations, print, audio, and/or video) of people who seek meaning and purpose for their lives through a particular practice. This helps spark people’s reflection and storytelling.

Movement 2. Exploring the Christian Practice

The second movement, *Exploring*, grounds the Christian practice in the Bible by describing how the biblical story deepens our understanding of the Christian practice and connects to people’s human needs and hungers. We present the wisdom of the Christian tradition on a particular Christian practice, describing what people today, and throughout history, actually do when they are engaged well in a particular practice—how people or communities live the practice with exceptional grace and skill. By connecting the Christian practice to human needs and hungers, people can identify how and why a practice is important to living a meaningful life.

Movement 3. Experiencing the Christian Practice

The third movement, *Experiencing*, immerses people in the actual practice—opportunities to experience activities that lead them into the Christian practice. This immersion can take place in programs, within the life of the Christian community (such as worship and ministry activities), and/or out in the community (serving people, providing hospitality, etc.). The key is that people actually experience the practice.

Movement 4. Living the Practice

The fourth movement, *Living*, includes reflecting on the experience of the practice activities (Movement 3); showing people how to make the Christian practice a part of everyday life; and providing people with a variety of tools and activities to integrate the Christian practice into their daily life—at home, at work, at school, and in the world.

The Practice of Forgiveness Learning Process

To illustrate how these four elements are incorporated into the learning process here is an example for the Practice of Forgiveness. (The Forgiveness reproducible activities are available for free on the Lifelong Faith website.)

Movement 1. Reflecting on Life Experience

Activities

- Activity 1. Our Need for Forgiveness
- Activity 2. Why Should We Forgive?
- Activity 3. Forgiveness—True or False
- Activity 4. No Simple Formula

Movement 2. Exploring the Christian Practice

Activities

- Activity 5. The Challenge of the Christian Practice of Forgiving
- Activity 6. Forgiving Involves Courage
- Activity 7. Forgiving Involves Mercy, Faith, and Love
- Activity 8. Forgiving Involves Restoring Relationships
- Activity 9. The Way of Forgiveness
- Activity 10. The Path Toward Forgiveness

Movement 3. Experiencing the Christian Practice

Activities

- Activity 11. The Power of Forgiveness (Film)
- Activity 12. The Costs and Benefits of Forgiveness

- Activity 13. How Forgiveness Can Grow and Flourish
- Activity 14. Developing the Practice of Forgiveness

Movement 4. Living the Practice

Activities

- Activity 15. Practice Forgiveness in Daily Life

Program Designs

The Christian practices learning process and activities can be used in a variety of program designs:

- Intergenerational programs
- Family-centered programs
- Families at home activities (print or digital)
- Children’s programming: classes, vacation Bible school, parent-child, grandparent-child
- Adolescent programming: classes, youth gatherings, and retreats
- Adult programming: independent, small groups, retreats, and large gathering settings
- Online playlists of Forgiveness experiences for different age groups published on a website

Example: A Four Session Mini-Course or Small Group Program

The activities can be designed into a 4-week mini-course or small group program of 60-90 minutes per session for children, youth, adults, and/or parents. Each activity plan is approximately 10-15 minutes in length. Create a “Guide to Forgiveness” (print, digital) to accompany the program. All of the Activities can be published on a website and designed onto a playlist for each session. Here’s an example of a 4-week program:

Session 1 – Select from Reflecting Experiences

- Activity 1. Our Need for Forgiveness
- Activity 2. Why Should We Forgive? OR Activity 3. Forgiveness—True or False
- Activity 4. No Simple Formula

Session 2 – Select from Exploring Activities

- Activity 5. The Challenge of the Christian Practice of Forgiving
- Activity 6. Forgiving Involves Courage
- Activity 7. Forgiving Involves Mercy, Faith, and Love
- Activity 8. Forgiving Involves Restoring Relationships
- Activity 9. The Way of Forgiveness

Session 3 – Focus on the Power of Forgiveness Film

- Activity 10. The Path Toward Forgiveness
- Activity 11. The Power of Forgiveness (Film)

- Activity 12. The Costs and Benefits of Forgiveness

Session 4 – Select from Experiencing Experiences

- Activity 13. How Forgiveness Can Grow and Flourish
- Activity 14. Developing the Practice of Forgiveness
- Activity 15. Practice Forgiveness in Daily Life

Example: Retreat or Extended Time Program

The activities can be combined into an extended day program or retreat experience with a blend of whole group activities and small group experience centers.

Opening Prayer

Part One

- Activity 1. Our Need for Forgiveness
- Activity 2. Why Should We Forgive? OR Activity 3. Forgiveness—True or False
- Activity 4. No Simple Formula

Break

Part Two

- Activity 5. The Challenge of the Christian Practice of Forgiving
- Activity 6. Forgiving Involves Courage
- Activity 7. Forgiving Involves Mercy, Faith, and Love
- Activity 8. Forgiving Involves Restoring Relationships
- Activity 9. The Way of Forgiveness

Break

Part Three

- Activity 10. The Path Toward Forgiveness
- Activity 11. The Power of Forgiveness (Film)
- Activity 12. The Costs and Benefits of Forgiveness
- Activity 13. How Forgiveness Can Grow and Flourish
- Activity 14. Developing the Practice of Forgiveness
- Activity 15. Practice Forgiveness in Daily Life

Closing Prayer

Example: An Intergenerational or Family Learning Program

The activities can be combined into one 2-hour intergenerational or family program using only selected activities or into two, 2-hour programs that includes all of the activities with a meal. Here is the two-session design:

Session One

Gathering and Opening Prayer Experience
Reflecting Experiences

- Activity 1. Our Need for Forgiveness
- Activity 2. Why Should We Forgive? OR Activity 3. Forgiveness—True or False
- Activity 4. No Simple Formula

Exploring Activities

- Activity 5. The Challenge of the Christian Practice of Forgiving
- Activity 6. Forgiving Involves Courage
- Activity 7. Forgiving Involves Mercy, Faith, and Love
- Activity 8. Forgiving Involves Restoring Relationships
- Activity 9. The Way of Forgiveness

Session Two

Experiencing & Living Activities

- Activity 10. The Path Toward Forgiveness
- Activity 11. The Power of Forgiveness (Film)
- Activity 12. The Costs and Benefits of Forgiveness
- Activity 13. How Forgiveness Can Grow and Flourish
- Activity 14. Developing the Practice of Forgiveness
- Activity 15. Practice Forgiveness in Daily Life

Resources

(Online at <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/practice-of-forgiveness.html>)

- ◆ *The Power of Forgiveness* Learning Activities for forgiving self, others, spouse, and family are designed to accompany the film (see Activity 12). They can also be used as standalone activities.
- ◆ *The Conversations on Forgiveness* by the Fetzer Institute are activities for four conversations on forgiveness. These learning activities, including, three essays that explore why and how to forgive, can be used in a variety of settings. A second resource on *Love* has four additional conversations and activities.
- ◆ The *Conversation Cards* from the Fetzer Institute are reproducible, full color, cards to start conversations on forgiveness, love, and compassion.
- ◆ The Greater Good Magazine (online) has a variety of helpful articles and tools on forgiveness. Find resources at <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/search?q=forgiveness>.

Visual Faith Bible Activities on Forgiveness

Broken Relationships (#26) - This Visual Faith Exercise is based on Luke 15:11-32 and designed to help participants discuss their own wounded relationships and explore healing and restoration.

The Key to Living In Peace (#12) - This Visual Faith Exercise is based on Luke 7:36-50 and designed to help participants learn the importance of love and forgiveness over judgment.

Download the activities from <https://www.vibrantfaithprojects.org/visual-faith-project.html>.

You can purchase images through Vibrant Faith (<https://vibrantfaith.org/product/vfp-image-database>) or use copyright-free photo websites, such as Unsplash (<https://unsplash.com>) and Pixabay (<https://pixabay.com>).

Forgiveness Activities from Vibrant Faith at Home

There are forgiveness activities on Vibrant Faith at Home. They are in PDF files with a simple formatting to make it easy to use and download. You can provide these to people in variety of ways through age group programming, family or intergenerational programming, on a website, in an e-newsletter, on social media, etc. Vibrant Faith grants permission to use these activities in print or digital formats.

Go to www.vibrantfaithprojects.org/vibrant-faith-home.html. Search through the listing of activities for Children and Families, Teens, Young Adults, and Adults.,

Activity 1. Our Need for Forgiveness

Plan

Create an opening reflection activity on people's experience of forgiveness using or adapting the questions in the Activity. In a gathered setting invite people to share their responses in age groups, family groupings, or intergenerational groupings.

Activity

Forgiveness is about healing suffering for ourselves and others. Until we develop compassion within ourselves and a concern about the welfare of others, we cannot truly forgive.

His Holiness, The Dalai Lama

From the beginning of time, we humans have been in need of forgiveness, and from the beginning of time we have been challenged to forgive one another. Because we are human, we yearn for relationship and intimacy. This yearning of the heart draws us to each other, seeking community. It's our nature.

Also, because we are human, we fail, we fall short, we wound one another. We offend each other when we think only of ourselves. We hurt one another when the circumstances of our lives get out of balance. It's our nature.

Gratefully, because we are human and created in the image of a God who never stops loving and never stops forgiving, we too seek to mend our hurts with one another, heal our wounds, and reconcile. Because we are human we hunger to forgive and be forgiven. It's our nature.

Intimacy, conflict, and reconciling are all part of human nature. And family living plays a key role in teaching us about all three components. Tap into your natural hunger to forgive and to be forgiven. Read through and reflect on the questions below. Pause whenever you wish for as long as you wish. Allow your reflections to clarify and shape your hunger for forgiveness.

- ◆ What is your most vivid experience of offering forgiveness to someone?
- ◆ What is your most vivid experience of being forgiven by someone?
- ◆ Do you find it easier to forgive or to be forgiven?
- ◆ Who do you know who forgives well? In what ways does this person forgive well?
- ◆ Who has taught you the most about forgiveness?
- ◆ How is forgiveness a part of your daily life?
- ◆ How do you benefit by being a forgiving person?
- ◆ If you wanted to become better at forgiving, where would you start?

Activity 2 . Why Should We Forgive?

Plan

Ask each person (or household) to complete the Forgiveness Quiz: “Why Should We Forgive?” Give them several minutes to complete the quiz.

You can have people discuss their reflections on the quiz in pairs, triads, or small groups.

A second way to process the activity is to use a continuum activity:

1. Make a line across the meeting room using masking tape
2. Divide the line into four sections: place the #1 at one end and the #4 at the other end, with the #2 and #3 in middle
3. Take each of the items of the Quiz, one by one, and ask people to move to the # on the line which reflects their answer to the item
4. Ask people to give reasons why they chose their response, begin at the ends of the continuum and then move to the center responses

At the conclusion of the final question, invite participants to share their reflections on the experience. Ask them: What did they learn about forgiveness from the activity?

Activity

“Why We Should Forgive Quiz” on next page.

Why Should We Forgive?

According to Robert Enright, the reasons people forgive fall into the following eight categories:

1. You forgive to quiet your angry feelings.
2. Forgiveness changes destructive thoughts into quieter, more healthy thoughts.
3. As you forgive, you want to act more civilly toward the one who hurt you.
4. Forgiveness of one person helps you interact better with others. Perhaps your anger with someone at work has spilled over to your relationship with your children. Forgiving that person would be a gift to your children.
5. Forgiveness can improve your relationship with the one who hurt you.
6. Your forgiveness actually can help the one who hurt you see his or her unfairness and take steps to stop it. Your forgiving can enhance the character of the one who hurt you.
7. You forgive because God asks you to do so. You forgive as an act of love toward God.
8. Forgiveness, as an act of kindness and love toward the one who hurt you, is a moral good regardless of how the other is responding to you. Loving others while protecting yourself from harm is a morally good thing to do.

Why Should We Forgive Quiz

Rate your agreement with the following statements.

(1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree)

1 2 3 4	You forgive to quiet your angry feelings.
1 2 3 4	Forgiveness changes destructive thoughts into quieter, more healthy thoughts.
1 2 3 4	As you forgive, you want to act more civilly toward the one who hurt you.
1 2 3 4	Forgiveness of one person helps you interact better with others. Perhaps your anger with someone at work has spilled over to your relationship with your children. Forgiving that person would be a gift to your children.
1 2 3 4	Forgiveness can improve your relationship with the one who hurt you.
1 2 3 4	Your forgiveness actually can help the one who hurt you see his or her unfairness and take steps to stop it. Your forgiving can enhance the character of the one who hurt you.
1 2 3 4	You forgive because God asks you to do so. You forgive as an act of love toward God.
1 2 3 4	Forgiveness, as an act of kindness and love toward the one who hurt you, is a moral good regardless of how the other is responding to you. Loving others while protecting yourself from harm is a morally good thing to do.

Activity 3. Forgiveness—True or False

1. Forgiveness is easy.
2. Forgiveness is covering up your feelings.
3. Forgiveness is condoning or even tolerating the wrong that was done to you.
4. Forgiveness is not as satisfying as getting even.
5. Forgiveness is a sign of weakness.
6. Forgiveness is just mouthing the words.
7. Forgiveness is excusing the person who hurt you.
8. Forgiveness is dismissing the right to seek justice and even reparations. I Forgiveness is inviting someone to hurt you again.
9. Forgiveness is something you do all alone.
10. Forgiveness is forgetting.
11. Forgiveness is hard work.
12. Forgiveness is acknowledging your feelings of pain and hurt and sadness. I Forgiveness is naming the wrong that was done to you.
13. Forgiveness is a sign of remarkable strength.
14. Forgiveness is holding the other accountable for what he or she did to you. I Forgiveness is overcoming fear and shame and blame.
15. Forgiveness is a decision not to suffer anymore.
16. Forgiveness is moving on and taking steps to health and wholeness.
17. Forgiveness is without any strings attached.
18. Forgiveness is a process.
19. Forgiveness is a declaration of hope in a better future.

Activity 4. No Simple Formula

There is no simple formula for forgiveness, rather, it is a practice that emerges directly from one's identity and character. Think of the descriptive words you might use to describe someone you admire: honest, bright, empathetic, present, balanced, open, and so on. Although it is not common practice, you might also add "forgiving." The Christian practice of forgiving contributes favorably to shaping one's character.

Forgiveness, by definition, demands change and transformation. You've been wounded, offended, hurt by another. You feel angry and resentful, and what's more you feel justified in your anger. After all, the other is to blame and you are the innocent victim. Just knowing that you are right and the other is wrong gives you vindictive pleasure; yet you are still angry and want revenge. You have no patience for excuses from the other or for apparent mitigating circumstances. You've been wronged, pure and simple.

The practice and character of forgiveness challenges you to change your thought pattern and transform your heart. How do you move from wanting to hear no excuses to an eagerness to know what mitigates the offense? How do you begin to see that nothing is more destructive to the human spirit than the desire for revenge? How do you begin to realize that forgiveness is first an act of kindness to *yourself*, and may or may not be an act of kindness to the other? How do you begin to realize that, in the words of Karyn Kedar in *God Whispers*, "we have greater things than anger to feel....When anger is replaced by forgiveness, you are free to let love guide your life."

These are post-trauma symptoms that must be relieved if you are to regain balance and once again find happiness. Forgiveness relieves all of these symptoms.

The first step toward change and transformation is to recognize in yourself the symptoms that forgiveness can relieve:

- ◆ Feeling so wounded that you want revenge
- ◆ Brooding over petty grievances
- ◆ Feeling guilty yourself and covering it over with anger
- ◆ Worry that it will all happen again
- ◆ Bitterness and stubbornness that permeates all arenas of your life
- ◆ An ever-growing need to be right.

Activity 5. The Challenge of the Christian Practice of Forgiving

To introduce the challenge of forgiving show the video NOOMA 007 *Luggage* by Rob Bell or NOOMA 010 *Lump* by Rob Bell (order from www.nooma.com). *Luggage* is better for an adolescent-adult audience. Be sure to preview both videos to select the one that would work best with you audience.

Luggage - NOOMA 070 by Rob Bell

DVD 13 minutes 2004

YouTube: <https://youtu.be/U7Xvp9SsTwY>

Maybe a friend turned their back on you. Maybe someone you loved betrayed you. We all have wounds and we end up carrying around these things that people have done to us for weeks, months, and sometimes even years. It isn't always easy to forgive these people and after a while these hurts can get really heavy. So the only way to feel better seems to be somehow getting back at the people that hurt us, to get revenge. But does revenge ever truly satisfy? Maybe forgiving isn't something you do for someone else to let them off the hook. Maybe forgiveness is about you. God didn't create you to carry these wounds around. God created you to be free.

Lump - NOOMA 010 by Rob Bell

DVD 13 minutes 2004

YouTube: <https://youtu.be/2WC-70-Otk8>

A lot of us have done things in our lives that we're ashamed of. Some are small things, and some of us have really big and devastating things. Some of us even have things that people close to us don't know about. Personal junk that we keep to ourselves so we don't have to deal with it. Because we don't know how to deal with it, do we? We're afraid that if we try it's just going to make everything worse. But no matter how big our junk is, no matter how much what we've done has impacted the way other people feel about us or how we feel about ourselves, it hasn't changed how God feels about us. God loves us, he always has and always will, and there's nothing we can do to change that.

After the video presentation invite the participants, at table groups, to share their emotional response to what they have experienced and then what the video taught them about forgiveness and the challenging of forgiving others.

Strategies for Exploring the Christian Practice of Forgiving

Use these strategies in conjunction with the “Exploring” activities

Activity 6. Forgiving Involves Courage (Story of Joseph in Genesis 45)

Activity 7. Forgiving Involves Mercy (Story of the Unforgiving Servant in Luke 18) and Forgiving Involves Faith and Love (Story of the Sinful Woman in Luke 7)

Activity 8. Forgiving Involves Restoring Relationships (Story of Prodigal Son in Luke 15)

Activity 9. The Way of Forgiveness (Matthew 5)

Option 1. Read and Report

Assign each table group one of the five sections and ask them to prepare a short presentation for the whole group (a read and report activity). Groups can develop a creative presentation (art, music, drama, etc.) for the whole group on their Scripture passage. (If you have more than 5 groups, assign multiple groups the same section.)

Option 2. Rewrite a Bible Story

Assign each table group one of the five sections and ask them to read and rewrite the Bible story/passage for today’s world, using a contemporary setting or forgiveness issue. Then have each group present their rewritten Bible passage. Here are a variety of ways to re-write a Bible story:

- Rewrite a Bible story or teaching using a contemporary setting or issue, and a contemporary style.
- Rewrite a Bible story from a first person point of view, describing the events as though you were there participating. Conclude the story with a dialogue between Jesus and yourself, discussing what happened.
- Rewrite a Gospel story as an eyewitness account of something Jesus did or as an interview script of a person who met Jesus (e.g., a person Jesus healed). Rewrite an Old Testament story as an eyewitness account.
- Rewrite a Bible story from a particular point of view, e.g., the different characters in the parable of the Good Samaritan.
- Rewrite a Bible story using creative methods such as storyboards for a TV show or a movie, a TV newscast, a commercial, and/or a newspaper or magazine story.
- Rewrite a Bible story using a letter format. Tell people to think of the Bible as God’s letter to them. Read the passage and then ask them to respond by writing their reflections on God’s Word in the form of a prayer. Ask them to use a letter format (Dear Jesus... or Dear God...) and include what they learned from reading the Bible story, how they will try to live what God has said, and what they need from God now so they can live what God has asked them to do.

Option 3. Dramatize a Bible Story or Passage

Assign each table group one of the five sections and ask them to create a dramatic enactment of their Bible story, using a contemporary setting or forgiveness issue. People can do this in silence by simply

acting out the passage or act the story while someone is narrating or assign different parts of the story to individual actors. They can also rewrite the story in contemporary form and act it out.

Option 4. Create a Forgiveness Advertisement

Create an ad to present a Bible story in contemporary language and setting. Groups can use a variety of advertising methods (a 30 second TV or radio ad, a song, an ad in a magazine, poster advertisement, a billboard). They should write the content for an advertisement (e.g., a script for a commercial or magazine ad); identify or create artwork, symbol, images, photos to accompany the content; develop the final product; and then present it to the group. Here are several suggestions for creating an ad:

1. *Focus the Ad:* In short phrases clearly identify what you want to communicate.
2. *Select the Advertising Approach:* Think about all the types of advertisements in magazines and on the radio and television. Select your approach.
3. *Design the Ad:* Combine your content or message with your advertising method to create your unique promotion.

After each group has made their presentation, ask table groups to discuss the following questions:

- What did you discover about the importance of forgiveness in Jesus' ministry?
- Why was forgiveness so central to Jesus' ministry?
- What are the implications of Jesus words and actions for us today?

Activity 6. Forgiving Involves Courage

No biblical character shows this heroic courage more than Joseph, son of Jacob, who was betrayed by his brothers, nearly left to die in the desert, and at the last minute sold off to the Egyptians. Read Genesis, chapters 37—50. Joseph’s story has one dramatic twist after another. After beating and selling him into slavery, the brothers return home to lie to their father, Jacob. But Joseph is rescued and taken to Egypt, where he eventually wins favor with Pharaoh by interpreting his dreams and accurately predicting both feast and famine throughout the land. When Jacob sends his sons to Egypt seeking grain, Joseph recognizes his brothers, but they do not recognize Joseph.

Joseph’s anger and resentment return and he arrests and jails his brothers. Clearly he has the power to inflict “just” punishment upon them for their past deeds (chapter 42). He demands that the youngest brother, Benjamin, who remained with Jacob in Canaan, be brought to him. And when Joseph sees Benjamin, the one brother who is innocent of Joseph’s betrayal, his heart softens. Joseph first seeks a private place to cry, wanting to hide his pain from his brothers.

Joseph was no longer about to control his feelings in front of his servants, so he ordered them all to leave the room. No one else was with him when Joseph told his brothers who he was. He cried with such loud sobs that the Egyptians heard it, and the news was taken to the king’s palace. Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” But when his brothers heard this, they were so terrified that they could not answer him. Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Please come closer.” They did, and he said, “I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. Now do not be upset or blame yourselves because you sold me here. It was really God who sent me ahead of you to save people’s lives....Now hurry back to my father and tell him that this is what his son Joseph says: ‘God has made me the ruler of all Egypt; come to me without delay. You can live in the region of Goshen, where you can be near me—you, your children, your grandchildren, your sheep, your goats, your cattle, and everything else you have. If you are in Goshen, I can take care of you. There will still be five years of famine and I do not want you, your family, and your livestock to starve.’”...He threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and began to cry; Benjamin also cried as he hugged him. Then, still weeping, he embraced each of his brothers and kissed them. After that, his brothers began to talk with him. (Genesis 45:1–5, 9–11, 14–15)

In a truly redemptive moment of forgiveness Joseph opens himself and his pain to his brothers and makes reconciliation possible. He provides a way out of the cycle of pain and dysfunction for his family, and symbolically, for God’s chosen people. As Richard P. Westley writes, “Joseph transforms his pain and puts it to good use by identifying himself as both the injured party—and therefore unwilling to be hurt again—and yet still full of love for his brothers who injured him. This approach is not an easy one, but it proves transforming since it knits together Joseph’s deeply torn family.”

Activity 7. Forgiving Involves Mercy, Faith, and Love

In a world and a culture that is full of wounds, anger, injustice, inequality, historical privilege, jealousy, resentment, bitterness, murder, and war, we must speak always and everywhere about forgiveness, reconciliation, and God's healing. Forgiveness lies at the center of Jesus' moral message. The litmus test for being a Christian is not whether one can say the creed and mean it, but whether one can forgive and love an enemy. (Ronald Rolheiser)

Mercy

Following immediately after Jesus' challenge to Peter to forgive, "not seven times, but seventy times seven," Jesus tells us the parable of the Unforgiving Servant (see Matthew 18:23–35). This story contrasts the huge debt owed by the servant, which the king forgives, with the small debt owed to the servant, which the servant refuses to forgive. Even when the lesson is delivered loud and clear some fail to make the connection.

So he called the servant in. "You worthless slave!" he said. "I forgave you the whole amount you owed me, just because you asked me to. You should have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you." (Matthew 18:32–33)

Faith and Love

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, if my brother keeps on sinning against me, how many times do I have to forgive him? Seven times?" "No not seven times," answered Jesus, "but seventy time seven, because the Kingdom of heaven is like this." (Matthew 18: 21–22)

Consider the Pardon of the Sinful Woman in Luke 7:36–50. This is the story of a dinner party given by Simon, a Pharisee, to which Jesus was invited. Upon entering no one greeted him with a kiss or gave him water to wash his feet. Yet throughout the evening the woman whom all knew as "sinful," washes Jesus' feet with her tears and dries them with her hair.

Jesus uses this public display of sensuality to teach a lesson in forgiveness. He quizzes his host Simon about two people whose debts were forgiven. One owed a large amount, while the other owed a little. "Which one then will love him [the creditor] more?" Simon responds "I suppose that it would be the one who was forgiven more." "You are right," said Jesus.

Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your home and you gave me no water for my feet, but she has washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You did not welcome me with a kiss, but she has not stopped kissing my feet since I came. You provided no olive oil for my head, but she has covered my feet with perfume. I

tell you, then, the great love she has shown proves that her many sins have been forgiven. But whoever has been forgiven little shows only a little love.” The Jesus said to the women, “Your sins are forgiven.” (Luke 7:44–48)

In this story, we learn about forgiveness from the side of the offender. Seemingly, Simon the Pharisee is the small offender and is granted little or no forgiveness. The “sinful” woman is the major offender—at least in the eyes of others—but because of her deep faith, her sorrow, and her adoration of Jesus, her sins are forgiven.

These then, are the necessary ingredients to receive God’s forgiveness: genuine remorse, steadfast faith, and lasting devotion. We are all sinners, regardless of our status in society, but Jesus is eager to embrace each one of us with his love and forgiveness if we but turn our gaze toward him.

Activity 8. Forgiving Involves Restoring Relationships

In the act of forgiveness we are declaring our faith in the future of a relationship, and in the capacity of the wrongdoer to make a new beginning on a course that will be different from the one that has caused the wrong. We are saying, here is a chance to make a new beginning. It is an act of faith that the wrongdoer can change. According to Jesus (Matthew 18:22), we should be ready to do this not just one, not just seven times, but seventy times seven, without limit—provided, it seems Jesus says, your brother or sister who has wronged you is ready to come and confess the wrong they have committed yet again. (Archbishop Desmond Tutu)

Finally, we consider the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11–32. The text of this story has four scenes, but the story itself demands a fifth. In the first scene, the younger son takes his inheritance from his father and leaves home. The second scene shows the younger son squandering away the money and, coming upon hard times, returning home with a rehearsed speech of repentance. The third scene is the touching reunion with his father, and the younger son is immediately welcomed and enveloped into the family and household.

He was still a long way from home when his father saw him; his heart was filled with pity, and he ran, threw his arms around his son, and kissed him. “Father,” the son said, “I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son.” But the father called to his servants. “Hurry!” he said. “Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. Then go and get the prize calf and kill it, and let us celebrate with a feast! For this son of mine was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.” And so the feasting began. (Luke 15:20–24)

In the fourth scene, the father and older son argue in the yard while the party continues inside. The text ends with these words of the father to his older son, “But we had to celebrate and be happy, because your brother was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found” (v. 32). While the text ends, clearly the story is not over. Each of us is intended to determine the end.

How would *you* conclude the story of the Prodigal Son? Would the older son accept his younger brother and be reconciled with him? Or would there be more division and heartache for all parties?

Activity 9. The Way of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is at the heart of the gospel and of our most important prayer, the Lord's Prayer: "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" (Matthew 6:12). In the Beatitudes Jesus teaches us that peacemakers are children of God, "Happy are those who work for peace; God will call them his children" (Matthew 5:9). But the only way to be a peacemaker is to be a forgiver:

[Jesus said,] "So if you are about to offer your gift to God at the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift in front of the altar, go at once and make peace with your brother, and then come back and offer your gift to God." (Matthew 5:23–24)

Very simply, these teachings show us that forgiveness requires initiative and action. We must consciously seek to repair wounded relationships—to forgive as God has forgiven us.

Jesus' answer to the brokenness of people's lives was to embody God's forgiveness. We learn how to forgive from the God who first forgave us in Christ. Christ forgives without condition, but we can only receive that forgiveness if we're set free to forgive others.

*Feasting on forgiveness—rather than on bitterness, anger, or revenge—allows us the freedom to live into a future not bound by the brokenness of the past. It gives us hope. Forgiveness is both receptive and active; it's something done to us and something done by us. We're called to forgive others, which can be very difficult. But we're also called to be forgiven for the wrongs we've done, an act that takes us out of control and places us at the mercy of the one whose forgiveness we seek. To embody forgiveness fully, we must forgive as well as be forgiven. (Susan Pendleton Jones and L. Gregory Jones in *Forgiveness: Letting Go*)*

Activity 10. The Path Toward Forgiveness

God's Spirit is at work forgiving, healing, and recreating us in the likeness of Christ for life in God's kingdom. Indeed, God's Spirit is at work in the ways we learn to forgive and be forgiven, to heal and be healed, to recreate and to be recreated in our lives with others. In this light, it becomes apparent that Christian forgiveness is not only a word spoken or heard, a gesture offered or received, an emotion experienced or transformed; it's a way of life to be lived in faithful response to the gracious love of God at work in our world and in our lives.

(Susan Pendleton Jones and L. Gregory Jones).

How do we learn to practice the way of forgiveness that Jesus taught? Susan Pendleton Jones and L. Gregory Jones offer these insights.

- ◆ *We become willing to speak truthfully and patiently about the conflicts that have arisen.* When we try to be patient and truthful, we can discern more clearly what is going on. James 1:19 reminds us, “Everyone must be quick to listen, but slow to speak and slow to become angry.”
- ◆ *We acknowledge both the existence of anger and bitterness and a desire to overcome them.* Whether those emotions are our own or belong to the other party, it does no good to deny them. We can learn to overcome and let go of anger and bitterness as we begin to live differently through practices that transform hatred into love. This is important, for otherwise, anger can destroy others and us. Ephesians 4:26 says, “If you become angry, do not let your anger lead you into sin, and do not stay angry all day.”
- ◆ *We summon up concern for the well-being of the other as a child of God.* Seeing the ones on whom our bitterness focuses as children of God challenges our tendency to perceive them simply as enemies, rivals, or threats.
- ◆ *We recognize our own complicity in conflict, remembering that we have been forgiven in the past and take the step of repentance.* This doesn't mean ignoring differences between victims and victimizers. People need to be held accountable for their actions, and some people need to repent and ask forgiveness while those who have been victimized struggle to forgive. We need to recognize and resist our temptation to blame others while exonerating ourselves. All too often we see the specks in other people's eyes while not noticing the log in our own (Matthew 7:1–5). This is why it's important for us to remember our own forgiven-ness. Indeed, rather than “forgive and forget,” a better directive would be that we forgive and are forgiven so we can remember well.
- ◆ *We make a commitment to try and change whatever caused and continues to perpetuate our conflicts.* Forgiveness ought to usher in repentance and change.
- ◆ *We confess our yearning for the possibility of reconciliation.* Sometimes a situation is so painful that reconciliation may seem impossible. At such times, prayer and struggle may be the only imaginable options. However, continuing to maintain reconciliation as the goal—even if it is “hoping against hope” for reconciliation in this life—it is important because it reminds us that God promises to make all things new.

Activity 11. The Power of Forgiveness (Film)

To illustrate the practice of forgiving in action show two segments from the video *The Power of Forgiveness* by Martin Doblmeier: “The Amish” and “Paths to Forgiveness.”

The Power of Forgiveness by Martin Doblmeier

78 minutes Divided into individual stories/sections English

Purchase the CD: <https://journeyfilms.com/shop/power-of-forgiveness-5/>

Streaming: <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/thepowerofforgiveness>

The Power of Forgiveness explores research into the psychological and physical effects of forgiveness on individuals and within relationships under a wide variety of conditions and translates it into a popular, accessible documentary film for national public television. It includes feature stories on the Amish, the 9/11 tragedy and peace-building in Northern Ireland, along with interviews with renowned Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel, best-selling authors Thomas Moore and Marianne Williamson and others. The film also explores the role forgiveness holds in various faiths traditions. It provides an honest look at the intensity of anger and grief that human nature is heir to. We see in the film that there are transgressions people find themselves unwilling or unable to forgive. Through character-driven stories the film shows the role forgiveness can play in alleviating anger and grief and the physical, mental and spiritual benefits that come with it.

Follow the film presentation with a table group discussion about the power of forgiveness. Invite people to reflect on questions, such as:

- ◆ What was your emotional response to what you say in the two stories?
- ◆ Why did forgiveness work in these two situations? What practices made forgiveness work?
- ◆ What do the two stories teach us about the practice of forgiving? What are the implications for how you practice forgiving? How can use the insights from the two stories in your own life?

Download *The Power of Forgiveness* Activities document from the Lifelong Faith website. It contains learning activities for forgiving self, others, spouse, and family.

Strategies for Developing the Practice of Forgiveness

Here are a several ways to use Activity 14. How Forgiveness Can Grow and Flourish, Activity 15. Developing the Practice of Forgiveness, and Activity 16. Practice Forgiveness in Daily Life .

Ten Ways to Forgive

Invite people at table groups to develop a list of “Ten Ways to Forgive” based on their learning. This is advice they would give others to live the Christian practice of forgiving. Have each group write their “Ten Ways to Forgive” on a sheet of newsprint. When they have completed their work, ask each group to share several items from their list and then post the newsprint on the wall for all to see.

Role Play of Forgiveness Situations

Role playing is one of the most useful methods to practice skills. Conduct a *before* (need for forgiveness) and *after* role play (using forgiveness ideas in chapter).

Forgiveness Panel

Develop a panel of “forgiveness practice mentors” who can present personal witness to the power of forgiveness and a variety of ways to live the practice in daily life.

Demonstration of Practicing Forgiveness

Conduct a demonstration of resolving a conflict positively so that the participants can see the Christian practice in real-life settings, e.g., at home, work, parent-child relationships, etc. Use the forgiveness ideas to create a demonstration that is conducted by the teaching team and/or invite “practice mentors” in the church or community to demonstrate concrete ways that they live the practice. A demonstration shows people the “how to” of living a Christian practice. Follow-up the demonstration with questions such as:

- ◆ What did you learn about the Christian practice from this demonstration?
- ◆ How can you use what you learned from this demonstration in your own life?
- ◆ What do you need to practice some more before doing this yourself?
- ◆ What type of help would you like so that you can live this practice in your life?

The Costs and Benefits of Forgiveness

Use the worksheet on the next page.

Activity 12. The Costs and Benefits of Forgiveness

Think of a situation in your life where you find it hard to forgive or are struggling to forgive. Now use the questions below and your responses to assess the potential impact on you if you choose to forgive in this situation.

Costs: If I don't forgive the person:

1. I feel _____ when I think of the person and the situation.
2. The effects on my physical health are _____.
3. I think about the person and the situation ___all the time ___often ___ sometimes ___ never.
4. I believe that the person deliberately intended to hurt me through his or her action and did not have any other reason to do what he or she did. Yes___ No___
5. I feel like I'm the only person this has happened to. Yes___ No___
6. I find it hard to move on with my life. Yes___ No___
7. It is difficult for me to make good decisions because of the presence of that person/situation in my life. Yes___ No___
8. I seek opportunities to tell other people about the person/situation as I see it. Yes___ No___

Potential Benefits: If I forgive the person, I will:

1. Stop blaming the other person and be able to spend time on activities that move my life forward. Yes___ No___
2. Take responsibility for the part I played in the situation. Yes___ No___
3. Change my expectations for other people's behavior so that I don't take future situations personally. Yes___ No___
4. Learn strategies and skills that make me better able to cope with future hurts. Yes___ No___
5. Stop focusing so much on the situation/person. Yes___ No___
6. Feel a physical sense of relief. Yes___ No___
7. Find peace. Yes___ No___
8. Become a more forgiving person in the future. Yes___ No___

Activity 13. How Forgiveness Can Grow and Flourish

The practice of forgiveness involves reconciliation and healing. Think about all of your important relationships: your family, your closest friends, those with whom you live, those with whom you work, perhaps all those whom you love and who love you. When you think about these love relationships, two things are certain: 1. conflict is inevitable, and 2. reconciliation is a must for the relationship to continue.

Do you forgive well? How well do you heal the wounds of conflict with those whom you love? The practice of forgiveness is reflected by our character and our faith. With this in mind, here are several suggestions for help forgiveness grow and flourish:

- ◆ *Treat others with respect and love.* It seems obvious, but the most sure-fire way to prevent negative, unforgiving feelings from building up in relationships is to treat others with love and respect. Love involves treating people with respect regardless of how badly the person messes up or disappoints others. People are imperfect and will, in fact, make mistakes at times. Nevertheless, if people treat each other with mutual respect, those transgressions occur less frequently.
- ◆ *Recognize that conflict is inevitable.* Intimacy and conflict are two sides of a very thin coin of relationship. Part of being human and living in relationship with others means good times and bad, great days and dark days, close connection and separation. People who forgive well know this and remain honest with themselves about how all get wounded in relationship.
- ◆ *Spend your energy seeking solutions rather than laying blame.* Have you ever pondered how much time and energy is wasted on figuring out whose fault it was when an infraction has occurred? Occasionally, we can actually pin blame somewhere, but it provides only a fleeting moment of satisfaction, and has done *nothing* to solve the problem and reconcile the hurt. People who forgive well have learned that the blame game is a waste of time; regardless of who wins, all are losers. Those who forgive well go directly to problem-solving because they've learned that's where they can all begin to feel better.
- ◆ *Distinguish the person from the act.* People who forgive know in their hearts that each person, as created in God's image and likeness, is truly good. They also know that each person will make mistakes and errors in judgment and action. While the person is always good—that will never change—the person's choice or action may be bad, even deplorable. Families who forgive well are careful with their language when confronting an offender to name the offense as bad, while honoring the person as inherently good.
- ◆ *Know the difference between excusing and forgiving.* People who forgive well simply excuse that which is excusable: a bump in the hallway, forgetting to empty the dishwasher, a distracted or annoying remark. They don't make a "federal case" out of excusable mishaps. But at the same time they recognize that in the event of an *inexcusable* act, all must participate in the hard work of healing, reconciling, and forgiving.

- ◆ *Be quicker to say “I’m sorry” than to expect the other person to apologize.* When people live in close relationships, they tend to experience as important the things that are done wrong to them more than they are bothered by the things they do wrong to the other person. Naturally, then, people tend to look for times when the other person should be apologizing for his or her actions. For harmonious relationships, people should be vigilant about the times when they themselves might have hurt another person. The offender should seek out the harmed party to apologize quickly and thoroughly. The offender should take responsibility for his or her own acts and tried to assure the offended party that the offender will try not to act hurtfully again.

- ◆ *Ritualize and celebrate their healing.* When the conflict has been resolved, when forgiveness has been granted, and when healing begins, people who forgive well will honor the moment with celebration in an appropriate way. The moment may call for a simple quiet hug, or a rousing toast, or a special meal or treat. Whatever it is, forgiving people mark their reconciliation with a gesture of remembrance.

Activity 14. Developing the Practice of Forgiveness

We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. The one who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies. (Martin Luther King, Jr.)

- ◆ *Take time to resolve the conflict.* Here's a simple process for resolving conflicts and reconciling with an individual or your family.
 1. *Set aside time.* If tempers are hot, let them cool down before trying to solve the problem. Set a time to talk.
 2. *Seek understanding of issues and feelings.* Give each other a chance to speak—to offer thoughts and feelings about the problem. No comments or judgments, just let everyone speak.
 3. *Brainstorm solutions.* Get all the possible ideas on the table. Sometimes a crazy suggestion leads to a workable solution. Prioritize the ideas and choose one solution.
 4. *Do it; practice the solution.* Implement the idea and set a date to check-in to see if the solution is working. If it's working, go to the final step. If not, go back to the previous two steps.
 5. *Evaluate and celebrate.* If the solution works, choose an appropriate way to celebrate. Be sure to celebrate your healing and reconciling.

- ◆ *Write a letter to someone you are struggling to forgive.* If you want to forgive someone or ask for forgiveness, writing down your thoughts can be a good place to start. It will give you the opportunity to thoughtfully consider what you want to say, why, and how to say it. And the recipient will have time to absorb the contents of your letter before responding.

When *asking for forgiveness*, some things you might want to put in writing are:

- what your intention was (most people don't set out deliberately to hurt others)
- how you are feeling about what happened
- why you want to be forgiven
- what, if anything, you are willing to do to apologize and/or make restitution.
- what you have learned from what happened, and how that might affect your future relationship with this person.

When *offering forgiveness*, consider letting the person know:

- your reason for offering forgiveness
- your feelings toward the person, as opposed to the action he or she took
- what, if anything, you would like the person to do to make restitution
- what you hope will happen (or not happen) in your future relationship with this person.

- ◆ *Before going to sleep, consciously let go of the hurts and angers of the day.* Regard each evening as the beginning of a new day. Make a simple ritual woven of silence and word and gesture. Use the “Daily Reflection Activity” questions.
- ◆ *Face your most recent experience of when forgiveness did not happen.* Can you find forgiveness by walking in the shoes of the other person? Are you willing to speak truthfully and patiently about your personal conflicts? Ask someone to anoint you for healing this relationship.
- ◆ *Reflect on ways forgiveness does and doesn’t happen throughout the course of a week.* Keep a journal and note situations of small and large conflict and how they were resolved (or not). Share your reflections with a trusted family member or friend.
- ◆ *Pray for forgiveness.* Pray for the strength to forgive and to be forgiven.

Daily Reflection Activity

- ◆ **Review the day** for any sorrows or hurts you may have caused another or that might have been directed at you.

- ◆ **Picture the situation** of what is to be forgiven and review it in detail. Who needs to be forgiven? Who needs to forgive?

- ◆ **Imagine** what your life would be like without the sorrow of this situation.

- ◆ **Make amends** with the person you have hurt or who has hurt you. Resolve to do this as soon as possible. Practice the words you will say.

- ◆ **Ask for God's help** to overcome any fear or resistance you may have in seeking or giving forgiveness.

- ◆ **Have patience.** Forgiveness begins healing. Recognize that your attempt to heal is a step toward a radical way of living. The practice and character of forgiveness challenges you to change your thought pattern and transform your heart.

Forgiveness Prayers

The Prayer of Saint Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. O
Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

* * *

Lord Jesus, you opened the eyes of the blind, healed the sick, forgave the sinful woman,
and after Peter's denial embraced him with love and mercy.

Lord Jesus, forgive all my sins, and renew your love in my heart.
May your peace take root in my life and strengthen me to be forgiving and compassionate.

* * *

Lord, teach us to forgive:
to look deep into the hearts
of those who would us,
so that we may glimpse,
in that dark, still water,
not just the reflection
of our face
but yours as well.
(Sheila Cassidy)

* * *

O Peace, O Holy One, O Comforter
we have wounded you as we have hurt one another.
Help us treat each other with love and respect.
For you are peace at our center, the holiness in our midst, the comfort we need. Amen.
(Deborah Alberswerth Payden and Laura Loving)

Activity 15. Practice Forgiveness in Daily Life

Plan

Here is a simple process of helping people move from idea to action. Give people a worksheet or piece of paper to create their action plan.

1. List three actions you would like to take to live the Christian practice of Forgiving in your daily life/family life.
2. Choose the action that you would like to do first.
3. List the potential roadblocks to implementing this action.
4. Develop strategies for overcoming these roadblocks.
5. Describe in detail the action you will undertake and the steps you will take to ensure that it will happen.

Another way to move from idea to action is to ask each household to develop a list of “Five Commandments (or Guidelines) for Forgiving” that they can post on the refrigerator or other prominent place in the house and that will become the “gold standard” for how they will practice forgiveness at home. Give each household a piece of paper to write their “commandments.” Then remind them to post it prominently in their house.

Conclude the learning activities by asking each person to write a letter to someone he or she is struggling to forgive (see Activity 14). Participants can send this to the person or decide to meet them and share the contents of their letter. Provide guidance to the group by presenting the information in Activity 14.