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a resource in:  
**Sunday School**

**Forgiveness Lessons**  
High School



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# Forgiveness

## Lesson 1 - God's Example of Forgiveness

Recommended Age/Class: **High School** (9th-12th grade)

### Lesson Objectives:

1. The student will understand God has given us forgiveness, through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, when we did not deserve it.
2. The student will understand all believers are given forgiveness in order to be reconciled with their Heavenly Father.
3. The student will distinguish between God's forgiveness and reconciliation.

### Scripture:

*Colossians 1:12-14* "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:"

*1 John 1:9* "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

*2 Corinthians 5:18-21*, "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

### Content:

- Sin separates us from God (e.g. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden).
- God does not excuse sin or deny its severity. Rather, sin demands payment. Christ's death on the cross was the ultimate payment for sin.
- Forgiveness is a releasing of a debt. God, through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, offers forgiveness to all believers.
- Forgiveness is given so we can be reconciled to God.
- Reconciliation involves restoration and a reconnection.
- When God forgives us and we ask to receive His forgiveness through repentance, our relationship can be restored with Him and we can now commune with Him.
- Forgiveness does not automatically mean reconciliation. (e.g. Jesus asked God to forgive the Roman soldiers who nailed him to the cross but they may not have become believers). God has provided a solution for all sin for all time through His perfect Son's death on the cross, but if we do not repent and seek His gift of forgiveness, we cannot enter into a restored, reconciled relationship with Him.

# Forgiveness

## Discussion Questions:

1. How did God show forgiveness is not an excuse for sin?
2. What words can be used to describe God's forgiveness for our sin?
3. What does *Psalms 103:10-12*, *Jeremiah 31:34*, and *Micah 7:18-19* portray about God's forgiveness?
4. How is God able to cast our sins into the depths of the sea? Compare the difference between "memory loss" and "choosing not to bring something back up."
5. Could forgiveness occur without reconciliation? Why or why not?
6. Could reconciliation occur without forgiveness? Why or why not?
7. What is God's ultimate desire in forgiving us of our sins?

## Activity:

1. The "S" word: Ask students to call out the first word they think of when they hear the word "sin." Make a list of their answers. Typical answers include: stealing, adultery, murder, lying, etc. Discuss how these are actually the results of sin, but the cause of these actions lie deep within the human nature of all of us (*Mark 7: 21-23*). Without God's salvation, we cannot turn from our evil nature.
2. I'm Forgiven: Choose four different students to read the following verses out loud (and in order) to illustrate what God has done with the problem of our sin:
  - a. *Romans 3:22-26*
  - b. *Romans 5:6-11*
  - c. *Romans 10:9-10*
  - d. *Romans 8:38-39*
3. Object Lesson: (Materials needed: clear drinking cup, water, food coloring, bleach)
  - a. Pour water into a clear drinking cup. Tell the students that this cup represents what our heart and life was like when we were born.
  - b. Tell them that as we live life, we inevitably do things that displease God. Give examples or have students give examples of what that could include. Each time an example is given, put one drop of food coloring into the cup. Possible examples:
    - i. Venturing unto inappropriate sites on the internet.
    - ii. Dishonoring parents through words or actions.
    - iii. Gossiping about a friend.
    - iv. Desiring/lusting after an inappropriate relationship with someone.
  - c. Talk about how this "dirty" water represents the condition of our hearts and how God views it as separating us from Him.
  - d. Pour some bleach into the cup and compare it to God's salvation through Christ and that through His forgiveness God chooses to cast away the mark of our sins.

# Forgiveness

## Lesson 2 - God Calls Us to Forgive: What Forgiveness Is and Is Not

Recommended Age/Class: **High School** (9th-12th grade)

### Lesson Objectives:

1. The student will understand God calls us to forgive others, just as He has forgiven us through Christ.
2. The student will understand that forgiveness, as Christ modeled it, is a high calling that is only possible through God's grace.
3. The student will understand forgiveness can be given, whether the offender requested it or not.
4. The student will understand forgiveness does not "excuse" sin, but rather acknowledges an error has occurred and releases the offender from the debt.
5. The student will understand that forgiveness is not easy, but rather is an intentional decision that requires hard work.

### Scripture:

*Luke 23:34, "Then said Jesus, Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."*

*Colossians 3:12-13 "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."*

*Matthew 5:43-48 "Ye have heard it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans do so? Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."*

*Mark 11:25-26 "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But, if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses."*

*Matthew 18:21-31 "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall they brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told their lord all that was done."*

# Forgiveness

## Content:

- God calls us to forgive others, just as He forgave us through His son, Jesus Christ.
- Forgiving others is possible through God's grace.
- God takes forgiveness very seriously, and indeed His extension of forgiveness to us is affected if we refuse to forgive others (*Matt. 6:14-15*).
- Forgiveness is different from reconciliation. We can extend forgiveness, without restoring a relationship with the person who wronged us. God simply asks us to do our part and not be a hindrance in the healing process.
- There are behaviors which are irritants that require us to be "forbearing" – or patient with others. These types of behaviors include mistakes, personality quirks and making poor choices.
- Offenses include hurtful omissions (such as forgetting to keep a promise or obligation), hurtful words and actions, and major sin/harm (such as adultery, addiction, or abuse). Offenses must be handled through forgiveness. If they are not, offenses can become triggers for larger arguments in relationships.
- Forgiveness does not have to be requested before it is granted. The offended can extend forgiveness, regardless if the offender asks for it. Forgiveness requires only one person, while reconciliation requires two people.
- Sin cannot be overlooked and forgiveness does not mean someone is denying the seriousness of sin. Rather, it acknowledges a sin has occurred and sometimes the offender is unable to provide adequate compensation, and furthermore releases the debt from the offender. Forgiving others allows the person who forgives to also release and detach from the wrong that occurred.
- While forgiveness begins with a few simple words, it is also a process requiring intentional decision/s to offer forgiveness. It often requires hard work through change in our attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and actions. Forgiveness takes courage and is often personally demanding.

## Discussion Questions:

1. What enables us to forgive others who have perhaps wronged us greatly?
2. How does God's example of forgiveness demonstrate how we should forgive others?
3. Does it make it easier for you to forgive others knowing God has forgiven us for so many things? Why or why not?
4. Contrast our natural response/s when someone has wronged us versus how Jesus described what our response/s should be.
5. Can forgiving another person occur without a restored relationship, or reconciliation with that person? Why or why not?
6. How does the parable of the lord and his servant exemplify how serious God takes people forgiving one another? How does this show the difference between how much God has forgiven us and how little we have to forgive others?
7. Contrast what forgiveness is and what it is not.
8. When someone wrongs us, we have three options: ignore, take revenge, or forgive. Why is forgiveness the best option? Is it the easiest option? Why or why not?

# Forgiveness

## Activity:

1. Forgiveness Application: (Materials needed: Disappearing trick paper (can be found on Amazon or other online resources, warm water)
  - a. Give each student a piece of the disappearing trick paper.
  - b. Have the student write one thing someone has wronged them for that they might not have forgiven yet.
  - c. Ask the student to take some time and quietly pray for God to forgive these sins, as well as the person who has done the wrong.
  - d. Have the student dip the paper in warm water until it dissolves.
  - e. Discuss the following:
    - i. What connection does this activity have with forgiveness?
    - ii. What does dissolving the paper represent?
    - iii. Are some actions easier to forgive than others?
    - iv. Does the severity of the offense determine if forgiveness should be granted?
  
2. Object Lesson: (Materials needed: glass of water, effervescent vitamin tablets similar to Airborne)
  - a. Cut the tablets into fourths.
  - b. Put a tablet into the water and watch it dissolve.
  - c. Discuss the following:
    - i. Forgiveness is intentional: we must choose to forgive, just like we chose to let the tablet dissolve in the water.
    - ii. Forgiveness can take time: we have to allow God to work in us and that can take time, just like the tablet took some time to dissolve.
    - iii. Forgiveness means releasing the debt and hurt to God: when we ask God to help us forgive, the hurt is released to Him, just as the bubbles go up as the tablet dissolves.
    - iv. Forgiveness does not excuse the behavior or mean the effect of the wrong completely disappears: just as the water changed color, so too forgiveness does not mean that it is always forgotten or that we excuse the behavior, rather we choose to let God make something good of what has happened.

# Forgiveness

## Lesson 3 - Steps of Forgiveness and Preventing Bitterness

Recommended Age/Class: **High School** (9th-12th grade)

### Lesson Objectives:

1. The student will understand forgiveness takes work and is often physically, emotionally, and spiritually demanding.
2. The student will learn the acronym R.E.A.C.H. to understand the process of forgiveness.
  - a. Recalling the hurt
  - b. Showing Empathy
  - c. Altruistic gifting of forgiveness
  - d. Committing to forgive
  - e. Holding onto forgiveness.
3. The student will understand forgiving others prevents bitterness from developing in our own hearts and further damage to a relationship.
4. The student will understand withholding forgiveness, holding grudges, or harboring bitterness results in serious consequences.

### Scripture:

*Luke 6:37 "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:"*

*Romans 12:19-21 "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."*

*Hebrews 12:14-15 "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled."*

*1 Thessalonians 5:15, "See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men."*

*1 John 3:15-16 "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for our brethren."*

### Content:

- When we forgive others, we prevent bitterness from growing in our hearts.
- Forgiving others helps the healing of everyone involved, and helps prevent further damage in relationships.

# Forgiveness

- Steps towards achieving forgiveness: R.E.A.C.H.
  - Recall the hurt: In order to forgive, acknowledgement of the hurt must occur. In this step, the goal is to accept the wrong and be able to move forward. Either denying pain occurred or obsessively replaying the incident over-and-over in one's mind is a hindrance to forgiveness.
  - Empathize: In this step, the goal is to see the incident from the other person's perspective and to try to understand what they are thinking and feeling. This can be difficult if the offense is great and therefore one can begin with sympathy as a step towards empathy. This could occur by thinking, "How horrible it must be to have a conscience that is seared that someone could do something so wrong." Thinking of God's forgiveness for our own sin can help us to feel empathy towards others.
  - Altruistic gift of forgiveness: Remembering the gift of God's forgiveness for our own sin helps us to have humility and gratitude in order to extend forgiveness to others. Thinking about how we felt when we knew we had done something wrong, and how we felt when we knew God forgave us, helps us to want to extend this gift to others who have wronged us.
  - Commit to forgive: Make an intentional decision to forgive someone and commit to doing so. Telling someone else you are committed to forgive will help you to stand by that commitment when painful memories reappear from the past. This person could be a parent or sibling, a friend, a minister, or even the person who wronged you.
  - Holding unto forgiveness: We often have the misconception that when we forgive, we will forget the event that occurred. When painful memories from the past reappear, it does not mean we have not forgiven. Rather, we need to hold on to our commitment to forgive by giving the event and person over to God in prayer, and moving forward again.
- God tells us not to be vengeful or return the wrong that we encountered.
- Withholding forgiveness results in bitterness growing in our hearts. Bitterness causes damage in our own hearts and the people we are close to, such as our family and friends.
- Withholding grudges or holding bitterness in our hearts is like a cancer that slowly eats away at us, hindering our closeness to God. Over time, bitterness can cause even anxiety and spiritual depression. The longer we hold onto a grudge or bitterness, the harder it can become to forgive. We need to reach out and ask for help if we are struggling with bitterness.
- Overcoming hurts and bitterness allows us to feel God's peace and feel the Holy Spirit directing our hearts and minds.

## Discussion Questions:

1. What benefits does the offender receive from forgiveness? What benefits does the offended person receive from forgiving others?
2. What steps are involved in forgiving others?
3. How should we recall the hurt in order to move forward?
4. How does empathy help us extend forgiveness to others?
5. What can we do if we are having a hard time feeling empathy for someone who has wronged us?

# Forgiveness

6. What are ways we can commit to forgiving others and hold firm to this commitment?
7. Does remembering a hurt mean we have not forgiven someone? Why or why not?
8. How does David show an example of extending forgiveness rather than vengeance in *2 Samuel 1:11-12*?
9. What consequences do we personally experience if we refuse to extend forgiveness to those who wronged us?

## Activity:

1. Hymn Discussion: Review the song, “Did you Think to Pray” and talk about why it is important to pray when we are forgiving someone and how praying for God’s help can give us peace in our own hearts.
2. Object Lesson: (Materials needed: a rope with several knots tied in it)
  - a. Drape the rope around your neck.
  - b. Explain to students that we experience hurts in life that can make us feel anxious or unhappy – like knots in our stomach.
  - c. Start to give examples of hurts and start to wrap the rope more around your neck with each example. For example, someone sent you a text message that seemed like it could have been bullying.
  - d. Have students also share examples of things that have caused or could cause hurts in their own lives.
  - e. Discuss how holding onto these hurts actually hurts us personally. The hurt and pain is not removed, rather it stays with us and restrains us from living a peaceful, happy life.
  - f. State we can choose to forgive and turn the hurt over to God. Then, start to remove the knotted rope from around your neck.
  - g. Discuss how when we choose to forgive and ask God’s help in doing it, we are freed from this hurt.

# Forgiveness

## Lesson 4 - Self-Forgiveness

Recommended Age/Class: **High School** (9th-12th grade)

### Lesson Objectives:

1. The student will understand it can be a struggle to forgive one's self, even after God has granted forgiveness.
2. The student will understand Satan is the accuser of God's children and attempts to condemn us even after we have received forgiveness for sin.
3. The student will understand continual self-punishment or offering sacrifices does not earn forgiveness.
4. The student will learn steps to practicing self-forgiveness include trusting God's Word more than our emotions; sharing the struggle with others; accepting our imperfection knowing God understands and seeking help.

### Scripture:

*1 John 1:9* "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

*Revelations 12:10* "And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night."

*Hebrews 10:10-12* "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;"

*Philippians 3:13-14* "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

*Psalms 103:13-14* "Like as the Father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust."

### Content:

- Forgiving one's self can be one of the greatest struggles believers experience, even after repenting and asking God for forgiveness.
- Even though believers may know in their minds that God has forgiven them, they may still feel unforgiven or condemnation in their hearts.
- Satan attempts to destroy the peace and connection believers have to God by accusing them of sin and imperfections.
- Inflicting self-punishment or continually offering self-sacrifices will not earn forgiveness.

# Forgiveness

- Steps to practicing self-forgiveness include:
  - Trusting God's Word more than our emotions: Read through Bible verses related to God's forgiveness (see Lesson 1 or above) and choose to believe they are true, even when your feelings don't confirm it. God is able and willing to forgive when we come to Him.
  - Share the struggle with others: Talk to a family member, a mentor, or a friend who understands God's forgiveness and who can help support and pray for you.
  - Accept our imperfection knowing God understands: While we want to live a life that is free from errors and offending others, we just cannot. God understands our human nature and gives us mercy.
  - Seek help sooner rather than later: Sometimes, depression, perfectionism, or other emotional issues can lead to issues with self-forgiveness and inability to move forward in life. Seeking help from a minister or Christian counselor can help you identify barriers with self-forgiveness and begin to overcome them.

## Discussion Questions:

1. Why can self-forgiveness be one of the hardest struggles for believers?
2. Why might the inability to forgive one's self also be a reflection of pride?
3. Why would Satan delight in believers struggling with self-forgiveness?
4. Why will self-punishment or self-sacrifice not earn forgiveness? Who is able to give us true forgiveness?
5. Why should we seek God's forgiveness before we forgive ourselves?
6. What are some practical steps for achieving self-forgiveness?
7. What are some Bible verses you can use when you are struggling with self-condemnation?
8. List some people you can share this struggle with and ask for support and prayer.
9. Explain the dilemma between striving for perfection as Jesus commands, yet also realize we are imperfect? How can we handle this struggle?

## Activity:

1. Causes for Struggling with Self-Forgiveness:
  - a. List these factors on a board or piece of large paper: Anger, Guilt, Fear, Pride or Self-Righteousness, Self-Pity
  - b. Discuss with students each of the above factors and how Satan can prevent Believers from practicing self-forgiveness thru each. Have students give possible examples for each one, similar to those below, as well as how following the actions steps for self-forgiveness can be practiced in dealing with these scenarios.
    - i. Anger: Feeling angry at one's self for sinning or hurting others, such as how Joseph's brothers might have been angry at themselves for selling him into slavery
    - ii. Guilt: Pseudo-guilt for things beyond our control, such as a person who is driving a car and strikes down a child that runs across the street.
    - iii. Fear: We might have guilt and regret that leads us to fear of what might have been or what is now missing because of a result of our actions. It could be someone who disobeyed curfew and now fears the consequences of those actions.

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- iv. **Pride or Self-Righteousness:** We believe we do not need God to help us resolve issues or we might hold ourselves to a higher standard than we do others. It could be someone who said an unkind word to a friend and is too proud to ask God to help repair the relationship.
  - v. **Self-Pity:** We feel sorry for ourselves and refuse to forgive our wrongs, such as someone who has become impatient with a sibling for their unkind words and said something/did something in revenge.
2. **Object Lesson:** (Materials needed: a jar or container that has a narrow neck large enough for an unclasped hand to fit through, but small enough that a clenched fist cannot be pulled out; a rock or object to place in the jar)
- a. Put the rock or object in the jar.
  - b. Hand the jar to a student and ask the student to pull out the object. The student should be unable to pull out the object while holding onto it. The student should only be able to remove his/her hand once letting go of the object.
  - c. Discuss the following:
    - i. Compare holding or clinging unto the rock when pulling the hand out of the jar with refusing to forgive ourselves.
    - ii. Holding or clinging onto our own sin, traps us from moving forward.
    - iii. Only by letting go of the sin, can we make progress in our Christian walk.