



Leader’s Discussion Guide -- Forgiveness

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Church of the Nazarene

**Forgiveness**

**Session Goal:** To help participants gain a better understanding of forgiveness and encourage them to extend forgiveness to others.

**Are You Ready?**

 Pray for God’s direction as you prepare for the session. Pray that participants will be open to

God’s truth and be ready to apply it to their lives.

 Read the entire leader’s guide for this session to get an overview of the material.

 View the Mor2Lif video, *Forgiveness*.

 Be prepared to show the Mor2Lif video, *Forgiveness.*

 Choose one or two questions from the “So What?” section as a follow-up to the video and an intro to the study.

 Determine which *Option* you will use from “Now What?” If you choose *Option 1*, be prepared to share a personal experience of forgiveness given or received. **Note:** Do not use real names when sharing this experience. If you choose *Option 2*, have paper for each participant, wastebasket, and/or a paper shredder available.

 Be prepared or enlist several people to read: Matthew 18:21-35.

 Prepare copies of the participant outline, *Forgiveness.*

**Introduction**

It is very easy to say, “Just forgive and forget”; while in reality forgiveness can be very difficult to give. When we have been hurt, it is instinctive to want to strike back. Sometimes we feel that by giving forgiveness we are letting the other person “off the hook” or perhaps giving them “permission” to do wrong again. While both of these attitudes seem to make sense, they do not find support in the Apostle Paul’s instructions to the believers in Romans 12:19: “It [vengeance] is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.

Scripture states that God is ultimately responsible for dispensing justice. Think about the story of Joseph. He had been wronged by his family, falsely accused by his owner, and terribly mistreated, yet when approached by his brothers he responded; “Am I in the place of God?” (Genesis 50:19)? Letting someone “off the hook” releases us from a burden we’re not designed to carry.

Bitterness, anger, and resentment are all attitudes that can result when we refuse to forgive. The longer one holds on to unaddressed hurts and wrongs, the harder it becomes to resolve these issues. Addressing and solving the issues in our lives allows us to move on; it allows relationships to deepen and grow. Dr. Jim Pettitt suggests the following three steps for reconciliation: 1) recognize and communicate the issues;

2) align actions and attitudes with our statement of forgiveness; and 3) give up our right to justice.

Think about the following questions as you prepare to lead this session.

 Think about a time when some forgave you. How did it make you feel?

 Think about a time when you needed to forgive someone. Was it difficult or easy? Why?

 What part does wanting vengeance have to play in the forgiveness process?

 When offering forgiveness to another does it feel as if you are letting them off the hook?

 If you are having difficulty forgiving someone, does “wanting them earn your forgiveness” play a

part in your unwillingness to forgive? Why or why not?

 What was the ultimate cost of God’s forgiveness? What does God’s forgiveness mean for us?

 How can forgiveness we extend to others provide emotional release and joy?

**Note to Leader:** There may be those in your group who have been physically and emotionally hurt due to abusive or criminal wrong doing. Be sensitive to their pain and situation. You may need to suggest they seek outside help; you may even need to recommend the appropriate authority be contacted.

**So What?**

View the video, *Forgiveness.* Choose one or more of the following questions that best fits the needs/dynamics of your group.

 It is said that divorce has the same emotional impact on a person as the death of a loved one. Do you agree? Why or why not?

 How common do you think Christina’s situation is in our society? How often do you see others experience her pain and anger?

 Why is it so difficult for Christina to forgive her ex-husband and move on with her life?

 Given the two roles played in the video, what role have you played most? Are you most often the friend/counselor or the one who has experienced the injustice?

 As suggested in the video, have you felt like someone needs to “earn your forgiveness”? Is that the attitude a Christian should harbor? Why or why not?

**What Does the Bible Say?**

*Accounting 101*

**Say,** Bitterness, anger, and resentment are all emotions and attitudes that are a result of our refusal to forgive. The longer one holds on to unaddressed hurts and wrongs, the harder it becomes to resolve these issues. Addressing and solving these issues in our lives with God’s help allows us to move on; allowing relationships to deepen and grow.

Read or have someone read Matthew 18:21-22.

 What do you think Peter’s question shows about his attitude of forgiveness?

 What do you think Jesus’ answer to Peter’s question teaches about forgiveness and God’s grace?

*A Parable About Forgiveness*

Read or have someone read Matthew 18:23-35

**Say,** Peter was under the impression there is a limit to the number of times a person has to forgive another. Jesus told this parable to expand his and our understanding of forgiveness. Jesus also delivers a clear and unmistakable warning to those who are unwilling to forgive others. Reflect on Jesus’ parable; then answer the questions.

 How did the servant react to the king’s demands to pay his debt?

 How did the king respond to the servant’s request?

 If you had been forgiven an impossible debt, how would you respond to the one who had forgiven you? How would it make you feel? What would it prompt you to do?

 How do you explain the difference between the relief the servant experiences when his debt is forgiven by the king compared to the reaction he shows to the debt his peer owes him?

 What does the reaction of the “heavenly Father” in verse 35 teach us about our attitudes and

reactions concerning forgiving others?

 What insights do Jesus’ teachings give us about forgiveness?

**How Does This Affect My Life?**

**Say,** Christians have been forgiven an incredible debt, and yet many times want to hold a grudge against another person. Forgiveness is not easy; it requires divine intervention.

 What might make you unwilling to extend the same kind of forgiveness that you have received?

 What kinds of circumstances keep you from being able to forgive others?

 How does understanding how much you have been forgiven help you to look on others with mercy?

 Is there someone in your life that you need to forgive? If so, what insights have you gained from the study that can help you?

 In the video, Melissa tells Christina she isn’t alone because she is part of the Body of Christ. How can having supportive Christian friends help you in a painful situation, such as Christina’s? Are you someone’s Melissa?

**Now What?**

*Option 1*

**Say,** Forgiving others is rarely an easy task. Yet, we are forgiven through God’s love and mercy which

can empower us to forgive others.

 Write a “Thank You to God” for the complete and freeing forgiveness He has given to you.

 What are some things you will try to do differently as you find yourself in conflict with others this week?

 How can the group help you to forgive others?

*Option 2*

Share a personal experience of forgiveness given or received. **Say,** It is possible, and sometimes necessary, to forgive others even when they do not nor or cannot ask for it. These circumstances include when people are deceased or incapable of communication (Smith, 1984). In the video Melissa talks about “on-going” forgiveness.

 Think about the people and circumstances in your life that require “on-going” forgiveness.

**Ask/Say,** Are you ready to release these situations and people to God? If so, talk to God about the person or issue in your life that needs forgiveness.

 When you are ready, write the person’s name and issue on a piece of paper.

 Crush and discard or shred the paper symbolizing your willingness to release the hurts you have received.

 Thank God for His total forgiveness and mercy to you. Ask Him for His help in the difficult process of offering forgiveness.

Close the session in prayer by thanking God for His complete and total forgiveness of sin. Ask God to help us apply the lessons learned about forgiveness to the relationships in our lives.