

Build a Bridge

GENESIS 50:15-21

4



GOAL

Youth consider how acts of forgiveness can strengthen communities, building bridges for future relationships and acts of ministry.

- A Art
- AM Active/Movement
- AT Abstract Thinking
- C Conversation
- CT Concrete Thinking
- D Drama
- G Game
- M Music
- QC Quiet/Contemplative
- S Service
- T Technology
- X Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Holy One, help me to see possibilities for the future as I prepare this session. Help me release my burdens and live in hope. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Forgiveness allows us to deal with things from our past. But there is more. When we forgive, we can imagine a future emerging from trust and faithfulness rather than a future defined by sin and hurt. This session is about building bridges and moving forward, allowing our past to inform, rather than define, our future. The act of forgiveness allows us to imagine a future that is not limited to behavior that is right and wrong but that expands to include reconciliation and recommitment to one another. From these, relationship and community are strengthened.

THE BIBLE STORY

In Genesis 50:15-21, Joseph shows his commitment to reconciliation and care for his brothers and their families. Earlier in Genesis, we find Joseph's brothers mistreating him, as well as Joseph's arrogance annoying his brothers. Eventually, his brothers sell Joseph into slavery in Egypt while they remain in Israel. When all of Israel suffers from a famine, Joseph's brothers go to Egypt looking for relief. Joseph, who has prospered in Egypt, recognizes them although they do not initially recognize him. Joseph's commitment to caring for his brothers and their families allows Joseph's family to look with confidence toward a future together.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

Youth need a community to which they can belong without judgment. Friend groups cannot always be these communities because of fluidity within groups. Instead, youth often find their community on sports teams, in musical ensembles, and in youth groups at their churches. This session will boost young people's confidence in their church community as a place where they can belong regardless of their past transgressions. They participate in building a community of trust and compassion.

SESSION PREPARATION

- "Forgiving" (p. 32): Post the sheet of newsprint with the words to the responsive litany from session 1 (p. 6).
- Depending on the options you choose:
- "Debate" (p. 32): Prepare copies of Resource Page 1.
- "Drama" (p. 33): Prepare copies of Resource Page 2 and a coat.
- "Taping It Up" (p. 34): Gather Resource Page 3 and one roll of clear tape per person.

GETTING STARTED

☐ Internet-connected device

A WONDERFUL WORLD

M

Welcome youth as they arrive. Gather around an internet-connected device and show the YouTube video “Louis Armstrong—What a Wonderful World (Official Video)” (bit.ly/FMWonderfulWorld, 2:18). Encourage youth to notice images of Armstrong’s vision of a wonderful world. Gather the group and discuss the images they identified. Ask:

- ➔ What have you experienced in the past week that fits into Armstrong’s definition of a wonderful world?
- ➔ What are your images of a wonderful world?

☐ Prepared newsprint with words to the litany from session 1 (p. 6)

FORGIVING

QC

Display the prepared newsprint with the responsive litany and invite the participants to join you in prayer.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

☐ Newsprint and markers

IMAGINING A PERFECT COMMUNITY

A AT

Form small groups and give each group a piece of newsprint and markers. Tell each group to build on the song “What a Wonderful World” to imagine their perfect community. Draw what this world would look like. Include ways to meet each person’s needs, create fair rules, care for the environment, and so on. Have groups present their perfect worlds to each other. As they present, note what their perfect communities have in common. Ask:

- ➔ How is forgiveness part of your perfect community?
- ➔ What needs to happen today to move us toward your perfect world?

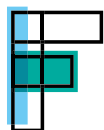
☐ Smartphones
☐ Internet access

CREATING A MEME

T

Have youth work alone or in pairs to create a meme with the title “Build a Bridge.” Have them gather images from their smartphones or online. Invite youth to show their memes to the group by passing around their smartphones or texting the meme to a group text. As each meme is shared, note their associations with “build a bridge.” Ask the group to identify similarities and differences within their created memes. Discuss:

- ➔ What does building a bridge have to do with forgiveness?



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or both options.

☐ Bibles
☐ Copies of Resource Page 1

DEBATE

CT C

Form two groups and distribute copies of Resource Page 1. Call one group “Team Joseph” and the other “Team Brothers.” Have them read the story of Joseph and his brothers. After reading the story, tell them that you

will have a debate about who is the better family member: Joseph or his brothers. Have teams create a 2-minute opening argument. Present their opening argument. Next, have teams create a rebuttal to the other team's opening argument. Present these. Finally, discuss who needs to forgive and be forgiven and how reconciliation might happen with this family.

Tell the group that Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt. Through a series of events, Joseph became an important person in Pharaoh's government. When a famine came to Israel, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt looking for food. Joseph recognized them, though they did not recognize him. Read Genesis 50:15–21. Discuss:

➔ How will Joseph's forgiveness affect the future of his family? Why?

DRAMA

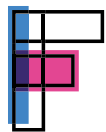


Distribute copies of Resource Page 2, assigning youth the roles of Narrator, Jacob, Joseph, Reuben, and Joseph's brothers. Have youth act out the story while reading the lines. Discuss:

- ➔ Who mistreated others in this story?
- ➔ Why did Joseph forgive his brothers at the end of this story?
- ➔ Did Joseph's brothers also forgive him? Why or why not?
- ➔ How do you think the brothers felt when Joseph told them he forgave them?
- ➔ How will Joseph's forgiveness affect the future of their family?

☐ Copies of Resource Page 2

☐ Coat



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or more options.

LOVE CAN BUILD A BRIDGE



Show the YouTube video “The Judds’ Love Can Build a Bridge YouTube” (bit.ly/FMLoveBridge, 5:55). Invite youth to discuss their impression of the video. Ask:

- ➔ What transformation occurred in these communities because of forgiveness?
- ➔ What communities do you see today that need similar forgiveness and transformation?

☐ Internet-connected device

REMEMBER THE TITANS



Prepare to show two video clips from the film *Remember the Titans* (2000), based on a true story of white and black football players learning to play together on an integrated team. The first scene takes place while the team is at football camp, struggling to get along. Show the YouTube video “Remember the Titans—‘You Will Respect Each Other’” (bit.ly/FMRespect, 1:37).

In the course of the movie, the black head coach of the team tells the players that they will have three-a-day practices until they get to know all members of the team and play together. As the players get sore and tired, they eventually come together as a team. In this scene, two players finally speak to one another. Show the YouTube video “Strong Side [Remember the Titans]” (bit.ly/FMRememberTitans, 1:39).

By the end of the movie, the players come to know and trust each other, and they win the football championship. Discuss:

☐ Internet-connected device

- ➔ What benefit do the black and white players find in getting to know one another?
- ➔ The tagline for this movie is “Before they could win, they had to become one.” What does this mean?
- ➔ What is the relationship between forgiveness and unity? Forgiveness and community?

☐ Internet-connected device

A BRIDGE IN SOUTH AFRICA

T AT

Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s work with South African’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission emphasized forgiveness as a way to make a new beginning, which enabled a new future. Tutu was also articulate about how forgiveness anywhere, even among individuals, is transformative. In this interview, he wraps together all the elements of forgiveness we have discussed (naming wrongdoing, being forgiven, forgiving others, and opening a window of possibility into a new relationship and future).

Show the video “Forgiveness: “What Do You Do to Forgive Someone?”—Archbishop Desmond Tutu.” (bit.ly/FMTutuForgive, 4:25). Discuss:

- ➔ Where do you find the four elements in the practice of forgiveness (from this study) emphasized by Tutu?
- ➔ Why is forgiveness necessary to build a healthy and hope-filled future?



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Colored pencils
- ☐ Pieces of clear tape
- ☐ Resource Page 3

TAPING IT UP

A QC

Distribute paper and colored pencils, and invite youth to find their own space in the room to work. Have them draw something that reminds them of God. They may also write words or phrases. When they complete their drawings, invite them to pray, thanking God for God’s presence in their lives. Use instructions on Resource Page 3 for ripping and taping their papers.

☐ Bibles

REVISITING THE PRODIGAL SON

C

Form pairs. Have partners sit facing each other to form an inner and an outer circle. Read Luke 15:25–32. Use questions for the youth to discuss in pairs. After each question, have the inner circle rotate one chair to the right so that youth discuss each question with a new person.

- ➔ The Bible never tells us whether the older brother reconciles with his father and younger brother in this story. What decision do you think the older brother made?
- ➔ Have you ever felt like the older brother in this story? When?
- ➔ Why do you think the Bible doesn’t tell us what decision the older brother made?
- ➔ If the older brother chooses to reconcile with his family, what do you think the family life might be like in the future?
- ➔ If the older brother remains resentful about his brother’s and father’s actions, what do you think the family life might be like in the future?
- ➔ What can you take from this story about forgiveness in the family? In your life and relationships?

MESSINESS OF MOVING FORWARD



- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pens

Every day offers countless stories where the future path forward is not yet clear, and the choice to forgive is balanced in the messy middle. Sometimes we participate in the messy middle without intention. Distribute paper and pens. Have youth draw five crooked lines and label them: personal life, community, church, nation, world. Invite them to identify situations in each of these areas where forgiveness is needed. Write these situations on the different lines.

Have youth prayerfully consider:

- ➡ What is your role in stepping into a new and different future in these areas?
- ➡ What can you let go of, what can you confess, what can you forgive that might shift things enough to start moving forward toward a better future for yourself? For others?
- ➡ How does forgiveness build a bridge for the future?

Pray about these things.



FOLLOWING JESUS

A CRUCIFORM BODY PRAYER OF FORGIVENESS



Lead youth in a prayer of forgiveness as an embodied practice. Use a three-dimensional shape of a cross to engage different parts of the brain beyond a spoken or thought prayer. Follow these steps and movements.

1. **Inward**

Take a deep breath in and out, bringing your hands inward to your chest.

In the quiet, name a wrong that needs forgiving, of either your own doing or that of someone else.

2. **Upward**

Reach your hands up.

Remind yourself that you are forgiven through the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

3. **Outward**

Stretch your arms out to your sides, palms up, then turn your palms down.

Release your hold on what you want to forgive.

4. **Forward**

Bring your hands together, stretched forward, in the shape of a bowl.

Receive God's gift of a new future, leaving behind the hurt, holding onto grace.

Close by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

The Story of Joseph and His Brothers

Jacob lived in the land of Canaan and had 12 sons from four wives. Jacob's youngest son was Joseph. When Joseph was 17 years old, he was working in the fields when he saw some of his older brothers misbehaving. He immediately went to Jacob and told him what his brothers were doing. Jacob loved Joseph the best of all his children, so Jacob made Joseph a beautiful coat with long sleeves. When Joseph's brothers saw the coat, they hated Joseph and could not speak to him.

Joseph was known for his vivid dreams. One day, he gathered his brothers together and told them about one of his dreams. In the dream, Joseph and his brothers were bundling crops together in a field. Then his brothers' bundles of crops all bowed down to Joseph's bundles. The brothers were angry. They asked, "Are you indeed to reign over us?" They hated him even more.

Joseph had another dream. This time, he gathered his brothers and his father together to tell them about his dream. In this dream, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to Joseph. Joseph's father was angry this time. Jacob said, "What kind of dream is that? . . . Shall I, your mother, and your brothers bow to the ground before you?" Joseph's brothers were angry about this dream as well. They called him names like "the dreamer."

One day, the brothers went out to pasture their father's flock, but Joseph didn't go with them. Jacob found out and sent Joseph to work with his brothers. Joseph's brothers saw him coming from afar and made a plan to kill him. They attacked Joseph and took his coat.

One brother, Reuben, begged the other brothers not to kill Joseph, so, instead, they put him in a pit where he couldn't get out. Then some robbers from the tribe of Ishmael came by and the brothers had another plan.

They sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites. They also slaughtered a goat and put the goat's blood on Joseph's coat. They took Joseph's coat home and led Jacob to believe that a wild animal had killed Joseph. Jacob was angry and upset at Joseph's brothers (his other sons) for a long time after this.



Drama Script

Narrator: Jacob had 4 wives and 12 sons and lived in the land of Canaan. Jacob and his sons raised animals to care for their family. When Joseph was 17, he was in the field with his brothers who were misbehaving.

Joseph: Hey! Brothers! Stop that! You know you're not supposed to do that.

Brothers: Who cares? Just go back and whine to Daddy!

Joseph: OK . . . I will.

Brothers: No . . . don't, OK? We were just kidding!

Narrator: Joseph went to his father, Jacob.

Joseph: Hey, Dad! My brothers were misbehaving in the field.

Jacob: I'm tired of punishing them. I'll do something nice for you instead.

Joseph: Really? I'd like that! What are you going to do?

Jacob: How about an amazing coat! It is expensive and has long sleeves. I'll give this only to you, not to your brothers.

Narrator: Joseph's brothers came home and saw the special coat.

Brothers: Where did you get that?

Joseph: Dad! He chose me because I don't misbehave when I'm supposed to be working.

Brothers: You're annoying. You know that?

Narrator: A few nights later, Joseph had a dream. He gathered his brothers together to tell the story of his dream.

Joseph: Hey, brothers! I had this amazing dream. We were bundling wheat into sheaves in the field. Suddenly, all your sheaves started bowing down to mine.

Brothers: You mean, like people bow down to a king? How annoying! No way! Gosh, you're annoying.

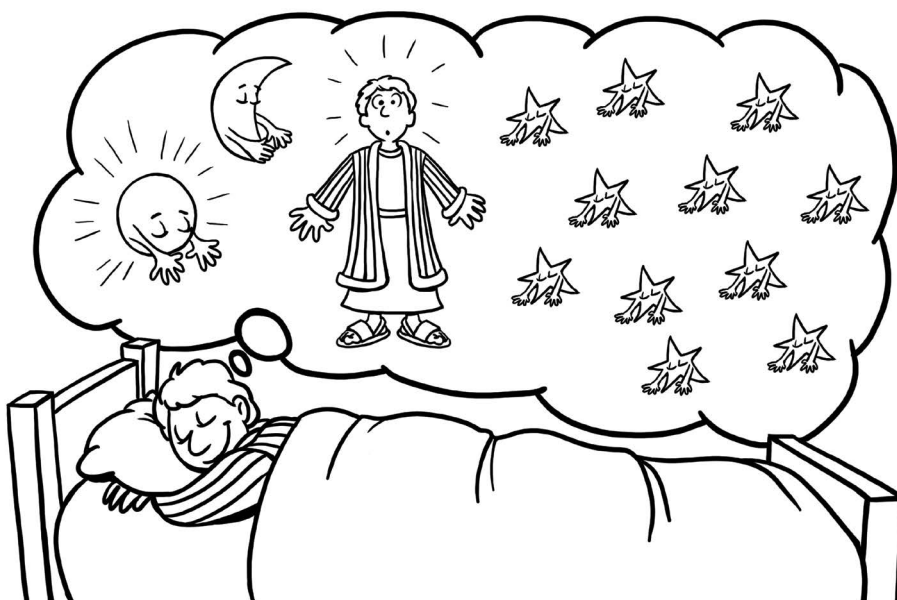
Narrator: A few nights later, Joseph had another dream. This time he told his father about the dream too.

Joseph: So, Dad. . . I dreamed that the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bowed down to me!

Jacob: You mean, like how people bow down to a king? You are my favorite son, but I don't think that'll happen. Why don't you go back in the field and help tend the flock with your brothers?

Narrator: Joseph's brothers were already working in the field for the day. Joseph went out to them, and they saw him coming from far away.

Brothers: Let's kill Joseph! We're tired of our father liking him the best!



Reuben: Are you sure? Maybe we can just throw him into a pit instead.

Brothers: Yeah—OK. We'll just leave him there.

Narrator: So they threw Joseph into a pit and took his coat. Then they sold him to some traders who took him to Egypt. They also killed a goat and put the goat's blood on Joseph's coat. They returned home to Jacob and showed him the bloody coat.

Jacob: Nooooo! I am devastated! Joseph was my favorite son! I can't believe we lost him!

Narrator: Several years passed. Through a series of events, Joseph became second-in-command to Pharaoh in Egypt. Because Joseph could interpret dreams, he predicted a huge famine in the land. Egypt was able to plan for the famine by storing up lots of food. Jacob and his sons in Israel were not able to plan, however.

Brothers: Father, we are hungry. So are you.

Jacob: Then go to Egypt. See if they have any food there that they can spare.

Narrator: And so, they went to Egypt and were brought before Joseph, who was in charge of giving out food. They didn't recognize their brother, but he recognized them and told them who he was. He sent them back to their father with lots of food. Jacob rejoiced, knowing his favorite son was alive. When Jacob died, the brothers were afraid that Joseph would punish them for what they had done to him. They went to him and begged for forgiveness.

Brothers: Joseph, please forgive us! We will be your slaves!

Joseph: I am not God. I will not judge you. Even though you wanted to harm me, God used your plans for good. God put me here so I could provide for you in a time of famine. I forgive you and all of the mean things you've done to me.

Brothers: Hooray!

Narrator: And Joseph continued to provide for his brothers until his own death in Egypt.

Taping It Up

Instructions for youth to rip and tape their papers:

Have youth respond to the following:

1. If you have ever said something to intentionally hurt someone feelings, rip your paper in half.
2. If you have ever spoken poorly about someone behind their backs, rip the paper halves again.
3. If you have ever done something to betray a friend or family member, then rip the paper again.

Each person should have eight smaller torn parts of paper.

Explain that, when we sin and we harm others, we break our relationships not only with people but also with God. The good news is that God always wants to repair relationship with us.

Have youth use tape to put their paper back together, recreating their original drawings. As they work in silence, invite them to focus on the feeling of being forgiven by God and having their relationship repaired.

Conclude with discussion about some of these questions:

- How does the newly taped paper look different from your original work?
- What do the cracks represent in your relationship with God? What could the tape represent?
- Think about this taped-up image of God. If you were asked to rip it again, would it be easier or harder to tear? Why?
- If we believe that each time we sin and are forgiven by God, our relationship is strengthened, then how is our faith affected?
- If we give and receive forgiveness from others, how could this affect our relationships and communities?

