

Receive Forgiveness

2

GENESIS 33:1-12; JOHN 8:1-11



GOAL

Youth explore the impact God's gift of forgiveness has on individuals and practice receiving forgiveness.

- 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 God, help me to believe that you offer forgiveness to me. Free me of the sin and brokenness that keep me from you. Amen.

THIS SESSION

God gives us forgiveness, offering an open-armed welcome. We can accept God's forgiveness and be grateful. When we resist receiving God's forgiveness, we are essentially saying that we know better than God who we are, what we have done, and how God ought to respond. Receiving forgiveness demonstrates that wrongdoing and sin (ours or someone else's) do not have the last word. Receiving forgiveness from God invites us into a new way of living, one that allows us to value ourselves despite our sinful actions.

THE BIBLE STORY

Today's Bible stories include two powerful examples of forgiveness. The first, from Genesis 33, shows Esau forgiving his brother Jacob, despite a lifetime of mistrust and tension between them. The second story, from John 8, is about a woman caught in adultery. Here, forgiveness is offered by Jesus as he refrains from condemning the accused woman. Jesus gives her life rather than death at the hands of her accusers. Forgiveness is a gift from God that allows us to live lives free of guilt and shame.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

Feeling shame from past actions can affect the self-confidence and sense of hope for some youth, with long-lasting effects. Other youth feel little shame because they do not recognize their brokenness or their participation in sinful actions. In naming sin, we work to de-stigmatize it and encourage each person to receive forgiveness. Once youth realize that sin need not control their lives, they are freed to receive forgiveness and allow God's grace to guide their feelings about themselves and their actions with others.

SESSION PREPARATION

- "Forgiving" (p. 16): Post the sheet of newsprint with the words to the responsive litany from session 1 (p. 6).
- Depending on the options you choose:
- "Writing on Rocks" (p. 16); "A Forgiving Brother," "Throwing Stones" (p. 17); "Walking Meditation," and "Emptying the Bag" (p. 19): Obtain large and small rocks (at least two per person) and a backpack for carrying rocks.
- "Writing on Rocks" (p. 16): Gather permanent markers or paint supplies.
- "Walking Meditation" (p. 19): Plan a path around the church (inside or outside).

GETTING STARTED

- ☐ Internet-connected device

“LET IT GO” CONVERSATION

M

As young people arrive, play the music video “Disney’s Frozen ‘Let It Go’ Sequence Performed by Idina Menzel” (bit.ly/FMLetItGo, 3:38). Expect youth to laugh, groan, or sing along.

Welcome the group and discuss why Elsa wants to let go of everything.

Ask:

- ➔ What things do you need to let go of?
- ➔ What keeps you from letting go?

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



Keep newsprint for use in sessions 3 and 4.

FORGIVING

QC

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



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

- ☐ Paper lunch bags
- ☐ Index cards
- ☐ Pens

GIVING AND RECEIVING

A G

Distribute paper bags and pens. Have youth write their name on their bag. Place opened bags along a wall. Distribute index cards and have youth write affirmations to each person in the group. Place the messages in the bags. Have youth retrieve their bags and read their messages. Discuss:

- ➔ How does it feel to write affirmations to one another? What opportunities do you have to say positive things to others?
- ➔ How does it feel to read the affirmations you received? What opportunities do you have to hear positive messages about yourself?
- ➔ Which is easier for you, giving affirmations or receiving them? Why?

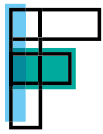
Tell the youth that you will explore the impact of giving and receiving more than affirmations. Today’s session explores giving and receiving forgiveness.

- ☐ Large rocks, one per person
- ☐ Permanent markers or paint supplies
- ☐ Backpack

WRITING ON ROCKS

A QC

Give each youth a large rock and a marker or paint supplies. Have them think of something for which they need forgiveness and draw a symbol, image, or word representing this on their rock. Place the backpack in the center of your group. Invite youth to offer a silent prayer about their need for forgiveness, then place their rock in the backpack. Once all rocks are in the backpack, invite volunteers to pick it up and describe its weight. Tell youth that, throughout today’s session, they will carry the backpack with them. At the end of the session, they will have a chance to let go of the rocks that weigh them down and receive forgiveness.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or both options.

A FORGIVING BROTHER

Invite seven volunteers to role play the roles of Esau, Jacob, Isaac, Rebekah, Laban, Leah, and Rachel. Have another person be the narrator. Distribute copies of Resource Page 1. Instruct Jacob to carry the backpack when indicated during the story. Following the Bible story, discuss:

- ➔ Who needed to be forgiven in this story? For what?
- ➔ Do you think Jacob expected to be forgiven? How do you think he felt about Esau's response to him?
- ➔ What impact might Esau's forgiveness have on Jacob's life?
- ➔ In this story, do you think it was easier to give or receive forgiveness? Why?

D

- ☐ Copies of Resource Page 1
- ☐ Backpack with rocks



If you have a larger group, consider forming two groups and choosing both options. Then, facilitate a conversation between the groups, allowing youth to compare their stories and talk about the impact of forgiveness.

THROWING STONES

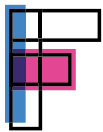
Give everyone a small rock to hold and imagine that they are among the crowd gathered around the woman while a volunteer reads aloud John 8:1–11. Explain that, typically, a woman who committed adultery would be stoned to death as punishment. Discuss:

- ➔ Feel the small rock in your hand. Could you throw it at someone to punish them for adultery? What sins do you think should receive such punishment?
- ➔ In your opinion, did this woman deserve to have stones thrown at her? Why?
- ➔ Why do you think the woman's accusers did not throw their stones at her?
- ➔ Jesus did not condemn the woman; how might this impact the woman's life?

C

- ☐ Bible
- ☐ Small rocks, one per person
- ☐ Backpack with rocks

Have youth place their small rocks in the backpack.



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or more options.

“YOU ARE SPECIAL”

Show “You Are Special—Max Lucado” (bit.ly/FMYouAreSpecial, 8:21). Discuss:

- ➔ In what ways do we put gray dots and yellow stars on people? What effects does this have on them?
- ➔ When do we put gray dots or yellow stars on ourselves? What effect does this have on us?
- ➔ How do Eli's feelings about the Wimmicks make a difference in the power of stars and dots?
- ➔ What connections can you make between this story and God's forgiveness?

T C

- ☐ Internet-connected device

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- ☐ Internet-connected device

RECEIVING FORGIVENESS

T C

Rob Bell tells the story of unconditional forgiveness in an incident when his son, who did wrong, hid under the covers because he was ashamed of himself. Show the YouTube video “10 Nooma Rob Bell LUMP 010” (bit.ly/FMLump, 10:31). Discuss:

- Have you ever done something where you felt the depth of shame the boy feels?
- What did you want to do in that moment?
- What could have helped you in that moment?
- How is the unconditional acceptance shown by the boy’s father like the unconditional acceptance and forgiveness God promises us?

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- ☐ Copies of worship bulletins with Assurance of Forgiveness (optional)

FORGIVENESS IN WORSHIP

C

Distribute copies of a worship bulletin and identify the Prayer of Confession section and its three parts: Call to Confession, Prayer of Confession, Assurance of Pardon/Forgiveness. Tell youth that after the worshipping community prays the Prayer of Confession together, naming individual and corporate sins, the worship leader offers words that assure people of God’s forgiveness.

If the Assurance of Pardon/Forgiveness is printed in your bulletin, read it aloud. Or read this adaptation of 1 Peter 2:9–10 and discuss the questions following it:

Once you were not a people,
but now you are God’s people.
Once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy.
You are God’s own people, in order that you
may proclaim the mighty acts of God
who called you out of darkness into the marvelous light.
Receive the good news of the gospel:
In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

—adapted from 1 Peter 2:9–10

- What do these words say about God?
- What do these words say about God’s people (us)?
- Why might it be helpful to hear these words after we pray our confession to God?

-
- ☐ Bibles
 - ☐ Paper
 - ☐ Colored pencils
 - ☐ Internet-connected devices

FORGIVENESS IN THE PSALMS

AT

Distribute Bibles, paper, and colored pencils. Read aloud Psalm 32. Look up words that need clarification on internet-connected devices. Have youth rewrite the psalm as if one youth is talking with another, giving them assurance and advice like the psalmist gave to the Israelites long ago. Invite volunteers to read aloud their writings. Affirm creative rewritings and emphasize the joy of being forgiven.

Discuss with the group if they want to publicize their rewrites of Psalm 32 with your worshipping community and identify ways to do this.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

WALKING MEDITATION

A X

Prepare to lead the group to a place around your church where they can let go of the rocks they have been carrying. Have youth take from the backpack the rock they painted in “Writing on Rocks” on page 16. If you did not choose this option, give each youth a rock and imagine that it represents something for which they need forgiveness. Use instructions from Resource Page 2 for the walking meditation.

- ☐ Resource Page 2
- ☐ Heavy rocks
- ☐ Backpack with rocks

EMPTYING THE BAG

QC AT

Pass the backpack with rocks around the group for each person to feel its weight. Have them work together to remove the rocks from the bag. Let each person claim the rock they painted in “Writing on Rocks” on page 16. If you did not choose this activity, invite each person to claim a rock and hold it. The rocks represent their sin and brokenness.

Form a circle. One at a time, have a person on one side of the circle walk across and take a rock from another youth, saying, “You are forgiven.” Set the rock outside the circle. Continue having one youth remove the rock from one another until all rocks have been let go. Discuss together what it feels like to hear one’s sins are forgiven.

- ☐ Heavy rocks
- ☐ Backpack with rocks

WRITING A LETTER

QC

Distribute paper and pens for youth to write a personal letter about forgiveness addressed to them from God. The letter could be about a specific instance of sin or wrongdoing that weighs heavily on them. Or it could be more general, reflecting God’s promise to love them no matter what. Imagine what God would say to them and how important they are to God. Encourage youth to take the letter home and keep it in a safe place.

- ☐ Paper and pens



FOLLOWING JESUS

SWEET FORGIVENESS

- ☐ Internet-connected device

Remind youth that forgiveness is a gift, given by God to each of us, over and over again. By itself, forgiveness is a life-changing gift. As one step in a process of forgiveness that we can participate in and extend to others, it can change our individual lives, our families, our communities, and our world.

Forgiven people are able to offer forgiveness to others. In the next session, we explore ways to practice sharing with others the grace we have been given.

In closing, reflect on the words of a Bonnie Raitt piece that emphasizes the ever-present forgiveness and acceptance of God. Show the YouTube video “Sweet Forgiveness (Remastered Version)” (bit.ly/FMSweetForgiveness, 4:11).

Use the following prayer or one of your own:

Dear God, we are forgiven! Thank you. Thank you! Help us celebrate your enormous love for each of us. Amen.

The Story of Esau and Jacob, adapted from Genesis 27–33

Esau and Jacob were twin brothers. Isaac was their father, and Rebekah was their mother.

From the beginning, Esau and Jacob didn't get along very well. Esau was the oldest, which should make him the favored twin.

Esau liked to hunt big game. His father, Isaac, loved to eat big game.

Rebekah, however, loved Jacob the most and tried to give him all the advantages.

One day, after Esau was hunting, he came home very hungry. Jacob refused to feed Esau unless Esau promised Jacob that he could have his birthright (the family inheritance). Esau agreed to the deal.

When Isaac was ready to pass along the birthright to his oldest son, he told Esau to go hunting and bring him food.

Rebekah overheard this and decided to trick Isaac to help her son Jacob. She put Esau's clothes on Jacob and put animal skin on Jacob's arms to make him hairy like his brother. Rebekah cooked food for Jacob to give to his father, who had very poor eyesight.

Jacob, dressed as Esau, served his father the food. Isaac could not tell that Jacob was fooling him. Isaac gave his birthright to Jacob. (*Jacob picks up and carries the backpack.*)

When Esau returned from hunting, he found out what happened and was very angry with his brother. Jacob would have all of the family's wealth, and Esau would be left with very little. Esau vowed to kill Jacob.

Jacob feared his brother and fled to a foreign land where he met Laban. Working for Laban, Jacob became a successful farmer and married two of Laban's daughters, Leah and Rachel.

Laban became jealous of Jacob's success. Jacob had to leave Laban, taking his wives, animals, servants, and all of his possessions.

Jacob returned to the land of his family and prepared to ask Esau for forgiveness. He sent his wives, animals, and most of the servants to Esau as a gift to try to win Esau's favor.

Esau, instead, ran to meet Jacob. Esau hugged and kissed Jacob, and the brothers wept together. (*Jacob sets down the backpack.*)

Esau refused to take Jacob's possessions. Instead, Esau said, "I have enough. Keep what you have for yourself."

Esau said to Jacob, "Let us journey our way. I will go alongside you."



Walking Meditation

Before the walk, invite the youth into a time of silence and reflection.

Walking meditation instructions:

1

Hold your rock in silence as you begin your walk.

2

(Stop.) Think about how you have mistreated others with your words or actions. Pray for those that you have hurt with your words or actions. *(Walk in silence.)*

3

(Stop.) Imagine that this rock represents your sins. Really feel the weight of the rock in your hands. Carry this heaviness in silence. *(Walk in silence.)*

4

(Stop at your destination.) One by one, place your rock in a pile. Ask God to take away the burden of your sin and brokenness.

5

Walk away from your rock, asking God for forgiveness. *(Walk in silence.)*

6

(Stop.) Ask God for wisdom and strength to not hurt others with your words or actions. *(Walk in silence.)*

7

Imagine God telling you how much God loves you. God gives us forgiveness. Feel the weight of a burden being lifted. *(Walk in silence to where you began the walk.)*

If time allows, discuss:

- ➡ What does it feel like to carry a burden of sin and brokenness?
- ➡ How does it feel to let go of these burdens and walk away?
- ➡ What does it feel like to hear that God loves you and forgives you?

