

Bulletin for Forgiveness

Business

Chalice Lighting

To pass the peace is a revolutionary act.
It means to trust the outsider we fear,
to wish well to those who have hurt us;
and to forgive at last ourselves.

To offer the blessing to those around you
is to love your neighbor as yourself
and to be at peace with God.

Pax vobiscum. Peace. Peace.

Clarke Dewey Wells, To pass the peace

Sharing of Joys and Concerns

Silence – holding each other in silent support

Shared Readings

Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned. *Buddhist saying*

Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime; therefore we are saved by hope.
Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history;
therefore we are saved by faith.
Nothing we do, however, virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we are saved by love.
No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as from our own.
Therefore, we are saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness.

Reinhold Niebuhr

Always forgive your enemies; nothing annoys them so much. *Oscar Wilde*

Forgiveness is the fragrance that the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it. *Mark Twain*

People have to forgive. We don't have to like them, we don't have to be friends with them, we don't have to send them hearts in text messages, but we have to forgive them, to overlook, to forget. Because if we don't we are tying rocks to our feet, too much for our wings to carry! *C. JoyBell C.*

Forgiveness has nothing to do with absolving a criminal of his crime. It has everything to do with relieving oneself of the burden of being a victim—letting go of the pain and transforming oneself from victim to survivor. *C.R. Strahan*

Grudges are for those who insist that they are owed something; forgiveness, however, is for those who are substantial enough to move on. *Criss Jami*

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

Round 1

Do you have a story you want to share about forgiveness?

Round 2

Share more deeply stories and experiences of forgiveness as a result of your exploration of the preparation materials.

Round 3

As time allows, share additional thoughts on forgiveness or reflect on what others have shared.

Closing Activity

Closing Words

Read as a responsive reading, with the group responding with the refrain.

For remaining silent when a single voice would have made a difference,

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For each time that our fears have made us rigid and inaccessible,

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For each time that we have struck out in anger without just cause,

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For each time that our greed has blinded us to the needs of others

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For the selfishness which sets us apart and alone,

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For falling short of the admonitions of the spirit,

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For losing sight of our unity,

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

Robert Eller-Isaacs, "A Litany of Atonement"

Song or Chime

The Covenant

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group
- to let the facilitator know if I will be absent or need to quit
- to share with the facilitator the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others
- to do the reading and thinking about the topic ahead of time
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and tell only my own story to others
- to honor the safety of the group by listening to what others share with an open heart
- to refrain from cross-talk, judging, or giving advice
- to share as deeply as I can when it is my turn.

Preparation for Forgiveness

There is power in forgiveness. Think about the awful shooting this past year in Charleston. Nine people were gunned down during a church Bible study. The perpetrator was invited to join them and had participated in the Bible study for a while, then just took out a gun and started shooting.

What we may remember most about that incident that made it so powerful, was how one by one the relatives of the fallen spoke forgiveness to the shooter, even before their loved ones were buried. It boggles the mind to think of how these bereaved family members could even do that. But what was most amazing was the power that forgiveness had for the whole community. It had the power to keep the peace, it had the power to make souls ponder, and it had the power to remove the Confederate flag from the Capitol grounds!

Gregg Easterbrook, in “Forgiveness Is Good For Your Health,” discusses the benefits of forgiveness:

Increasingly, psychological research has begun to show that being a forgiving person is essential to happiness. Even when someone wrongs you, feeling anger or hatred only causes your life to descend into misery and resentment: You are the one who suffers, not the person you’re angry at. Forgiving, on the other hand, can lift the burden. When Buddha and Jesus and other great spiritual figures taught us to forgive those who sin against us, they weren’t just pronouncing holy philosophy. Rather, they were giving practical down-to-earth life advice.

Among a number of other recent studies, a study of elderly women published in the journal *Psychotherapy* found that those who scored well on a standard test of forgiveness traits had higher self-esteem and fewer episodes of anxiety and depression compared to those who scored poorly. None of this makes forgiveness a panacea. [Researcher Kenneth Pargament notes that] when people have first suffered a wrong or a tragic loss, it’s often pointless to speak of forgiveness immediately: that can only come with time.

On Forgiveness by Murray Kennedy

Let me say how I see it. When one is holding a grudge, feeling victimized and hurt, and entertaining blame and resentment, the soul contracts. That’s the consequence. And who wants to go around in life with a contracted, hurt, bitter, soul? Many people do this because they don’t know any other way. It’s a great human tragedy. They perpetuate and multiply some original pain. They stay victims for life. Being for - giving is the key to freedom from the terrible burden of what happened in the past. But it isn’t easy. When you are for - giving what are you giving? You are giving up your claim to being the injured party. You are giving up your grievance. You are for - moving on. You are saying “they are no longer in debt to me” . . . which means you are no longer keeping that old relationship going, you are no longer keeping them in jail. You are no longer holding on. You are letting go. It is a matter of what you are for. If you are for holding on—to grievance and hurt, if you are for being right and getting revenge, you remain the prisoner of the past. That’s how it works.

Forgive me if along the way somewhere . . . I have killed your hopes and dreams . . . with my own disbelief in everything good.

Forgive me if I could not see with your vision the beauty of this world and the infinite possibilities for peace.

Forgive me my restlessness . . . that I could not pause on the path . . . to allow wisdom to come forth.

Forgive me that I have not treated each new day . . . with the same ultimate joy that you know . . . for another chance to be worthy.

Forgive me for not listening . . . when the very atmosphere is so charged . . . with universal music . . . and ideas too many to grasp.

Forgive me my foolishness . . . that I have believed . . . there only existed those things . . . which I could see and touch.

Forgive me that I have not thought . . . deeply enough or outside the limits . . . of the ordinary mind . . . to believe and overcome.

Forgive me that I have not sensed . . . the intense value of life . . . the infinitesimal beauty everywhere . . . in the smallest to the most majestic of God's creation.

Forgive me that I have not said thank you.

Joyce Kilmer, To Everything a Season

Questions to Ponder

1. Think of a story you could share about forgiveness. This question will be a part of the sharing at the meeting.
2. How does forgiveness happen?
3. Are some things unforgivable?
4. How easy is it to forgive another, or to forgive yourself?
5. What is the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?
6. Has forgiveness (or lack of forgiveness) affected your life? In what ways?
7. Is there something unforgiven in your life?
8. Is there anything that you would like to be forgiven for? What do you feel when you think of this?

Facilitator Notes for Forgiveness

Before the Session

Bring enough pens or pencils for each member to use in the Closing Activity. Prepare slips of paper (about a quarter of a sheet, so that people will only write a few words) for each person. Read over the Closing Activity so that you are prepared to lead it.

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Sharing of Joys and Concerns (each person about 2 minutes)

Silence – holding each other in silent support – 3 minutes

Shared Readings

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Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

In the rounds of sharing, pay close attention to the allotted time so that all members have the opportunity to share. Since the Closing Activity is expected to take about 5 minutes, you may want to adjust the allotted times or omit Round 3.

Round 1 (each person about 2 minutes)

Do you have a story you want to share about forgiveness?

Round 2 (each person about 5 minutes)

Share more deeply stories and experiences of forgiveness as a result of your exploration of the preparation materials.

Round 3

As time allows, share additional thoughts on forgiveness or reflect on what others have shared.

Closing Activity (about 5 minutes)

Pass out the slips of paper and the pens or pencils.

Read these words:

Is there something or someone you have not forgiven? It could be someone you have not forgiven who has hurt you in some way. Or perhaps you haven't forgiven yourself for something.

Write the "someone"—the person who has not been forgiven, either another person or yourself—on a piece of paper. Write a word or two that indicates the "something" that has not been forgiven.

Pause while people write. When everyone is finished, continue reading:

Hold the paper in your hand. What is it that is preventing you from forgiving this someone? What would it feel like to just say the words "I forgive you" while holding this unforgiven thing? If you want to, just say "I forgive you" out loud.

You can take this paper home with you to ponder it some more or to discard it.

Closing Words on the next page

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Read as a responsive reading, with the group responding with the refrain.

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