

FORGIVENESS Main idea

Hurt Breaks All Relationships - Forgiveness restores our ability to be in relationships

Jesus is the means for us to be able to forgive one another (and receive forgiveness for our sins). As we live in community, in God's family and in relationships with others in our biological and secular community 'families' we need to discover and rediscover forgiveness. It is the way for us to continue in relationship with each other. It is the only way for us to function together and not constantly be weighed down by the press of old hurts and unresolved conflict.

Consider & Prepare

You will need:

- Print out the statements regarding forgiveness
- Blu-tac or tape
- Coloured markers or pencils – Green for ticks and red for crosses. You could also use red and green dot stickers

- Enough small rocks or pebbles for each person to have one. NOTE: they must be small enough to fit in someone's shoe
- String of paper dolls – one per person
- OR sheets of paper and scissors for each person to make their own
- tape
- scissors
- paper crosses to heal the breach
- Print two copies of the script for "A Woman who Needed Forgiveness"
- Ask two people in advance to rehearse and present this dialogue

Song Suggestions

There's No Other Name

Thank you for the cross – Matt Redmond

Who am I

I have a shelter in the storm

Amazing Grace (even the "My chains are gone" version)



Welcome

I have a little present for each of you to start this morning. It's a pebble! I want each one of you to take one and put it in your shoe. You need to leave it there during our time together. We will talk about why later.

Raise your hand if anyone has ever hurt you. I'm confident that every single person here, no matter how young or old you are, has been hurt by someone. It might have been an accident or it might have been on purpose. You can probably think of examples for both!

I wonder how you feel about the person who hurt you. If some time has passed then maybe the way you feel has changed since they hurt you. Jesus had lots to say about how we should treat people who have hurt us. He also showed us what to do when he was hurt by other people. So, today we are going to look at what forgiveness is and some of the reasons for why it is important.

Song

What is Forgiveness?

Today we are learning about forgiveness but I know that each of you will already have some ideas about forgiveness. So, let's find out what we know so far. Everyone will need a red and a green marker/pen/pencil/or sticker dots.

If you look around the room you will see some statements about forgiveness. Some of them you might agree with, some of them you might disagree with. I'm going to give each of you a chance to have your say. If you agree with the statement then put a green tick (or green dot) on it. If you disagree with the statement then put a red cross (or red dot) on it. You can work together with someone if you would like to.

Link

The questions we are going to try to answer today are:

1. What is forgiveness?
2. Why is it important?
3. Who needs forgiveness?
4. How do we forgive?
5. Why should I do it?

Think about a time when someone has hurt you. They might have done something like hit you or pinch you that made your body hurt, that's called physical pain. Or, they might have said or done something unkind that hurt your feelings or made you feel afraid, that's called emotional pain.

When someone hurts us it's easy for us to get angry and to want to hurt them back. Lots of people think that it is fair for you to hurt someone if they have hurt you. Jesus taught something different about how to act when we are hurt. He taught about forgiveness.

Hurt breaks relationships. Think about this... do you want to spend time with someone when they have hurt you? Do you want to talk to them or play with them? Hurt can ruin our friendships and our families. Forgiveness is important because it is the way that we can make things right again.

Paper doll chain

Give everyone a paper doll chain or get them to make one.

Think of all the people who are closely connected to you. They might be family members or friends.

Now think of something hurtful in the past that cut off or damaged your relationship with one of these people.

Cut or tear the paper doll chain. You might want to tear a doll part way off or separate it all the way.

Now, put some sticky tape over the tear. When we forgive the person who has hurt us we make a way for us to connect again. We repair some of the damage. Can you still see the tear? That's OK because damage is caused and it takes time to heal and healed wounds always leave some sort of scar.

Link

How is the stone in your shoe feeling? Leave it there, we will talk about it some more – later.

A Woman Who Needed Forgiveness – (adapted from John 8:3-11)

Reader 1 Once upon a time...

Reader 2 (interrupts) In a land far away?

Reader 1 Well, yes actually... Once upon a time in a land far away, some men were very angry.

Reader 2 How angry?

Reader 1 Really angry! Foot stomping, yelling and red in the face angry.

Reader 2 What were they so angry about?

Reader 1 They were angry about a woman in their neighbourhood who had broken the law. They dragged her to where Jesus was teaching a crowd of people because they wanted to hear what he would say about it.

Reader 2 (hands on hips) Did they really drag her?

Reader 1 I'm afraid so. They thought Jesus would be really mad at her for breaking the law.

Reader 2 She must have been pretty scared.

Reader 1 Yes, I think so too. She knew that she had done the wrong thing and she knew that these men wanted to punish her and hurt her for breaking the law. They had even brought stones with them.

Reader 2 Stones? What were they going to do with stones? Did they have them in their shoes too?

Reader 1 No, they were carrying them. They were going to throw the stones at her to teach her a lesson.

Reader 2 Ouch! So what happened?

Reader 1 They came to Jesus, (pointing finger) "Jesus this woman has broken the law. She should be punished. We are going to throw these stones at her to teach her a lesson! What do you think?"

Reader 2 What did he say?

Reader 1 Nothing...

Reader 2 Nothing?

Reader 1 That's right. He didn't even look interested. He bent down and started writing in the dirt.

Reader 2 Writing in the dirt? What was he writing?

Reader 1 I don't know. The story doesn't tell us.

Reader 2 Was he playing 'noughts and crosses'?

Reader 1 Maybe.

Reader 2 Was he writing the alphabet?

Reader 1 Maybe

Reader 2 (Ask the congregation) Let's take a vote: Hands up if you think it was 'noughts and crosses'; who thinks it was the alphabet?

So, which was it; 'noughts and crosses' or the alphabet?

Reader 1 I really don't know but that's not the point!

Reader 2 Well what did the angry men do? Did they shout at Jesus?

Reader 1 They sure did. "Answer us! Tell us what we should do? Should we get bigger stones? Who gets to throw the first stone?"

Reader 2 Did that get his attention?

Reader 1 Yep. He looked around at the red-faced men and answered them very calmly but sternly. "Whichever one of you has never done anything wrong gets to throw the stones."

Reader 2 Woah!

Reader 1 Then Jesus started writing in the dirt again. These men were mad but they knew the truth. They had all done wrong things before. They stopped yelling. They looked at the ground for a while. Then one man dropped his stone and walked away. Then another man dropped his stone and walked away.

Reader 2 (Ask the congregation) Is there anyone here who has never done anything wrong?

So, who was left at the end?

Reader 1 Only two people were left; Jesus and the woman.

Reader 2 Jesus hadn't done anything wrong. Did he throw the stones?

Reader 1 No, he said, "Where have all those angry men gone? Isn't there even one left to throw stones at you?"

Reader 2 Jesus was left!

Reader 1 He was but he chose not to hurt her. He knew that she had already been punished. Everyone in the neighbourhood now knew about what she had done. She had been dragged around and she had been really scared. Jesus spoke kindly to her, "You can go home now but stop breaking God's laws."

Reader 2 So, Jesus forgave her.

Reader 1 Yes, just like he forgives us when we do the wrong thing. It hurts Jesus when we do the wrong thing. But he forgives us and asks us to forgive others when they hurt us.

Reader 2 What about when someone keeps on hurting us or they have hurt us really badly?

Reader 1 Choosing to forgive someone doesn't always mean that we can be friends again. Jesus still asks us to forgive them but sometimes it's not safe for us to keep on spending time with the person who has hurt us. Sometimes we have to forgive them and protect ourselves too.

Reader 2 What about when someone is not sorry about hurting us?

Reader 1 We still need to forgive them. Sometimes this will be really hard to do but forgiving someone helps to keep us healthy. We forgive someone because God asks us to and because he has forgiven us, not because someone deserves to be forgiven.

Reader 2 How come Jesus has the right to tell us to forgive? I might not want to forgive someone when they have been mean to me. (Ask the congregation) Do you always feel like forgiving people?

Reader 1 Luke 23:34 tells us that when Jesus was dying, he asked God to forgive the people who had been so cruel to him, even the people who killed him. Jesus also forgives us when we do wrong things. It is because he came to earth, died and rose again that we can be forgiven and have a friendship with God.

Reader 2 I think I understand. From God's forgiveness we learn to forgive others! When we forgive each other friendships can be made right.

Paper doll chain – PART 2

Let's take another look at our paper doll chains. Remember that when we fixed them up with tape we could still the tears? When we forgive someone understanding what Jesus has done for us, we don't look at the scar anymore. It's still there, but our focus is on the cross, on what Jesus has done rather than our hurt.

So, let's stick crosses on top of the damage.

Opportunity for Response

Just as God doesn't want us to live a life of pain from broken relationships, God doesn't want us to return to those who actively hurt us. Sometimes there is restitution, reconciliation and healing in the relationship. But sometimes the best response we have is to forgive those who hurt us, let God heal the hurt in us and leave the rest at the cross. Maybe another option for those paper dolls is that the hands don't get joined but the cross stands between you and the other person in that broken relationship. You might like to come and leave your stone here and take a cross to put between the two of you. This can show that you are willing to let God help you to forgive.

What do you want to do with that stone? Maybe you want to move it to your pocket? Maybe you need to throw that stone away? What is it you need to do?

Is there someone who can help you as you decide what to do with that stone?

Conclusion

There is something very strange about forgiveness. When we choose not to forgive someone they might not be hurt by it. They might not even know about it. But when we choose not to forgive someone we are hurt by that choice.

That's right, when we don't forgive people we actually hurt ourselves as well! When we choose not to forgive the pain stays inside us, a bit like the rock we put into our shoe. After a while we might not notice the rock so much but then when we try to get moving it really hurts again.

Forgiveness is God's way to help us keep ourselves and our relationships healthy and strong.

Benediction

Jesus, remind us each day of your loving forgiveness for us.

Give us courage to forgive others.

Give us the grace to accept the forgiveness of others.

Forgiveness is God at work in people
Forgiving someone is not holding on to the hurts so that the relationship is not damaged or where relationship is no longer possible, I am not damaged
Forgiveness is acknowledging the wrong so that it doesn't affect me into the future
Forgiveness is telling someone that it is ok to hurt me
Forgiveness is saying I wasn't really hurt anyway
When I forgive someone we have to be friends again
Everyone deserves to be forgiven
Jesus asks us to forgive others



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