

4 The Truth About Forgiveness

Materials

Name tags and markers
Copy of Group Agreement
Blessing Basket with blessings
Intention written on easel or board

Intention: To explore and apply the healing power of forgiveness.

Create sacred space: Chairs arranged in a circle, intention written on an easel or board. Soft, meditative music may be playing, candles burning, if permitted. Eliminate as many potential disruptions as possible by turning off the phone and making certain that pets and children are in places where they can be themselves without disturbing the meeting. Have Group Agreement from first meeting displayed.

The Gathering

Welcome: Greet individuals as they arrive. Invite them to make a nametag and to help themselves to a blessing from the Blessing Basket.

Centering Prayer (3-5 minutes): Guide participants in the following prayer or in your own words. Pause frequently where appropriate to give participants a chance to assimilate the message which the words inspire within them.

“Let’s make ourselves comfortable in our chairs. Take a deep breath and, as you exhale, feel any cares or concerns of the

day being released; feel yourself becoming totally relaxed. Take another deep breath and, exhaling, feel all tension dissolved in your mental body, in your emotional body, in your physical body. Our Unity affirmation is, 'I am centered and poised in the Christ Mind and nothing can disturb the calm peace of my soul.' I will say this again and then ask you to repeat it with me. 'I am centered and poised in the Christ Mind.' Together: 'I am centered and poised in the Christ Mind.' 'Nothing can disturb the calm peace of my soul.' Together: 'Nothing can disturb the calm peace of my soul.' Here, in the living, loving presence of the Christ, we willingly, gratefully let go of old hurts, resentments, or guilt. Anything in our consciousness of a negative nature is now dissolved in the pure, radiant light of the Christ.

“The Christ light operates fully and freely in your heart, your mind, your body, your world. This light perfects all that concerns you; it goes before you, making plain your path. Rest for a moment in the light. Let its warmth permeate your being. *Pause.* Now, gently bring yourself back to this room renewed, refreshed, revitalized and ready for the activity of God to move you to ever greater dimensions of understanding. Thank you, dear God. Thank you, each one here: beautiful, radiant friends of Light. Amen.”

Check-in (5-7 minutes): Facilitator may suggest that participants share by using the following example: “There are many ways to pray. The Buddhists say that walking can be a prayer. Watching a beautiful sunset in silence, singing or dancing, playing with a child, or seeing God in each other’s eyes are all kinds of prayer...as they open us to an experience of the divine.”

Invite participants to go around the circle, say their name and briefly share one experience during the past week that was “like a prayer” to them.

Community Building (8-10 minutes): “Today’s exploration is on the healing power of forgiveness. We begin learning about forgiveness at an early age, don’t we?”

Invite participants to find a partner and to share with each other an amusing childhood situation when forgiveness of themselves and/or others was needed and may or may not have been experienced. It may be about some prank someone played on him or her, or visa versa. Tell partners they have about 4-5 minutes each to share their experience. You may want to watch the time and indicate to the group when the first 5 minutes are up.

Discovery and Exploration

Materials

Copies of the story for participants (see Appendix)
Easel or board
Pen/markers

Optional

Have the music of “Love Can Build a Bridge” available to play after the story. (Words and music by John Jarvis, Paul Overstreet and Naomi Judd; performed on CD by The Judds.)

Facilitator: Re-gather the larger group. “Now that we have recalled an event in our childhood when forgiveness was desirable let’s continue to explore the activity of forgiveness. We will be asking ourselves the questions: What are some necessary steps toward accomplishing forgiveness? What are some attitudes of mind that are needed for me to extend forgiveness? Before exploring these steps, however, we are going to hear a story about two brothers and a carpenter.”

Reading and discussion (12-15 minutes): Read or invite a participant to read the following story.

The Carpenter

(Received over the Internet; source unknown.)

Once upon a time two brothers who lived on adjoining farms fell into conflict. It was the first serious rift in 40 years of farming side by side, sharing machinery, and trading labor and goods as needed without a hitch. Then the long collaboration fell apart. It began with a small misunderstanding and it grew

into a major difference, and finally it exploded into an exchange of bitter words followed by weeks of silence.

One morning there was a knock on John's door. He opened it to find a man with a carpenter's toolbox.

"I'm looking for a few days work," he said. "Perhaps you would have a few small jobs here and there. Could I help you?"

"Yes," said the older brother. "I do have a job for you. Look across the creek at that farm. That's my neighbor, in fact, it's my younger brother. Last week there was a meadow between us and he took his bulldozer to the river levee and now there is a creek between us. Well, he may have done this to spite me, but I'll go him one better. See that pile of lumber curing by the barn? I want you to build me a fence—an 8-foot fence—so I won't need to see his place anymore. Cool him down, anyhow."

The carpenter said, "I think I understand the situation. Show me the nails and the post-hole digger and I'll be able to do a job that pleases you."

The older brother had to go to town for supplies, so he helped the carpenter get the materials ready and then he was off for the day. The carpenter worked hard all that day measuring, sawing, nailing.

About sunset when the farmer returned, the carpenter had just finished his job. The farmer's eyes opened wide; his jaw dropped.

There was no fence there at all. It was a bridge—a bridge stretching from one side of the creek to the other! A fine piece of work—handrails and all—and the neighbor, his younger brother, was coming across, his hand outstretched.

“You are quite a fellow to build this bridge after all I’ve said and done.”

The two brothers stood at each end of the bridge, and then they met in the middle, taking each other’s hand. They turned to see the carpenter hoist his toolbox on his shoulder.

“No, wait! Stay a few days. I’ve a lot of other projects for you,” said the older brother.

“I’d love to stay on,” the carpenter said, “but I have many more bridges to build.”

Invite participants to stay with the facts and save interpretation for later. Use as many of the remaining questions as needed to supplement the information already volunteered.

After reading the story, ask:

- What is happening in the story? Let’s retell the story in our own words.
- What do we know about the brothers?
- What job did the older brother have for the carpenter?
- What do we know about the carpenter in this story?
- What do we know about fences and walls?
- What do we know about bridges?
- What effect did the bridge have on the two brothers?
- How is this story happening in the world, in this community, or in this church?
- How is this story happening in your own life? When have you wanted to build “a fence?” Who is the carpenter in you who “comes and builds a bridge?” How does that happen and what does it look like in your life?
- What tools does the carpenter use in his work? What are the “tools” that we use to “build bridges of forgiveness” in our lives? (Write down the group’s responses to this question on an easel or board, if available. This will lead into the next activity.)

Brainstorming (5-7 minutes): “Now that we have explored the various aspects of the story, let’s take a look at the movement in consciousness that is necessary for forgiveness to occur. The tools that we have just identified are what help us to move from one state of consciousness to another.

Responses may include the following:

Negative Positive

Anger/Rage	Love
Resentment	Joy
Bitterness	Surrender
Revenge	Enthusiasm
Willfulness	Good Will
Separation	Connectedness
Disharmony	Peace

“Drawing from the story and your own life, what are some of the negative attitudes and feelings that are present before forgiveness happens? What are some of the positive attitudes and feelings experienced after forgiveness?”

Write the responses for each question as a list or cluster (web) on easel paper, if available. You may want to put them on the same page as the “tools” you listed above, if there is room.

Facilitator: Ask the group how the attitudes they have listed might influence our health. You may want to interject that one of Unity’s basic statements is, “Thoughts held in mind produce after their kind.”

Guided Meditation (3-4 minutes): Invite participants to prepare for a guided meditation. Tell them that they will be using the story just discussed as a means of bringing healing to a relationship or situation in their own lives that has been difficult to forgive. Ask them to consider what it would take to “cross the bridge” toward the person they want to forgive.

You may wish to incorporate the following words in your meditation or use your own words, pausing where appropriate to allow participants to assimilate the meaning the words suggest.

“Let’s become still and relaxed as we turn quietly within to our Source of being, God, the Good, Omnipotent. Let this guided meditation become personal for you as you open your heart and mind to the activity of God within you.

“Father/Mother God, I come to you now to bask in the light of your great healing love. That light permeates my being, illuminating all areas of my consciousness. Any feelings of unforgiveness are dissolved *now* in the all-consuming light of your presence.

“I surrender completely, Father, to your will of good for me. I

rejoice in the awareness that the pure light of Christ cleanses and purifies me through and through. In this holy place of serenity and love, I behold the one who has been my so-called enemy. I let the activity of God now guide me through the steps that will restore this relationship to wholeness. I begin to cross the bridge toward this person and he or she begins to cross the bridge toward me. *Pause.* I feel the love of God embracing us both dissolving any feelings of hurt or fear. *Pause.* As we embrace each other, we are enveloped in the pure light of God. Our hearts are filled with joy, with peace that passes understanding. *Pause.* And now, we offer each other a gift. Each gift represents the healing that has taken place between us. Let's take a few moments to receive and appreciate these gifts. *Pause.* Together we praise and give thanks to God.

“Thank you, sweet Spirit, for your light and your love that bless us and lead us in paths of righteousness. Amen.”

Materials

Drawing or copy paper
Colored markers and/or
crayons

It is possible that “blocks” to forgiveness may reveal themselves in this meditation and that an experience of forgiveness may not happen. Let participants know that whatever occurred is okay and to draw any part they wish.

Give a signal after five minutes to shift sharing to other participant.

Forgiveness Drawing (5-7 minutes): “Slowly and gently allow yourselves to return to this room, knowing that what you have just experienced during the meditation is true for you. Remain for a moment in the glow of your experience of healing. When you feel ready, take a sheet of paper and markers or crayons and draw a simple picture of any part of the experience you just had. You are also welcome to express any of the feelings you may have experienced during the meditation in any way. This is not about creating great art, but about expressing something that is happening within you. Just let it flow! You are also welcome to journal, if that feels more comfortable for you.”

Partner sharing (3-5 minutes each partner): Invite participants to choose partners. Invite them to share anything they wish about their meditation experience or drawing.

Caring and Closing

Facilitator: “Once the brothers surrendered their animosity and were willing to cross the bridge to forgiveness, they were able to accept each other again in peace and love. Forgiveness requires us to rely on the activity of God to bring peaceful resolution within us and to the situation. Caring and support of family and friends are reassuring to us as we move through the process. Holding each other in prayer is one way we can offer this support.”

Closing Prayer and Requests (15-20 minutes): You may wish to incorporate the following thoughts in your closing prayer allowing moments of silence for reflection where appropriate.

Facilitator: “As we prepare for our time of prayer requests, let’s gently close our eyes and focus on our breathing. Taking a deep breath, draw it to the top of your head and let it out slowly all the way to the soles of your feet. And again.” Repeat the process.

“Resume breathing normally and allow yourself to be completely relaxed.” *Pause.*

“Let’s reflect on these beautiful words from beloved Unity minister, May Rowland: ‘The forgiving love of Jesus Christ releases me from all mistakes of the past and the results of all mistakes of the past.’ I will say the words and then invite you to repeat them with me. ‘The forgiving love of Jesus Christ releases me from all mistakes of the past.’ Together: ‘The forgiving love of Jesus Christ releases me from all mistakes of the past.’ ‘And the results of all mistakes of the past.’ Together: ‘And the results of all mistakes of the past.’ Let’s just be still for a moment and let the realization of the words we have spoken be established in our hearts and minds. (15 seconds is adequate time.)

“Right here and right now, you are completely free of every mistake you ever made or thought you made. Your part is simply to be open and receptive to the healing love of the Christ. Affirm within yourself that you gratefully receive that boundless love. No longer are you bound by negativity. You are free with the freedom of Spirit. Thank you, dear God. Thank you, living, loving Christ. Thank you, Jesus.

“Let us now join hands. Know that the living, loving Christ is with and in and all around us, for, ‘Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.’ (Matthew 18:20 KJV) Let us now make known our prayer requests. I will begin our process by stating my prayer request. When I am finished I will squeeze the hand of the person on my right, who may then say their request, and so on around the circle. You are welcome to pass, if you wish. Simply squeeze the hand of the person on your right to continue the process. After each person has stated their prayer request, let us affirm together, ‘The love of God enfolds you. Go in peace.’

“‘During this coming week I would like you to hold in prayer _____.’ Proceed until everyone has had the opportunity to make a request.

“Our prayers have been made known to each other and to that God presence within us all. Thank you, God, for answered prayer. Together: ‘Thank you, God, for answered prayer.’ Amen.”

Further Exploration: For their journaling activity during the coming week, invite participants to use Matthew 18:21-22: “Then Peter came and said to him, ‘Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.’”

Model how to make a request by keeping it brief and to the point, i.e. “Healing for my brother, Sam;” or “Divine guidance as our family members seek harmony.”