



vibrant**faith**

+ Cross-generational Session

Practice Forgiveness

Here is an intergenerational session for all members of the congregation exploring how to practice forgiveness—as individuals, families, and as a community. This session is designed to be conducted in about 90 minutes, and can be adapted for a shorter or longer timeframe.

Introduction

We all fail and fall short of expectations. We hurt one another, especially those with whom we live. We sin . . . that's part of being human. And so we seek forgiveness and reconciliation from one another and from God. Practicing forgiveness is not easy, but it is available to all.

I. Gather

[use the following adaptation of the activity Forgive One Another]

Needed

Forgiveness Activity Sheet, Building Blocks (12-15 per family/group)

Activity Plan

1. Invite people to sit in family groups, or in small groups of 4-6 persons. Say this prayer aloud.

Dear God, sometimes we have a hard time and don't do the right thing. Thank you for loving and forgiving us when we make mistakes. As we hear from your word, teach us how to love and forgive one another. Amen.

2. Read this verse from Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (4:32, *NIV*).

In the Bible, we learn that God wants us to be kind and caring toward one another. Tell the participants that you're going to use blocks to learn what "forgiveness" means.

3. Have the participants place the "Forgiveness Activity" sheet and the blocks directly in front of them. Explain that sometimes we do things that we aren't supposed to do. We hurt each other's feelings. We create problems for our friends or family members. We mess up in little ways or big ways.

4. Demonstrate. Tell them that you're going to stack the blocks on the squares on the Forgiveness Activity sheet. Each square talks about something we do that could hurt someone. Point out each square.
5. Have the participants place blocks on squares after you explain what they mean. Provide examples.
6. Once you have several blocks stacked to create a wall, point out how the mean words and unkind acts put up a barrier between us. That's what happens when we don't act in a caring way toward one another.
7. Tell the participants the good news that the wall doesn't have to stay there. God forgives us every time we mess up. God loves us and wants to be close to us. Knowing that God loves and forgives us helps us love and forgive one another.
8. Spend a few minutes practicing how to forgive each other. Share with the participants the simple phrase, "I'm sorry for _____" and the response, "I forgive you." Have the them start removing blocks with you as you practice. Then the participants can say, "I'm sorry for _____" and you can respond, "I forgive you."

II. Grow

[use the following adaptation of the activity Forgiveness is Not for Sissies]

Needed:
paper and pen

Activity Plan

1. Ask participants to remain in their family groups or small groups. Begin by lighting a candle, pausing, and calling to mind the presence of God. Follow this by reading or praying out loud something to the effect of:

Merciful God, I come to you humbly today. You know I am not perfect and you love me unconditionally anyway. My faults are no secret to you, yet naming my mistakes, failings, and sins before You is my way of acknowledging that You are my God and savior. I put my trust in You to forgive me. Amen.

2. Ask participants to take a few moments to sit quietly and reflect on their lives in recent days or weeks. Consider the following questions (post these on newsprint or on a PowerPoint slide):
 - Have I broken any of the 10 Commandments? (Go beyond the literal words to the spirit of each commandment.)
 - How have I failed to love God with my whole mind, heart, and soul? When have I put my will before God's? (Consider things like being disrespectful to God's creation, being ungrateful for the blessings that I may take for granted.)
 - How have I failed to love my neighbor as myself? (Consider things like gossiping, ignoring someone in need, complaining about others.)
 - If you're not coming up with many failings, consider whether you are guilty of pride or self-righteousness.
3. Instruct participants to use their sheet of paper to write down the ways they have failed to be their best selves. Next to each failing write one action that you could take to improve. Choose one of these to give special effort to over the next week. Young children can draw pictures.
4. Invite participants to choose one item on their paper that they would be willing to share with their family or small group. Instruct them to share how they've failed and the action they intend to take.

Other family members or group members should simply accept what each person shares without comment or evaluation, except to say “God forgives you, and so do we.”

III. Go Forth

Activity Plan

1. Invite participants to gather in a large group. Invite general discussion on these questions:
 - What have you learned about forgiveness today?
 - What are you going to do differently from now on?
2. Read aloud these verses.
 - 1 Corinthians 13:4 “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant.”
 - Matthew 5:43-44 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”
3. Remind everyone that God loves all people, and wants us to show love to one another. Give each family a copy of the activity called A Big Fight.
4. Describe the process for family members working through a problem that is contained in this activity.
 - Pick a grown-up to help.
 - When everyone is calm, sit down together in a quiet place.
 - Have each person tell their side of the story, with no interruptions.
 - Change roles. Be sure you can explain how the other person feels, even if you don’t agree.
 - Brainstorm at least three ways to solve the problem.
 - Choose a solution that both people can agree to.
5. Tell participants to use this process at home whenever a problem or disagreement arises.
6. Close with one of the following prayers:

Forgiving God, I’m sorry for the times I have failed to love you and my neighbor fully. Help me to do better.

OR you might use this classic Act of Contrition:

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.

OR you might use a prayer in thanksgiving for God’s love.

Loving God,

Thank you for each person here.

Thank you especially for _____, especially because _____.

Thank you especially for _____, especially because _____.

Help us to feel your love, and to share your love with each other.

In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Forgive One Another

By Paige Evers

Parents and other significant adults can help children experience the love and forgiveness of God by loving and forgiving one another. This activity encourages adults and children to talk about tough times when family members mess up and hurt each other. Through building and taking down a wall made from blocks, this activity also gives children an opportunity to practice saying “I’m sorry” and “I forgive you.”

For

Young Family

Season

Fall



Needed

Forgiveness Activity Sheet, Building Blocks (10-12 blocks)

Activity Plan

1. Share with your child that this activity is about forgiveness. Ask her if she knows what it means to forgive someone. Tell her you’re going to hear God’s word from the Bible and learn about forgiveness.
2. Say this prayer aloud. *Dear God, sometimes we have a hard time and don’t do the right thing. Thank you for loving and forgiving us when we make mistakes. As we hear from your word, teach us how to love and forgive one another. Amen.*
3. Read this verse from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (4:32, *NIV*). In the Bible, we learn that God wants us to be kind and caring toward one another. Tell your child you’re going to use blocks to learn what “forgiveness” means.
4. Position the “Forgiveness Activity” sheet and the blocks between you and your child. Explain that sometimes we do things that we aren’t supposed to do. We hurt each other’s feelings. We create problems for our friends or family members. We mess up in little ways or big ways.
5. Show your child the blocks. Tell him that you’re going to stack the blocks on the squares on the Forgiveness Activity sheet. Each square talks about something we do that could hurt someone. Point out each square. Have your child place a block on it after you explain what that square means. You can also give an example.
6. Once you have several blocks stacked to create a wall, point out how the mean words and unkind acts put up a barrier between you and your child. That’s what happens when we don’t act in a caring way toward one another.
7. Repeat the verse from Ephesians: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

8. Tell your child the good news that the wall doesn't have to stay there. Because Jesus died on the cross for us, God forgives us every time we mess up. God loves us and wants to be close to us. Knowing that God loves and forgives us helps us love and forgive one another.
9. Spend a few minutes practicing how to forgive each other. Share with your child the simple phrase, "I'm sorry for _____" and the response, "I forgive you." Have your child start removing blocks with you as you practice. The adult can say what is on the activity sheet, for example, "[Child's name] I'm sorry for yelling." Then the child can practice saying, "I forgive you." Switch roles. Have your child say, "I'm sorry for _____" and then the adult can respond, "I forgive you."
10. Continue practicing apologizing and offering forgiveness until all of the blocks are off the paper.
11. Share the verse one more time: "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." Tell your child how happy you are that you practiced being kind and caring for one another. Remind your child how unkind actions build a wall between people. Forgiving each other takes the wall down. Now that there is no wall between you, give your child a big hug. Tell her that God loves her and you love her.
12. Finish with a prayer. *Dear God, thank you for loving and forgiving us. Help us take apart any walls we've built by our mean words or unkind actions. Help us forgive and love each other. Show us how we can grow closer to one another and to you. Amen.*

Forgiveness is Not for Sissies

By Susan Vogt

Lent is a time to take stock of how our lives are going. Are there any bad habits to let go of or new habits to cultivate? Check yourself out.

For

Adult, Couple

Season

Spring

Needed

A contrite heart that's open, paper and pen, a lit candle, (optional: a safe place to burn a piece of paper)

Prepare in Advance

Decide whether to do this by yourself or with your spouse. If done with your spouse, see *Spouse Variation* at end.

Activity Plan

Ultimately prayer is the raising of the heart and mind to God. Over the centuries we humans have tried to organize and categorize prayer. One system that is simple and memorable works with the acronym – ACTS.

Adoration / Praise

Contrition / Sorrow

Thanksgiving / Gratitude

Supplication / Petition

For this activity, we will focus on the “C” (Contrition) since Lent is a time when Christians look at ways we have fallen short of being the loving, generous people that God calls us to be.

1. Begin by lighting a candle, pausing, and calling to mind the presence of God. Follow this by reading or praying out loud something to the effect of:

Merciful God, I come to you humbly today. You know I am not perfect and you love me unconditionally anyway. My faults are no secret to you, yet naming my mistakes, failings, and sins before You is my way of acknowledging that You are my God and savior. I put my trust in You to forgive me. Amen.

2. Take about five minutes to sit quietly and reflect on your life this past year, month, or week. Consider the following questions:
 - Have I broken any of the 10 Commandments? (Go beyond the literal words to the spirit of each commandment.)
 - How have I failed to love God with my whole mind, heart, and soul? When have I put my will before God's? (Consider things like being disrespectful to God's creation, being ungrateful for the blessings that I may take for granted.)
 - How have I failed to love my neighbor as myself? (Consider things like gossiping, ignoring someone in need, complaining about others.)



- If you're not coming up with many failings, consider whether you are guilty of pride or self-righteousness.
3. On your sheet of paper, write down the ways you have failed to be your best self. Next to each failing write one action that you could take to improve. Choose one of these to give special effort to over the next week.
 4. If you like, ritualize this experience by burning your faults. If you do this, write the action you plan to take to improve yourself on a separate piece of paper. Put it somewhere that you will see it frequently to remind you.
 5. Close with a prayer of contrition. You can say something simple like:

Forgiving God, I'm sorry for the times I have failed to love you and my neighbor fully. Help me to do better.

OR you might use this classic Act of Contrition:

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.

Spouse Variation

If done with your spouse you could simply sit together and say the opening and closing prayer in common. The truly brave couple may choose to share their list of faults and remedies. You needn't discuss them, but letting another person see your vulnerability is a bonding experience. It also strengthens commitment if you know that another person is aware of the action you intend to take to improve your love of God and others.

A Big Fight

By Amber Espinosa

Because we're all unique, we don't always agree. The people we love most and with whom we spend the most time, are, unfortunately, also the ones with whom we argue the most. If you've had a big fight with someone, these ideas can help!

For

Just for Kids

Season

Spring

Activity Plan



1. Sit down together and read these verses. Then, use the process below to help work out the problem.
 - 1 Corinthians 13:4 "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant."
 - Matthew 5:43-44 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."
2. Remember, that God loves all people, and wants us to show love to one another. Here's a process to help you work out the problem.
 - Pick a grown-up to help.
 - When everyone is calm, sit down together in a quiet place.
 - Have each person tell their side of the story, with no interruptions.
 - Change roles. Be sure you can explain how the other person feels, even if you don't agree.
 - Brainstorm at least three ways to solve the problem.
 - Choose a solution that both people can agree to.
3. Pray together. During the prayer, each person should thank God for something special about the other. For example, I might say, Thank you God for my friend Zach, especially because he always makes me laugh.

Loving God,

Thank you for each person here.

Thank you especially for _____, especially because _____.

Thank you especially for _____, especially because _____.

Help us to feel your love, and to share your love with each other.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Forgiveness Activity

Saying mean words

Not sharing toys

Yelling at someone

**Taking something
that belongs to
someone else**

**Not listening to
an adult**

**Not helping
my family**