



FORGIVENESS: 4-Week Series

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FORGIVENESS

WEEK 1: NEEDING FORGIVENESS

Bible: Romans 3:23

Additional Verses: 1 John 1:8; Romans 6:23

Bottom Line: Everyone has done wrong and needs forgiveness from God, others, and themselves.

SUPPLIES

- A list of questions to ask best friends about each other.
Here are a few sample questions:
 - What is your BFF's favorite color?
 - What was your BFF's favorite vacation?
 - What color are the walls in your BFF's bedroom?
 - What is one thing your BFF wishes he or she had the money to buy?
 - If your BFF could be married to any movie star, who would he or she choose?
 - Who is your BFF's favorite band?
 - What is your BFF's most irritating habit?
 - If your BFF could visit any country, what would it be?
 - Out of the two of you, who would your BFF say is a "better catch?"
 - How long does it take your BFF to get ready in the morning? (Be within 5 min.)
- A simple point system and awards for highest matched answers.
- A downloaded copy of The Newlywed Game show theme song to play during the game.

If you are unfamiliar with the Newlywed Game show, check out YouTube to see how it's played.

OPENING GAME: THE BFF (Best Friend Forever) GAME

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

How well do you know your BFF?

This game will be played like the old television game show, The Newlywed Game.

Choose a few BFF's to come to the front to answer questions about each other.

Have one person from each friendship leave the room.

Ask the remaining students questions about their friends who are waiting outside.

Once everyone has heard their answers, bring their friend back in and ask those who were outside the same questions.

If they answer similar to their partner, they get a match and points should be rewarded.

Ask about five questions at a time, then switch roles and play again.

It may help to have the contestants write their answers down, so everyone remembers.

Don't forget to find the theme song to The Newlywed Game and play it during the game.

It's available on iTunes or YouTube.

It will add some excitement to the experience.

You can give the pair with the most points a prize for winning—like candy bars—if you wish.

Play as many rounds as you want for the time and BFF pairs you have, then transition into the message time.

TEACH

That was pretty interesting to see just how much you did and didn't know about your BFF.

You may have found out just how close you are or how much more you need to learn about each other!

Today we're starting a new series about forgiveness.

And based on how some of the BFF game answers went, some of you may be understanding the need for forgiveness really well after service (*LOL*)!

Forgiveness is an important subject in the Bible and in life.

The need for forgiveness is one of the most essential experiences in life because, at some point, we all do something wrong.

Whether intentional or not, we all make mistakes, do something wrong, and hurt people at some point in our lives.

We also break God's laws whether we mean to or not, and this is called sin.

Forgiveness, forgiven, forgive, and forgave are all words mentioned nearly 200 times in the Bible.

So, you can see it's a very important subject to God.

It's the essence of the gospel—of Jesus coming to earth to make a way for us to be right with God.

Not everyone understands they need forgiveness in a society that says to us, “If it feels good, do it...If it seems right to follow your heart... Do what makes you happy, and if it's legal, it's not sinning.”

So, it can be difficult to understand the need for forgiveness in our culture today.

Another reason is not everyone fully understands what it means to forgive or to be forgiven.

ASK:

- What do you think forgiveness means?
- Do you think people in the world and in the church have different definitions of it?
- Do you think forgiveness is an important subject? Why or why not?

Let's look at what the dictionary says about forgiveness.

Forgiveness, according to Meriam-Webster, is the act of forgiving someone or something.

So what does it mean to forgive?

The dictionary defines *forgive* as this: to stop feeling anger toward (someone who has done something wrong); to stop blaming (someone)

Sometimes people need to be forgiven of an offense or for hurting someone.

Sometimes they owe a debt, and it gets forgiven, and then they no longer owe the money.

Now that is what the dictionary says, but what about the Bible?

There are a few words used in the original language to convey forgiveness, but there was one most often and powerfully used by Jesus all through the gospels.

Not to bore you with Greek words, but the Greek word aphiemi, pronounced: ***Uh-Fee-Uh-Me***, defines forgiveness as this: to send away from with the intent that it's as if it never happened.

So, whenever Jesus says I forgive you of your sins, He is saying I send your sins away from you as if they never happened.

WOW! That's so powerful!

The Bible has a different view of forgiveness because it doesn't just say I'm not mad about it anymore or blame you for it, but I send it away from you as if it never existed!

A lot of people say they forgive without a thought about what it means.

Some people treat offenses kind of lightly as if they don't matter a whole lot.

This can be why a lot of people feel like it's no big deal to do something wrong—because it's not seen as a big deal.

In reality, it's a huge deal, and God takes hurting others seriously.

Six out of the Ten Commandments are about how to treat other people, being careful not to cause harm.

Some of you might be thinking, "But I don't really hurt anyone, nor do anything that bad...I'm a good person so why do I need forgiveness?"

Romans 3:23 tells us why we need forgiveness.

Read Romans 3:23.

"For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard." (NLT)

So everyone, not just some of us, but all of us have sinned and done wrong at some point in our lives.

So we all need forgiveness from God, others, and even ourselves.

Sometimes we can think of our sins as "not that bad" or "not as bad as that person's sins," so we try to make it right in our minds and justify our behavior as if it's not sinning.

But the Bible says in 1 John 1:8 that we need to be careful of this.

Read 1 John 1:8.

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (NIV)

So we need to be careful that we're living in the truth, and that means sometimes we have to be honest with ourselves and say, "Yeah, I did wrong, and I need God to forgive me so I can restore things."

Everyone has done wrong at some point in life.

Think about it...

Have you ever seen a little toddler get caught doing something they shouldn't have?

When asked about who made the mess or did the wrong thing, they say something like, "I don't know."

Even as you get older, the most natural reaction when confronted with something you did wrong is to lie about it, to try to get away with it and get out of punishment.

You don't have to be taught how to lie; it comes naturally.

But you do have to be taught how to tell the truth and do the right things in all situations.

If we keep lying, we have to tell another lie to cover up the first lie, and it just keeps going and going and going.

Then you have all this work of trying to keep all the lies straight just to keep up the charade.

We don't need to fear the truth because the truth frees us from all the stress of keeping up with all the lies.

Our human nature is imperfect and in need of forgiveness.

As we read earlier in Romans 3:23, Paul makes it clear that everyone, no matter how "good" we may appear to be, is prone to sin and disobedience.

ASK:

- Think about the earliest sin you remember committing. What was it, and how old were you?
- What happened as a result of that act of rebellion?
- Sin entered our world through a decision by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Why is it important to remember that their choice was an act of rebellion?

Romans 6:23 says sin has a harsh penalty, but it also says God has a more powerful gift to overcome it.

Read Romans 6:23.

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Sin started in the Garden of Eden and continues today.

Paul doesn't share all this talk about being sinful to shame us but to remind us of our need for forgiveness—our need for a restored, renewed relationship with God.

In the Bible, the law was given to us to show us the right way to live and to be a mirror to show us when we've sinned.

Jesus came to set us free from the penalty of the law so we can live free and have eternal life.

When we recognize we have sinned, we also see we need someone to forgive us and remove the sin from us.

Often that means we need forgiveness from God, from others, and even ourselves.

Our sin and disobedience come at a high cost to us because sin leads to death—there is nothing hopeful in our sin.

Again, Paul isn't trying to shame us but instead wants us to see our hopelessness without the Good News of Jesus.

It is essential for us first to understand our own great need for forgiveness.

Only when we truly understand this need will we begin to grasp Jesus' great love and mercy.

It's God's way of giving us a second chance and sometimes a third, fourth, fifth chance, or even more.

Sometimes we blow it big with a friend or family member and wonder if there is a way to get a second chance.

Sometimes people do give us a second chance and other times they don't, but God's grace, mercy, and love are higher than ours.

Think about it... Have you ever done something that made your parents mad or upset with you?

They probably grounded you and took away privileges for a while or maybe forever depending on the circumstances.

Maybe you got that new phone and sent way too many text messages, making the phone bill extremely high with overage fees.

Or maybe you did something inappropriate on the computer.

Whatever it may be, at some point we all do something significant to make our parents upset with us, and we feel as if we blew it.

We have to work hard and change our behavior to regain their trust in us.

**Feel free to share a personal story of a time this may have happened to you and how you handled the situation.*

No matter who you are or where you come from, we all share in the human condition of falling into sin at some point in time in our lives.

We all need forgiveness first and foremost from God, then from others, and finally ourselves.

Let's take a few moments and reflect on our lives and think about what we need forgiveness for.

Give the students some time to reflect then you can pray with the students and dismiss to small groups.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1.** Why do we need forgiveness?
- 2.** Why is forgiveness so important?
- 3.** Having to be forgiven for something can be awkward. How do you approach asking for it?
- 4.** Who have you had to ask for forgiveness from in the past? How did it go?
- 5.** Who do you need forgiveness from when you do something wrong?
- 6.** Why do you think it's so easy to ignore our sins and do the wrong thing?
- 7.** How does Jesus help us in the forgiveness process?
- 8.** In Romans 6:23, what is the most important thing to consider about our sin—the penalty or the gift? Why?
- 9.** When reflecting on areas in which we may need forgiveness, how do you plan to go about it?
- 10.** Why do you think the world and the church have different views of forgiveness?

After small groups, briefly review the discussion and message while emphasizing the bottom line, then pray and dismiss.

FORGIVENESS

WEEK 2: RECEIVING FORGIVENESS

Bible: Isaiah 1:18

Additional Verses: 1 John 1:9 Ephesians 1:7

Bottom Line: No matter what you have done wrong, Jesus can forgive you for it if you ask Him.

SUPPLIES

- Electric leaf blowers (At Least 2; 3-4 if you have more than 30 students)
- Enough toilet paper rolls to have one roll per student (cheap stuff is fine)
- 4" paint rollers (At least 2, but enough to have 1 per leaf blower)
- Duct tape
- Extension cords
- Enough space to give each team about 10' of room to play.
- A cleanup crew
- Trash cans

Have this video cued up and downloaded, so it's ready to play during the lesson:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Z_SMrnEial

OPENING GAME: BLOW IT UP BIG

GAME PREP

Take the paint rollers and use the duct tape to attach them to the end of the leaf blowers in such a way as to put the roller directly in the path of the blowing air.

Take a toilet paper roll and attach it to the paint roller, then pull the toilet paper out, so it rolls off freely.

Turn on the leaf blower to make sure it blows the toilet paper off the roll and adjust the roller accordingly, so the game goes smoothly for the kids.

Prepare the rollers and a reasonably open area for gameplay ahead of time.

Use electric leaf blowers, so the area doesn't fill up with exhaust fumes from gas-powered blowers.

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Divide students into teams, no more than 10-12 students per team works best to keep things moving along.

Divide the toilet paper rolls evenly among the teams, so there is one roll per student.

One student from each team will be chosen to be receivers.

Try to pick an outgoing person from each team to be the receiver or someone who won't be embarrassed by being covered in toilet paper.

The rest of the team will work together to load toilet paper onto the roller and then turn the leaf blowers on and empty the roll of toilet paper onto the receiver.

The team will work together to cover the receiver as much as possible, and the receiver can spin around to wrap themselves up more.

Be sure to turn the leaf blowers off between rolls to make it easier to load and so you don't blow everything in the room all over.

Your cleanup crew will thank you.

The teams will go until all the toilet paper rolls have been used for each team.

The team who finishes first, and with the most toilet paper covered receiver, wins.

You can choose to have a prize for the winning team.

Transition into your message area while the cleanup crew cleans up the mess.

TEACH

Wow! that was a lot of toilet paper and a lot of fun!

ASK THE RECEIVERS:

- How did it feel with all that toilet paper on you?
- How hard was it to move normally?
- How hindered were you when you had the most toilet paper on you?

Just as the toilet paper made you feel bound up and hindered, making it hard to feel and move normally, so is it when we carry around our sins.

And just like your team was piling on the toilet paper, sometimes the world can put a lot of stuff on us, too.

Today we're continuing in our series on forgiveness.

In the first lesson, we talked about what forgiveness is and the need we all have to receive forgiveness.

This lesson is about receiving that forgiveness.

There is hope beyond your wrongdoing.

Needing to ask for forgiveness can be hard and awkward sometimes, just like being covered in toilet paper.

Last week, we learned the penalty for sin is death, but God didn't leave it there.

God says there is a gift of eternal life found in Jesus Christ.

So that means no matter what we've done wrong, if we just come to Jesus, there is hope and forgiveness.

Read Isaiah 1:18.

"Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." (ESV)

No matter how hard we try to hide or ignore our sins, they are still there, and God sees them.

We can't hide anything from Him, but He doesn't hate us because of our sins.

He loves us so much, and He knew we couldn't stop sinning or take them away on our own, so He sent Jesus to take care of the penalty and give us freedom.

We can receive forgiveness from God because of Jesus, who lived a perfect life, died on the cross, and came back to life.

Jesus was God in human form—He was entirely God and fully human.

Jesus doesn't forgive us because we've earned it or because we've done something to deserve it.

And Jesus doesn't force us to receive His forgiveness—it's a gift we must decide if we will accept.

Sometimes we also have to ask others for forgiveness because we've hurt them.

This can sometimes be harder than asking God because we can't see Him like we can see the person we hurt.

When we ask for forgiveness, it can be awkward, weird, and tough because we have to swallow our pride, admit we were wrong, and tell someone we're sorry.

Knowing we need to ask for forgiveness makes room for a lot of anxiety and stress because we wonder how they will react—if they will talk to us, accept our apology, and forgive us.

Depending on what we've done and how bad they're hurt, it can add to the tension of the moment.

ASK:

- Have you ever needed to ask anyone for forgiveness?
- Was it hard to do? How did they respond?
- Why do we sometimes think some sins are worse than others?
- Do you ever feel like you're just too far away from God to even ask for forgiveness?

Sometimes people don't forgive us when we ask for it, but God is always faithful to forgive us of whatever we've done wrong if we ask Him.

Read 1 John 1:9.

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (ESV)

So, if we confess our sins, we have a promise that Jesus will forgive us of whatever we have done and make us clean.

Jesus not only wipes away our penalty but washes us clean in God's eyes to make us white as snow.

Do you remember Isaiah 1:18, our opening verse?

It says even though our sins make us dirty, we will be white as snow.

Think about freshly fallen snow in the winter.

It looks so perfectly white and clean, right?

When you ask Jesus to forgive you, He washes you with His blood, and though we were dirty because of our sins, His blood makes us perfectly white and clean just as a freshly fallen snow.

Read Ephesians 1:7.

"In Him (Jesus) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace." (ESV)

Snow can get dirty, get moved around, and melt away, but our forgiveness isn't as fragile or temporary as snow.

The awesome part about God's love and forgiveness is it lasts forever, and He remembers our sins no more once we've received His mercy.

Often, we think of some sins as being worse than others, and we might disqualify some people from being able to be forgiven.

Society has a hard time forgiving some sins more than others, but God can forgive anything if we turn away from the sin, confess it, and ask for forgiveness.

Sometimes Christians can be the same way.

We have a hard time forgiving or accepting forgiveness because we hold some sins in a higher degree of "bad" than others.

God doesn't look at sin the same way we do.

People look at the details of sin, but God looks at sin in categories.

The Bible says there are three categories of sin.

The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Every sin a person can commit will fall under one of those categories.

So, the details of our sins are not that important because Jesus came and conquered all the temptations we face.

The Bible says Jesus was tempted at all points, yet was without sin.

That means no matter what we've done, Jesus understands the temptations.

Though our details may be different, our categories are all the same, and He conquered every single one of them.

That means you cannot sin enough to undo the power of Jesus' blood to forgive all your sins!

The only sin we can commit that He cannot forgive is dying having rejected His gift of forgiveness.

This is why they call grace amazing!

He chose to come and live a perfect life, die a cruel, painful death, and rise from the dead three days later so you could be forgiven and receive His power to overcome sin.

His grace and forgiveness is not a license for us to keep sinning just because He will forgive us, but it is the opportunity for us to experience the love of God and forgiveness through His Son, Jesus Christ.

And once we experience this love and forgiveness, it changes us.

It gives the power to forgive and to walk away from a life of sin.

It doesn't mean you will never sin again, but it means in our human condition we have hope and can ask for forgiveness and know it's taken care of.

It gives us the ability to walk in freedom instead of feeling like we're covered in toilet paper trying to walk around all bound up and hindered.

**Get the video ready to play so everyone can see it.*

I have a video to show you that illustrates what receiving God's forgiveness is like, so let's watch this video together.

Wow, that was a cool video illustration of the power of Jesus' blood.

Let's take a moment to reflect on our lives for a moment.

Are you ready to receive God's forgiveness?

Let's pray.

**If you do altar calls, it would be a good time to give an invitation to receive God's forgiveness and salvation through Jesus; otherwise you can end in prayer.*

Sample prayer:

Jesus, I know I've done wrong and need your forgiveness.

I ask you to forgive me of all my sins.

Cleanse me of all my wrongdoing and make me clean.

I receive Your forgiveness and ask You to help me not to sin anymore.

Give me Your strength to overcome temptation and live for You.

Thank You, Jesus, for this gift because I know I don't deserve it. Amen.

You can dismiss to small groups to discuss the questions then wrap up with a brief overview and emphasize the bottom line.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How important is it to receive forgiveness? Why?
2. How is God's forgiveness different from the world's version of forgiveness?
3. Why is God's forgiveness so powerful?
4. How did God pay our penalty for our sins to give us forgiveness?
5. Why do you think we make some sins worse than other sins?
6. Do you find it easier to ask another person to forgive you or to ask God to forgive you? Why?
7. How does it affect you to know that you're not the only one who struggles with sin and needs forgiveness?
8. How does it make you feel to know the one true God, who created the universe, loves you so much that He would pay such a high price to forgive you?
9. If you accepted God's forgiveness today, how does it make you feel to know you're forgiven?
10. How can we be changed and live out the forgiveness we received through Jesus Christ? Today? This week? This month?

Wrap up with a review of the lesson and discussion while emphasizing the bottom line as you end with prayer and dismiss.

FORGIVENESS

WEEK 3: FORGIVING OTHERS

Bible: Matthew 6:14-15

Additional Verses: Ephesians 4:32; Matthew 18:21-22

Bottom Line: Because Jesus forgave all our wrongs, we can forgive anyone for the wrong they've done to us.

SUPPLIES

- 3"x5" Index cards – Enough cards to have 2-3 for each student
- Pens or pencils – Enough for each student to have 1
- A couple of small clean trash cans

Have this video downloaded and ready to play toward the end of the message.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FxoMbPWuk0I>

OPENING GAME: ROCK, PAPER, WHATEVER!

GAME PREP

At the end of the message, have your leaders hand out to each student two index cards and something to write with.

The students will be writing who and what they need to forgive, much like the cardboard the people held in the video.

On one card they will put those things and on the second card they will write, "I forgive..." and then who and what they forgive, and then write "because Jesus Christ forgave me."

After they finish, invite the kids to throw away the first card symbolizing their forgiveness of the offense, as God does with us.

The reason for clean trash cans is so you can read the cards later to see what all of the kids have forgiven and gained insight into what they may be going through that you might not already know about.

It will help you pray for them more effectively and understand them deeper.

Several adult leaders to help with the pairs of students during the game.

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

This game is played just like Rock-Paper-Scissors with one exception: participants can call out ANYTHING they want on the final “throw.”

For example, students can say “nuclear bomb,” “Luke Skywalker,” “Hurricane,” etc.

They aren’t restricted to scissors.

As you can imagine, there will be TONS of debate about who wins.

But that’s part of the fun!

Start with a regular game of Rock, Paper, Scissors to get everyone in the frame of mind of the game.

Once there is a winner, tell them this time is rock, paper, whatever, and explain the rules.

Divide students up into pairs of 2.

Do elimination by best 2 out of 3 for each round then the winners will pair up until only two students remain.

Make sure students understand that the adults’ decisions are FINAL with NO arguing.

Also, adult leaders should NOT allow students to use the same “weapon” more than once.

There are a few things that should be off-limits, these include: God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Infinity, Time, Black Hole, Armageddon... or anything you can think of that would be an “automatic win.”

Have plenty of adult leaders standing around to help make the FINAL call on who wins and moves on, and who loses and must sit out the rest of the game.

If the adult leader is a bit confused, they can ask the students to explain why their “weapon” should be declared the victor.

This can be hilarious!

Play as many rounds as you want as time allows then transition into the message time.

TEACH

**Have your index cards and pencils ready to hand out at the end of the lesson and have your adult leaders help pass them out.*

That was fun and hilarious!

What was your favorite weapon you heard used during the game?

Aren't you glad those weren't real weapons being used on each other?

That would have been bad!

Sometimes people use rock, paper, scissors to decide something or to settle a difference.

Sometimes people use weapons like words, social media, pictures, phones, gossip, violence, abuse, and even other people to hurt us.

How we choose to respond to that hurtfulness can mean the difference in what quality of life we live.

This week we continue with our series on forgiveness.

In the first lesson, we talked about the need for forgiveness, and that everyone has fallen short of God's standard and needs to be forgiven.

Lesson two talked about receiving forgiveness and that no matter what we've done, Jesus can forgive us.

This is lesson 3 in the series, and it might be a tough lesson because it deals with forgiving others.

Forgiving others can be hard depending on what they have done to us, especially when they are not sorry for it.

We often look at forgiveness as being about the other person, but it's more about us in a lot of ways.

Jesus talked a lot about forgiveness in the gospels and said our forgiveness towards others directly impacts God's forgiveness towards us.

Read Matthew 6:14-15.

"If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. 15 But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins." (NLT)

So, if we choose not to forgive, we hold ourselves hostage by not allowing God to forgive us.

It's like wanting to put the person(s) who hurt you in prison while building the prison around yourself in the process.

Lewis B. Smedes was a renowned theologian and Christian author who wrote this about forgiveness:

"To forgive is to set a prisoner free and to discover that the prisoner was you."

We think that forgiving is setting the other person free of the offense—and it is, but it's more than that alone.

We not only free them of the offense whether or not they know it, want it, or care, but we also set ourselves free from the grudge and pain of what happened.

And honestly, sometimes forgiving someone is less about them and more about you.

We can become bitter and angry when someone hurts us and goes on living their life like nothing ever happened.

They don't know or sometimes even care they hurt us or need to be forgiven of something.

But we know, and we care when we're the one who is hurt.

It can fuel the anger to see them living life while we are miserable and trapped by pain.

We can begin to think things like, "Don't they know how bad I'm hurting? Do they even care I'm in misery over here while they go on and just live a carefree life? How could they? Who do they think they are?"

Then we go deeper into the prison of our minds, more bitter, angry, and hurt.

You hear the words of Jesus saying, "Forgive them," and you wonder, "How can I forgive them after what they did and said? Don't you know how bad this hurts and how wrong they are?"

But we cannot let ourselves get so swept away in our self-pity that we isolate our thoughts only to be about us, our pain, and our problems.

We must shake ourselves out of the funk and look to Jesus' example on the cross.

The people Jesus came to serve are mocking Him—making fun of Him.

The ones who nailed Him to the cross, the ones He came to save, are rejecting Him and He says, "Father, forgive them. For they don't know what they're doing."

WOW! Just WOW!

Because if we're honest with ourselves here, it wasn't just those people who put Him on the cross; it was us, too.

It wasn't just their sins He was forgiving; it was our sins, too.

So if Jesus can forgive them for the things they did to Him as He was dying for them, what stops us from forgiving others when they do things to us?

Jesus clothed Himself in compassion and mercy to see past their actions and to see that in His suffering, He was making way for them to know God.

They didn't deserve His forgiveness any more than we do, but He chose to forgive them anyway.

He looked past what they were doing and saw their hearts.

Maybe there was something else going on behind the scenes that we don't read about in the Bible.

Maybe there was a reason they were doing what they did, so Jesus looked past the surface of what was happening and looked to the reason behind why they did it.

And here's the absolute crazy part about it: Even if He saw their hearts were full of hatred, He still forgave them and loved them enough to die for their sins.

That's a crazy, insane, illogical kind of love right there!

Because Jesus showed us this kind of crazy, radical love and forgiveness, it gives us the power to look past all the pain and choose to love and forgive radically too.

And when we show that kind of love to people, we're like Jesus, and it may turn those people's hearts toward Him too.

ASK:

- Think about it; when you did something wrong, and someone forgave you when you didn't deserve it, didn't that change you?
- Why did it change you?
- How did it change you going forward in life?
- Did it make you feel different about forgiving others when they hurt you?

Forgiveness changes everyone's hearts involved in the matter.

Forgiveness diffuses bad feelings, bad thoughts, bad emotions, and bad memories.

Forgiveness takes a bad situation and makes something good out of it.

Jesus was kind to us when we were not deserving of kindness, merciful to us when we deserved judgment and forgiving when we were guilty of our sins.

So in all these things, we need to show others the same treatment because of how He has treated us.

Read Ephesians 4:32.

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." (ESV)

Knowing that people do things when we can't see what's going on in the background can help us be kind when they're hurtful.

There's always more to what's going on than we can see.

Maybe that person is being hurt by someone or having troubles at home.

So be kind and forgive, because you never know what that person has been through to make them how they are.

Remembering everything Jesus has forgiven us of and the kindness He has shown us enables us to be able to forgive others of whatever they've done to us.

ASK:

- But what about when people keep hurting us?
- Are we supposed to keep forgiving or does God set a limit?
- How much is enough before we have to stop forgiving someone for hurting us repeatedly?

Jesus was asked this question by Peter, one of His closest disciples, in Matthew 18.

Let's read it and see His reply.

Read Matthew 18:21-22.

"Then Peter came to Jesus and said, "Lord, how many times may my brother sin against me and I forgive him, up to seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I tell you, not seven times but seventy times seven!" (NIV)

Seventy times seven is a large, measurable amount but it wasn't meant to say there is a limit.

Jesus was getting the point across that we need to forgive as He forgives.

ASK:

- How many times do you think you've sinned in your life?
- How many times do you think you'll sin in your life if you live to be 90?
- Do you think Jesus will forgive all those sins?

Jesus shed His blood to take care of all sins—past, present, and future, and He never stops loving us no matter how many times we fall short.

Jesus forgives much because He loves much and there's nothing you can ever do to change His love and forgiveness toward you.

Because of that great love and forgiveness towards us, we can choose to forgive others of whatever they've done to us.

It's not always easy, but it is possible, and Jesus says it's our choice.

We can give away the gift He's freely given us, or we can choose to hold onto unforgiveness and miss out on our forgiveness from Him.

I have something I want you to watch about forgiving others.

**Play the video in a way everyone can see it and have your leaders ready to pass out the index cards and pencils/pens.*

Wow, that was a powerful video!

Some leaders are coming around to pass out some cards and a pencil/pen for each of you.

Once you have them, take a moment to reflect on who and what you need to forgive.

Start to write on one of the index cards who and for what you need to offer forgiveness.

You can use the front and back of one card but leave the other one blank for now.

If you happen to use up all the space on one and need another, raise your hand and a leader will give you another card.

Once you're done, write on the blank card, "I forgive (who and what) because Jesus Christ forgave me."

It is your choice, but remember what Jesus did for you when making your decision.

We have some trash cans up here, and I invite you to come up and throw away your first card with everything on it that you needed to forgive.

It's ridding your life of the bitterness, the pain, the hurt, and the anger.

Throw it away, as God did with your sins, and remember it no more.

I'm so proud of you for taking this step to choose to forgive!

Let's pray together before we dismiss to small groups.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How hard was it to write all the ways you were hurt? Why?
2. Was it harder to write the things you needed to forgive, or the I forgive card? Why?
3. How did you feel when you chose to forgive?
4. Did thinking about what Jesus did for you make it easier to forgive others? Why or why not?
5. What can happen to us if we choose not to forgive others?
6. Why do you think Jesus made such a big deal about forgiveness?
7. Why do you think forgiveness is so hard?
8. What do you find to be the hardest part about forgiving others?
9. Do you think it's harder to ask for forgiveness or to offer forgiveness?
10. How can we make forgiveness a more natural process the next time we're hurt or mistreated?

Wrap up with a brief overview of the time together and remind them of the bottom line as you pray and dismiss.

FORGIVENESS

WEEK 4: FORGIVING MYSELF

Bible: Romans 8:1

Additional Verses: 1 John 1:9; Psalm 103:2-4, 12; Romans 5:1

Bottom Line: Jesus, the Perfect Judge, has forgiven you so you can forgive yourself and live free of guilt and shame.

SUPPLIES:

- Cereal bowls – 1 for each student playing (disposable bowls are fine)
- Paper plates – 1 for each participant per round
- Box of Lucky Charms or any cereal that has crunchy pieces and marshmallows (more than one box for a large group)
- Tables – enough to accommodate the number of players per round
- Chairs – enough for the number of participants each round
- Blindfolds – enough for each participant per round
- Cleanup team
- Trash cans

You will need enough space to accommodate the table, chairs, and students for the game as well as the students observing the players.

Materials Needed for Lesson:

A couple of full-length mirrors or mirrors big enough to get a whole person's face in.

At the end of the message, invite the students to come up in front of a mirror and say, "I'm forgiven, (and then have them say their name), I forgive you."

You can also have them use their cell phones to take a selfie and post it on social media sites with a hashtag #Imforgiven.

This is an excellent way to incorporate your youth group on their social media pages.

It may start a movement of forgiveness and open conversations of what Jesus has done for them in the past month, giving them a chance to testify to other students.

OPENING GAME: BLIND BREAKFAST

GAME PREP

Fill the bowls with the cereal and set them on the tables in front of the chairs.

Put a paper plate next to each bowl for them to put the cereal on.

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Select 4-6 participants (or however many you decide for your group size) and have them sit down behind the table(s) for the rest of the group to see.

Participants must keep their hands fastened behind their backs, meaning they must only use their faces while remaining blindfolded.

They must separate the marshmallows from the cereal and put them on the plate next to their bowl in the pre-determined allotted time (1-3 minutes works best).

Blindfold the participants and explain what they must do, emphasizing how they cannot use their hands and must remain blindfolded.

The participant with the most marshmallows separated at the end of the time wins.

You can do it just for fun, or you can take the winners from each round and have them compete to determine the best-blindfolded cereal separator—whatever you have time for and decide is best for your group.

Have the cleanup team throw away the used cereal, plates, and bowls as well as put away tables and chairs if needed.

As they clean up, transition into the message time.

TEACH

That looked like a challenging game!

What did you find most difficult about separating the marshmallows from the cereal?

You know what else can be difficult?

Separating our past sin from our forgiveness.

It can be tough to forgive ourselves and get past what we've done because we have a memory.

We remember all the bad things—we tend to focus on the negative stuff and forget that in God's eyes, it doesn't exist anymore.

God forgives our sins and wipes them away as if they never happened so we can live free of all the bad memories associated with our past.

We don't need to let those feelings of guilt and shame keep us from the life God has for us.

We can walk in God's forgiveness and live it out by forgiving ourselves.

This is the final part of our series on forgiveness.

We have covered the need for forgiveness, receiving forgiveness, showing forgiveness to others, and now we're going to talk about forgiving ourselves.

I am convinced there is nothing you can do that is so bad that it can undo the sacrifice and forgiveness of Jesus.

Read Romans 8:1.

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Paul, who wrote the book of Romans, uses a big word in this verse: condemnation.

This word is a legal term that you might hear a judge speak in a courtroom.

It means that a person has been found guilty and deserves punishment.

But Paul says that those who belong to Jesus don't face condemnation.

We aren't guilty, and we no longer deserve punishment because of Jesus.

We can experience freedom, yet sometimes we still feel shame and guilt because of things we've done.

We can learn to forgive ourselves as we remember that Jesus died for us on the cross.

When we belong to Jesus, everything changes—including the fact that we don't have to feel shameful or guilty about our past.

Just because we all have a past, since we've all sinned, doesn't mean we have to live in the past.

Jesus has paid the penalty for our sins so we can live entirely free in every area of our lives as we look forward to the future He has for us.

***"Nothing enables us to forgive like knowing in our hearts that we have been forgiven."* - Lewis B. Smedes**

Sometimes the hardest person of all to forgive is our self.

Sometimes we condemn ourselves and become our own judge, but we have to remember Jesus doesn't condemn us.

So we can look up and forgive ourselves because Jesus has forgiven us.

We have to look to Jesus because looking within ourselves will only lead to hopelessness.

It's impossible to ever live up to the standard on our own and in our own strength.

Jesus came because we couldn't do it ourselves, so God made a way for us to be right with Him and therefore, we have hope.

Having Jesus doesn't mean we will never sin again.

It just means He is fighting for us in our walks of faith and He always provides a way out from the sin.

Read 1 John 1:9.

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (ESV)

God sees us covered by Jesus' blood, so we're clean.

We don't have to look at ourselves in a sinful state because God doesn't see us that way any longer.

We need to look at ourselves through God's eyes and not in our own eyes with a worldly viewpoint.

It's so easy to find faults within ourselves, and it can be difficult to see the good and separate the two—like the hard cereal from the marshmallows.

We can be blindfolded by just a few faults to the good things in us, the gifts God has put in us, and the image He placed in us and miss.

We need to remember all the good things God has put in us and done for us.

Read Psalm 103:2-4, 12.

"Yes, I will bless the Lord and not forget the glorious things he does for me. 3 He forgives all my sins. He heals me. He ransoms me from hell. He surrounds me with loving-kindness and tender mercies. (TLB)

As far as east is from west—that's how far God has removed our sin from us." (CEB)

He forgives all your sins, heals you, paid the penalty of death for you, and surrounds you with loving-kindness and tender mercies.

That's a lot of excellent stuff!

And He did this willingly even when we sinned.

He removes our sins as far as the east is from the west—the east never touches the west, so that's far!

God, the Perfect Judge, in all His love and kindness has taken away your sins so you can forgive yourself as He has and live in freedom from condemnation.

In Romans, Paul wanted to make the point that we don't have to live in the guilt and shame of our past sins.

Read Romans 5:1.

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

There's another big church word in there, “justified.”

It often gets overlooked because we don't know what it means.

In this verse, justified means declared not guilty.

So God has said by putting our faith in Jesus, we are declared, “Not Guilty!”

So regardless of whatever sins we may have committed, God declares us not guilty when we put our faith in Jesus and ask Him to forgive us!

That's so powerful because sin can make us feel guilt and shame, but through faith, we are declared not guilty of all the charges our sin brought against us!

Think about it...because of sin; we were sentenced to death as we talked about in the previous lessons in this series.

The penalty for sin is death, but because we put our faith in Jesus Christ and let Him cleanse us of all our sins, we're declared not guilty and get granted eternal life!

How awesome is that?

Jesus showed us eternal grace that lasts forever, so what holds you back from showing yourself the same grace as Jesus taught you?

The act of forgiving ourselves demonstrates that we accept His gift of grace.

It is only when we learn to walk in that acceptance that we find a truly loving God who loves us unconditionally and perfectly.

In the Bible, there's a compelling story of forgiveness displaying the freedom only Jesus can give.

The Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus by using a vulnerable woman.

They brought a woman caught in the act of adultery and threw her down before Jesus.

They told Him the law said she was to be stoned for what she had done.

Jesus looked at them all and said, "He that is without sin, throw the first stone."

One by one, they all walked away because they knew that they all had sinned and could not throw a stone at her.

Jesus looked down at the woman who was full of guilt and shame, feeling condemned not only by those who brought her there but by her conscience.

When everyone was gone, Jesus said to her, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"

She said, "No, Lord," and He said a very profound thing back to her: "Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."

Jesus was the only One who was without sin who could've stoned her, but He chose mercy over judgment.

The woman left in freedom instead of guilt and shame.

Jesus is saying to you right now the very same thing: "I don't condemn you, so go live in freedom and sin no more."

If you are ready to step out of fear, guilt, and shame, I want to invite you to do something.

There are some mirrors up here for you.

You can come up and take a look in the mirror and say, "I am forgiven, and today I choose to forgive myself. (Have them say their name), I forgive you."

When you do this, you will begin to see yourself as God sees you: perfect and forgiven because of Jesus Christ.

Who would like to receive this gift of forgiveness from themselves?

SOCIAL MEDIA OPTION:

You can also take this to your social media page(s) by taking a selfie and posting about how you're forgiven and how have forgiven yourself today using the hashtag #imforgiven.

If you have some friends who forgave themselves too, do a group selfie and post with, "We're forgiven!" and hashtag #weareforgiven.

Maybe it will spark a movement for you, your friends, and your schools.

Wouldn't that be awesome?

Who is ready to make a change tonight and see themselves as God sees you?

Are you ready to offer yourself the same gift Jesus has through forgiveness?

Allow students time to work out their forgiveness and then close in prayer as you transition to small groups.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was the biggest issue holding you back from forgiving yourself? Why?
2. How does God declaring you not guilty affect you in deciding to forgive yourself?
3. How do you think forgiving yourself will affect your relationships with others? Why?
4. When you look in the mirror every day, what image of yourself do you see? Your own, or God's image?
5. Seeing yourself as God sees you is important to having a healthy self-image. How can you start seeing yourself as God sees you?
6. Why do you think it's so easy to be hard on ourselves and not forgive ourselves for things we've done wrong?
7. What is harder for you to do—forgive others or forgive yourself? Why?
8. What does forgiving yourself mean to you?
9. How does Jesus help you in learning to forgive yourself?

10. You can forgive yourself and walk in total freedom, especially from shame and guilt.
How do you plan to live out this freedom and how will it make your life different?

Close with this thought:

As you move forward in forgiving yourself, remember this: Yesterday is gone, tomorrow is not promised, so live in today.

Live in today, plan for tomorrow, and learn from yesterday.

Walk in the plan and purpose God has for each of your lives and forgive yourselves just as He forgives each of you.

Wrap up the discussion with a brief recap of the time and discussion you had while emphasizing the lesson bottom line.

End with prayer as you dismiss.