



What Motivates God to Continue Loving Us?



Session Objective

In this session, participants explore Scripture's testimony of God's loving kindness and steadfast love that reach out to everyone in a covenant of grace and mercy. Participants will see that the forgiveness we offer to one another starts with God's nature to love us and to show mercy to us.

Faith Statement

God in infinite and perfect love, having provided in the covenant of grace, through the mediation and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, a way of life and salvation, sufficient for and adapted to the whole lost race of humanity, doth freely offer this salvation to all people in the gospel. In the gospel God declares God's love for the world and God's desire that all people should be saved; reveals fully and clearly the only way of salvation; promises eternal life to all who truly repent and believe in Christ; invites and commands all to embrace the offered mercy; and by God's Spirit accompanying the Word pleads with humanity to accept God's gracious invitation.

— Westminster Confession of Faith (6.187–6.188)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- Why do you love someone? What motivates you to keep loving them?
- Why does God love? What might motivate God to continue loving us?
- What qualities would you use to describe God, or God's character?



Explore

Read Psalm 103 and John 3:16–17 and explore these questions:

- Based on these two Scriptures, how do you think God views the world? our lives?
- What might inspire someone to write a psalm like Psalm 103?
- Thinking of Psalm 103 as a song celebrating God's love, how would you sing a joyful song of God's love today?



Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned.

- What would it be like to view the world through God's eyes?
- What responsibility do we have to view the world through God's eyes?
- How have you experienced God's steadfast love? God's forgiveness?

Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the biblical passages.



Exit

Close in prayer, thanking God for some of the specific ways the group has experienced God's love.





Why Did God Make Humanity So Sinful?



Session Objective

In this session, participants discover that human beings were created with the ability to make choices, including the ability to disobey God. Rather than making us sinful and then punishing us, God made us able to love God out of free choice. Knowing we might choose otherwise, God offers complete forgiveness and new life in Christ.

Faith Statement

God has created human beings in a personal relationship with God that they may respond to the love of the Creator.

The reconciling act of God in Jesus Christ exposes the evil in people as sin in the sight of God. In sin, people claim mastery of their own lives, turn against God and each other, and become exploiters and despoilers of the world. They lose their humanity in futile striving and are left in rebellion, despair, and isolation.

God's love never changes. Against all who oppose the divine will, God expresses love in wrath. In the same love, God bore judgment and shameful death in Jesus Christ, to bring people to repentance and new life.

—Confession of 1967 (9.17a, 9.12, 9.14)
Inclusive Language Text



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What would the world be like if there was no sin and therefore forgiveness wasn't necessary?
- What do you think about today's question ("Why did God make humanity sinful?")? Did God make humanity sinful?
- What does the Bible tell us about being human?



Explore

Read Ephesians 2:1-10 and explore these questions:

- What does this passage tell us about the nature of humankind? What were we created for?
- What does this passage tell us about God's nature or what God does?
- What way of life do you think is meant in verse 10?



Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned.

- What do you wish you'd never done? How can you release it into God's mercy and forgive yourself?
- Is forgiveness—by God, or of one another—dependent on repentance?
- What impact does our salvation in Christ have on the earth and its inhabitants?

Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the biblical passage.



Exit

Close in prayer, thanking God for inviting us into a relationship and offering us grace and forgiveness when we stray.





If We Are All So Bad, Why Doesn't God Just Start Over in Another World?



Session Objective

In this session, participants discover that God gives us unlimited chances, even when we keep making the same mistakes over and over. Participants explore the role of repentance in our relationship with God and in our relationships with one another. Participants also learn that the forgiveness we give to others might need to be renewed periodically.

Faith Statement

God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified; and although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may by their sins fall under God's parental displeasure, and not have the light of God's countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.

—Westminster Confession of Faith (6.072)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- When have you been confronted with something you've done? How did you react? What relationships were affected?
- What "do-overs" have you had in your life? What part(s) of your life could use a "do-over"?
- Is forgiveness dependent on repentance?



Explore

Read 2 Samuel 11:1–12:14 and explore these questions:

- Trace David's sins as they compound and twist and turn around each other. When have you been in a situation that got more and more twisted and complicated?
- To what extent did David get a "do-over"? Did he get a completely clean slate? What consequences or repercussions of his actions were left?
- What do you think would have happened if David did this again? Do you think God would have forgiven him? What if he repented again?



Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned.

- What does it take for you to repent? To say "I'm sorry"? To ask forgiveness?
- How hard is it for you to keep forgiving someone for the same thing? Do you need to renew your forgiveness of certain people every day?

Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the biblical passage.



Exit

Close in prayer, thanking God for unlimited chances.





Session Objective

In this session, participants discover the depth of God’s mercy as they ask if there is a limit to God’s forgiveness. Did God forgive Judas for betraying Jesus? Does God forgive people who have committed terrible sins against others or even against a whole people? The Scriptural witness attests to God’s unfathomable mercy, and that forgiveness is God’s decision.

Faith Statement

Wherefore we condemn all impious utterances of some who wrongly use the preaching of the Gospel and say that it is easy to return to God. Christ has atoned for all sins. Forgiveness of sins is easy. Therefore, what harm is there in sinning? Nor need we be greatly concerned about repentance, etc. Notwithstanding we always teach that an access to God is open to all sinners, and that he forgives all sinners of all sins except the one sin against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:29).

—Second Helvetic Confession (5.102)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- How far do you think God’s mercy extends? Is anything unforgivable?
- Have you ever thought God was unfair? If so, what was the situation? Were you the beneficiary of that unfairness?



Explore

Read Matthew 20:1–15 and explore these questions:

- What reactions do you have when reading this story?
- Why do you think the landowner acted as he did throughout the parable?
- What do you suppose the kingdom of heaven is like, based on what we learn from this parable?



Express

Use the following questions to help the young people express what they’ve learned.

- How have you experienced God’s extravagant mercy?
- What situation needs to experience God’s generous mercy? How can you help? (*Note to Leader: Consider exploring the idea of a living wage in the United States and other countries.*)
- Can you think of anyone you wouldn’t want to experience God’s mercy? Why? What do you suppose God’s reaction to the situation might be?

Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the biblical passage.



Exit

Close in prayer, thanking God for some of the specific ways the group has experienced God’s extravagant mercy.





Session Objective

In this session, participants explore the benefits of forgiveness, for the one forgiven and the one doing the forgiving. Forgiveness is more than an intellectual exercise or something we do because God tells us to. The experience of being forgiven and the experience of forgiving someone involves God's healing of relationships and giving of renewed hope. The joy, freedom, and peace of reconciliation and forgiveness are fruits of the Spirit God gives as new life in Christ unfolds.

Faith Statement

Q. 90. What is the birth of the new self?

Complete joy in God through Christ and a strong desire to live according to the will of God in all good works.

—*Heidelberg Catechism* (4.090)

The new life does not release people from conflict with unbelief, pride, lust, fear. They still have to struggle with disheartening difficulties and problems. Nevertheless, as they mature in love and faithfulness in their life with Christ, they live in freedom and good cheer, bearing witness on good days and evil days, confident that the new life is pleasing to God and helpful to others.

—*Confession of 1967* (9.23)
Inclusive Language Text



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What does forgiveness look like?
- What does forgiveness feel like if you are the forgiver? What does it feel like if you are forgiven?
- Why is forgiveness the right thing to do? How does it change relationships? How does it affect a group?
- Read the following quote from the Robert Frost poem "The Road Not Taken" to the participants: "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference."
- How is forgiveness the road less traveled?



Explore

Read Matthew 18:21–35 and explore these questions:

- How many times have you forgiven someone?
- Why do you think the slave who was forgiven didn't offer forgiveness?
- What do you think Jesus was trying to teach with this parable? Why does it come right after the saying to forgive someone so many times?

Read Proverbs 17:9 and explore these questions:

- What effect does forgiveness have on a friendship?
- Forgiveness is a topic repeated over and over by teachers, including the teacher in Proverbs. Why does it have to be taught and retaught so often?



Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned.

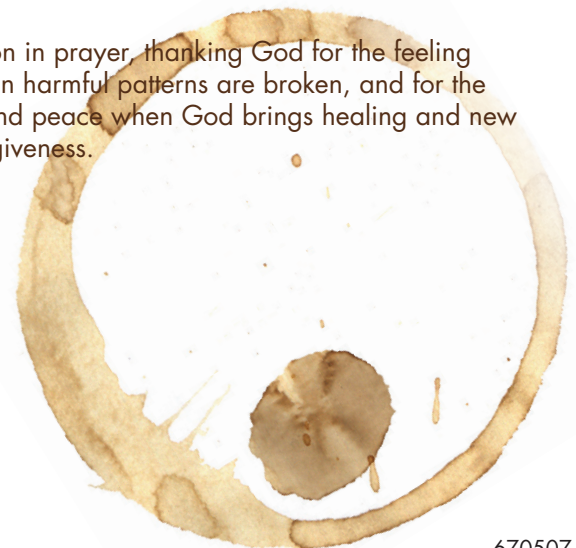
- How might forgiveness break patterns of behavior?
- What are the personal benefits of forgiving someone?
- How is forgiveness like healing? How are the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) part of forgiveness?
- Many people have found that forgiving someone makes them feel as if a burden has been lifted off them, and as if the feeling of being wronged doesn't control them anymore. What relationships are you in where you would like to escape a burden and not feel controlled by what happened anymore?
- What situations in the news this week could use forgiveness? How might it change the outcome?

Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the biblical passages.



Exit

Close the session in prayer, thanking God for the feeling of freedom when harmful patterns are broken, and for the feeling of joy and peace when God brings healing and new life through forgiveness.





Session Objective

In this session, participants have the opportunity to be practical and concrete about forgiveness as they identify ways the Holy Spirit brings reconciliation to the world and ways they can be part of the ripple effect of forgiveness.

Faith Statement

God the Holy Spirit fulfills the work of reconciliation in human life. The Spirit enables people to receive forgiveness as they forgive one another and to enjoy the peace of God as they make peace among themselves. In spite of their sin, the Spirit gives people power to become representatives of Jesus Christ and his gospel of reconciliation to all.

—Confession of 1967 (9.20)
Inclusive Language Text

Q. 105. What do we pray for in the 5th petition?

In the 5th petition, which is “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,” we pray that God, for Christ’s sake, would freely pardon all our sins; which we are the rather encouraged to ask because by his grace we are enabled from the heart to forgive others.

—Shorter Catechism (7.105)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- Who is the most forgiving person you know? Why?
- What or who helps you forgive?
- What role does God play in reconciliation? How can we tell?
- What does it mean to be an “agent of forgiveness”?



Explore

Read Matthew 6:7–15 and James 5:15–16. Then explore these questions:

- What do these passages say about how to forgive someone? What processes are suggested?
- Who or what makes forgiveness possible?
- How might these processes and this behavior change the communities we are a part of (families, schools, churches, clubs, cities, countries)?

Read Genesis 50:15–21 and explore these questions:

- What led Joseph to forgive his brothers?
- How did Joseph’s forgiveness affect the relationships with his brothers? What might have happened if reconciliation had not occurred?



Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they’ve learned.

- How is forgiveness like untangling a knot you didn’t create?
- Many things happen that we can never forget. How does remembering the event affect forgiveness or reconciliation? Is forgiveness or reconciliation still possible if the event isn’t forgotten?
- How can forgiveness be a way of life? Does forgiveness grow the more you practice it? Why or why not?
- What situations in the area we live in could use reconciliation? What are some ways we could be involved in the process? Make a commitment to pray for the issues on a regular basis.

Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the biblical passages.



Exit

Close the group in prayer, thanking God for changing our hearts so that we can make peace with one another and share forgiveness throughout our communities.

