



FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Find time to explore these questions as a family after each session.

Session 1

- Why does God love? What motivates God to continue loving us?
- How have you experienced God's steadfast love and mercy?
- How have you experienced God's forgiveness?
- How would we, in our own family, treat each other if we viewed each other through God's eyes?

Session 2

- What would the world be like if there was no sin and therefore forgiveness wasn't necessary?
- 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?

Session 3

- When have you been confronted with something you've done wrong? 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"?
- How do you feel about life when you realize that the future isn't written yet? What does your future look like?

Session 4

- Have you ever thought God was unfair? If so, what was the situation?
- How far do you think God's mercy extends? Is anything unforgivable?
- What situation needs to experience God's extravagant mercy? How can your family help?

Session 5

- What does forgiveness look like? What does it feel like, if you are the forgiver? What does it feel like if you are the person being forgiven?
- How might forgiveness break patterns of behavior?
- What stories in the news this week involve people who need forgiveness? How might forgiveness change the outcome of the situation?

Session 6

- Who is the most forgiving person you know? Why?
- What or who helps you forgive?
- How is forgiving different from forgetting? How are the two related?
- What's the hardest part about forgiving someone?



SESSION 1 QUESTIONS

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What motivates God to continue loving us even when we mess up?
.....

What one word would you use to describe how God feels about us?
.....

Why does God love us?
.....

Is it possible for us to love God as much as God loves us? Why or why not?
.....

Is it possible for us to love each other as much as God loves us? Why or why not?
.....

What one word would you use to describe how you feel about God right now?
.....

Is God's love for us the same kind of love that we experience between people, such as the love between parent and child, love between friends, or romantic love? Why or why not?
.....

How would you explain God's love to someone who has never experienced God's love?
.....





SESSION 1 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)





CASE STUDY

Sonia and David

Sonia and David have been dating for a year. They are seniors in high school and looking toward graduation, summer jobs as camp counselors, and starting at the state university together in the fall. Both Sonia and David have decided not to have sex until they are married.

During Christmas break, Sonia's family visited relatives on the other side of the state, where she lived until sophomore year. Sonia saw Isaiah, her lab partner from freshman year, whom she had not seen in two and a half years. They hit it off and spent every possible hour together, including New Years' Eve, when they made out in Isaiah's basement. Two days later, Sonia's family returned home.

Sonia didn't tell David, and for three weeks acted as if nothing had happened. She didn't return Isaiah's calls, and pretended it was a wrong number when Isaiah called when she was with David. Isaiah finally called her home number, and Sonia's mom answered the phone. Sonia's mom confronted her that night, wondering why Isaiah was calling, and why he sounded so upset that she wouldn't return his calls. Sonia lied. She said he had been going through some rough stuff with his girlfriend, and she had been talking him through it over the break and was tired of spending so much time with him. That night she cried herself to sleep, feeling ashamed for what she had done.

The next day, David said he knew something was wrong and needed to talk with her.

Discussion Questions:

- Who in this situation is in need of forgiveness?
- If you were Sonia, what would you do next? If you were David? If you were Isaiah?
- If you were best friends with Sonia, what advice would you give her? If you were best friends with David? If you were best friends with Isaiah?
- How do Psalm 103 and John 3:16–17 shed light on the forgiveness needed in this situation?



CLOSING LITANY

All: We trust in God, whom Jesus called Abba, Father.

Leader: In sovereign love God created the world good

Group 1: and makes everyone equally in God's image, male and female,

Group 2: of every race and people, to live as one community.

Leader: But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator.

Group 1: Ignoring God's commandments,

Group 2: we violate the image of God in others and ourselves.

Group 1: We accept lies as truth,

Group 2: we exploit neighbor and nature,

Group 1: and we threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care.

All: We deserve God's condemnation.

Leader: Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.

Group 2: In everlasting love, the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people to bless all families of the earth.

Group 1: Hearing their cry, God delivered the children of Israel from the house of bondage.

Group 2: Loving us still, God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.

Group 1: Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child,

Group 2: like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home,

All: God is faithful still.

—Adapted from *A Brief Statement of Faith* (10.3)





SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Genesis 2:15–18 and 3:1–13

These passages are a part of one of the earliest stories of the earliest writers of Israelite history. The writers are trying to explain why the world is the way it is. Read Genesis 2:15–18 and 3:1–13 and explore the following questions together:

- What does this story tell us about being human?
 - What does this story tell us about the consequences of our actions? What does this story tell us about the consequences for the earth?
 - What does this story tell us about God?
-

Ephesians 2:1–10

This passage summarizes Paul's teaching about the gospel and about our purpose. Read Ephesians 2:1–10 and explore the following questions together:

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





SESSION 2 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





CASE STUDY

Sam and Jorge

Sam and Jorge have been friends since fourth grade. The summer between sophomore and junior year, they both got jobs at the local technology store as stock boys. Each was saving up for a car, but sometimes they spent money on music or games with their employee discount. Both of them figured that they would have enough money for their own car by Spring Break. At the end of the summer, Sam rolled up to work in the rusted-out '89 Mustang he had been saving for.

Jorge was jealous. He begged Sam to tell him where he had gotten the extra money to get the car—had his parents chipped in? But Sam was vague, saying he had found a little here and a little there and had stopped buying so many games and songs so he could get the car.

A month later Jorge saw Sam slip a game under his shirt while they were stocking. Jorge confronted Sam later, but Sam denied it. They argued for an hour, and finally Jorge left, slamming the door behind him. Sam and Jorge didn't talk to each other for a week, until the day Jorge saw Sam showing off a new stereo in his Mustang. Jorge confronted Sam again, and again Sam denied stealing inventory.

A month later three gaming systems were missing from stock, after they had been checked in off the truck. The store manager talked to each employee individually. Jorge felt terrible that all of the employees were being accused of stealing, all because he hadn't turned his friend in earlier. When Sam came out of the manager's office, he wouldn't make eye contact with Jorge. Jorge was called in next, and couldn't believe what he heard! The manager said several employees had seen Jorge steal small items from the truck over the last few months and had seen him carry one of the gaming systems straight from the warehouse to his mom's car when he left work two days ago. Jorge knew it would sound like a lie to accuse Sam of anything now. He swore to the manager that he had not stolen anything, that he had bought the system with his employee discount, and didn't know anything about the missing gaming system. The manager fired him anyway, and Jorge thought that was the end of a bad situation.

Less than a week later, Jorge received a letter from the company, threatening criminal and civil charges for theft in the amount of \$10,000 unless the items were returned.

Discussion Questions:

- Who in this situation is in need of forgiveness?
- If you were Sam, what would you do next? If you were Jorge?
- If you were best friends with Sam, what advice would you give him? If you were best friends with Jorge?
- How do Ephesians 2:1–10, Genesis 2:15–18, and Genesis 3:1–13 shed light on the forgiveness needed in this situation?



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- What are your specific beliefs about how God created the world?
- What are your specific beliefs about how God continues to interact with the world?
- Why do humans sin?
- If humans are all so bad, why doesn't God just start over in another world?





SESSION 3 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)*





CASE STUDY

Kinya and Her Father

Your friend Kinya has been angry and depressed for several weeks. You've asked her what's wrong and she's assured you that it isn't you, but she snaps at you all the same. You spend time with other friends for a couple of weeks, until she stops you after school to see if you can talk with her. Back at your house, she tells you that something terrible has happened. She explains:

Her parents were divorced five years ago, and she hasn't seen her father since then. He had been getting drunk and yelling at the family almost every night. Kinya had lived in fear that one day he would hurt her, her sister, or her mother. Finally, her mother made a plan to leave and sent the girls to live with their grandparents while she filed for divorce and made new living arrangements. Her father left town, and the only contact they'd had with him was the occasional check he sent. Now he is back in town and is leaving messages on their home phone saying he has changed and wants to be a father in her life. He's been asking to meet her for lunch on Saturday.

Kinya tells you that she has talked with her pastor and the school counselor off and on for a year about her dad. She felt like she was finally getting out from behind his shadow. Now that he is back, however, she is scared that he and her feelings about him will always run her life.

Discussion Questions:

- Who in this situation is in need of forgiveness?
- If you were Kinya, what would you do next? If you were her dad, what would you do next?
- If you were best friends with Kinya, what advice would you give her?
- How do 2 Samuel 11:1 – 12:14 and Romans 6:1–4 shed light on the forgiveness needed in this situation?





SESSION 4 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)*





**How have you
experienced God's
extravagant mercy?**





**Who in your life needs
to experience God's
extravagant mercy?
What can you do to help
them experience it?**



**Who in the world needs
to experience God's
extravagant mercy?
How can you help them
experience it?**



CASE STUDY

Paul

Sixteen-year-old Paul's parents announced they were getting a divorce a year and a half ago. For three years his parents had yelled at each other, slammed doors, and fought about money and the kids in front of them. Since the divorce, Paul and his sister, Marissa, have been tossed back and forth like volleyballs between their parents. Both parents are bitter and upset and have shared information with Paul that he wishes he didn't know—about things they have done to each other and about the difficulties of having two separate households raising kids. Paul feels guilty that he and Marissa cost so much, so he asked for extra hours at his job in order to pay for his clothes and food. The custody battle has torn the family further apart. After over a year of odd arrangements and not knowing which house they should go to after school, Paul and Marissa now spend each week with a different parent. During the long arguments about who was a better or worse parent, no one asked the children's opinions, even though they are both teenagers. Paul often thinks about when he was five or six and both his parents spent happy times together with him. And he remembers when he was eight or nine, and he didn't notice that his parents were hardly ever at home at the same time. But he still knew that both parents loved him.

"It's like I don't matter," Paul often bogs. His parents argue about him and about how much they love him, but it's like he's a piece of furniture that both want to have but don't want to take care of. Even though the divorce is final, the custody has been worked out, he has a room in both houses, and his parents don't spend as much time at the courthouse, the mess of their lives is not sorting out. Both parents still complain about the other one. Marissa has started breaking curfew regularly and dating older college students. And Paul can't seem to concentrate enough to keep his grades up for the scholarship he needs to college. Also, his manager at work has talked to him several times about mistakes he's made at the cash register.

Paul asked his dad to spend a Saturday with him to help him sort things out.

Discussion Questions:

- Who in this situation is in need of forgiveness?
- If you were Paul, what would you do next?
- If you were best friends with Paul, what advice would you give him?
- How do today's stories from Matthew and Jonah shed light on the forgiveness needed in this situation?



Read the poem quietly to yourself. Circle words or phrases that stand out to you. In the margins, jot down thoughts and ideas that come to mind. Continue reading and reflecting until the music stops playing.

The Road Not Taken

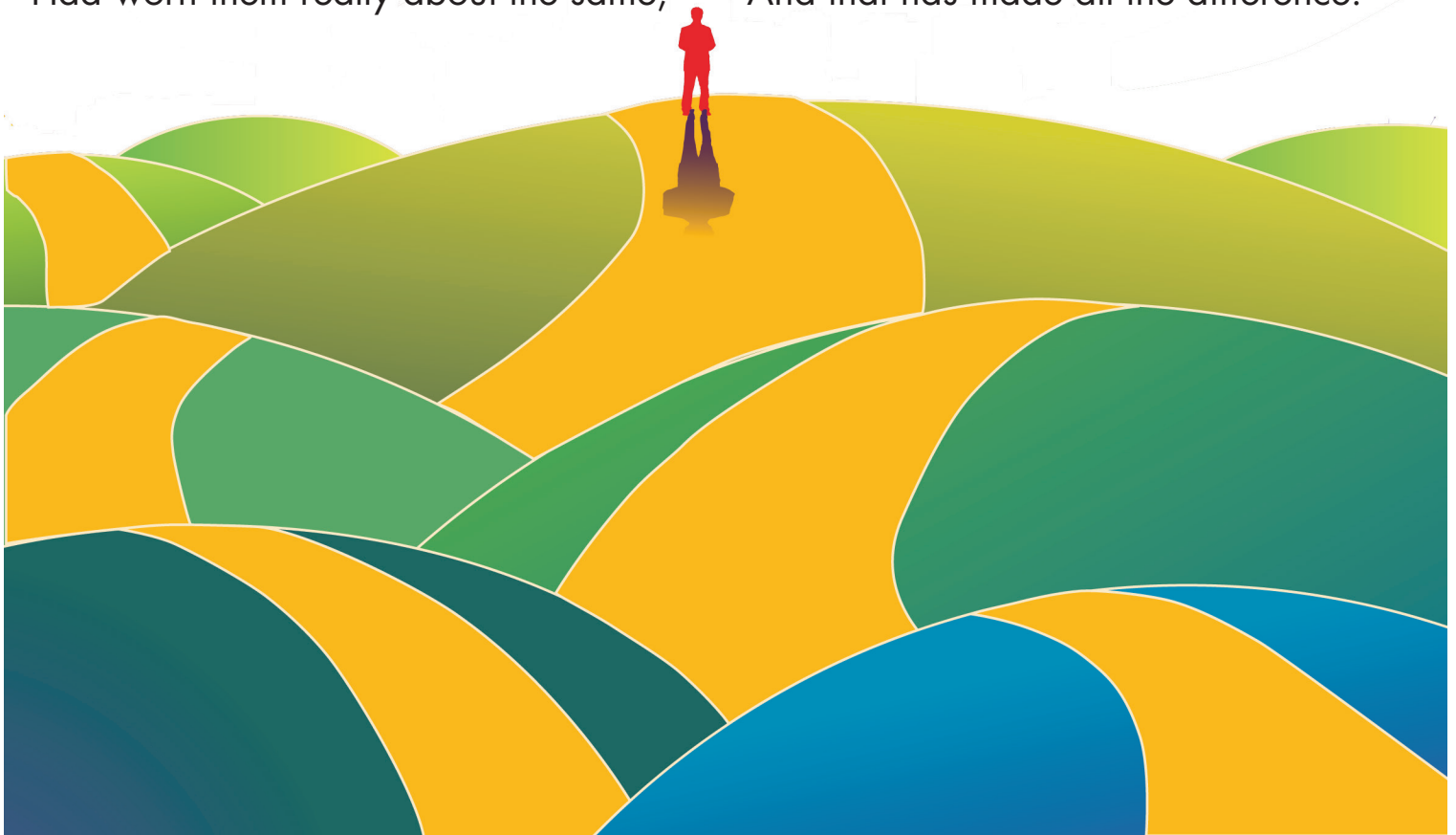
By Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.





SESSION 5 QUESTIONS

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As people of faith, why is it important that we forgive?
.....

Why is forgiveness the right thing to do?
.....

How does forgiveness change relationships?
.....

How does forgiveness affect groups of people (families, communities, church families)?
.....

Why is forgiveness so hard?
.....

What does forgiveness look like?
.....

What does forgiveness feel like if you are the forgiver?
.....

What does forgiveness feel like if you are forgiven?
.....

Why does the Bible tell us to forgive?
.....





**Whoever would foster love
covers over an offense, but
whoever repeats the matter
separates close friends.**

—Proverbs 17:9 (TNIV)



SESSION 5 FAITH STATEMENTS

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

A. 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





CASE STUDY

Youth Group Cliques

At the beginning of sophomore year, Janet and Rachel had a falling out. They had been best friends in middle school and on-again, off-again friends throughout their freshman year. But the first week of sophomore year, Janet called her youth group leader in tears. Rachel was telling people at school that Janet had gained a lot of weight over the summer. She felt humiliated; in fact, she didn't want to go to school or church or youth group and face Rachel or anybody else. Both moms were friends and tried to help their daughters reconcile. Rachel denied saying anything about Janet, even when Janet finally confronted her.

The fall was miserable for Janet, but she managed to avoid Rachel most of the time, even at school, by spending time with a different group of friends. The two girls sat in different places during worship, and managed to switch off which weeks they went to Sunday school or youth group. Most of the rest of the group went to school with both Rachel and Janet. A few had no idea what was going on. Some knew and took sides. A couple just avoided the whole thing and even stopped going to youth events in case one of them was there.

By Halloween, the girls had started talking again, and went to a party together with other girls. Alcohol was available, and Janet was worried that Rachel had been drinking when she saw her goofing off on the porch. She pulled her away and asked if she had been drinking. Rachel said no, but Janet wasn't sure. She and another girl, Rebekah, walked Rachel home a few minutes after curfew. Rachel said goodnight to her mom and stumbled upstairs to bed. But her mother followed and asked if she had been drinking. She said no repeatedly, and even told her mother to smell her breath, that it didn't smell like alcohol. She did say that Janet and the other girls had a beer.

The next day, Rachel's mom called Janet's mom to say she thought Janet had been drinking at the party. Janet denied having anything but a couple of Diet Cokes at the party. She explained that she thought Rachel might have been drinking because she seemed a little too giddy. She also said that she and another friend had taken Rachel home.

(continued on next page)





Youth Group Cliques (continued)

Later in the week, Rachel's mom and Janet's mom had a meeting with Rachel, Janet, and Rebekah. Rebekah felt torn between both friends and wanted to help them get out of trouble with their families. But what she said ended up getting everyone in trouble. She told the moms that she didn't see either Rachel or Janet drinking, but she did see them with guys who were drinking, and that Rachel and Janet had even gotten into a car with them. After she shared this, both girls were mad at her, everyone was grounded, and trust was ruined between the friends and the moms and daughters. Church was the only place the girls were allowed to go.

At church, Janet, Rachel, and Rebekah all tried to tell everyone what happened and tried to recruit people to be on their side. For a few weeks Rachel was ostracized, then Janet was. Some, including the youth leader, tried to get everyone to talk it out and become friends. Finally, the other youth didn't know how to help and didn't want to talk about the fight anymore. Several canceled on the ski trip and weren't sure about the mission trip. By February, most had stopped coming to youth group.

Discussion Questions:

- Who in this situation is in need of forgiveness?
- If you were Janet or Rachel, what would you do next? If you were the youth group leader? If you were a member of the youth group?
- If you were best friends with Janet or Rachel, what advice would you give her?
- How do Matthew 18:21–35 and Proverbs 17:9 shed light on the forgiveness needed in this situation?



MELODRAMA PROMPTS

.....

Create a short, melodramatic skit about two family members who are forgiving each other for something that they each did wrong. *You* come up with what each person did wrong and where the conversation is taking place!

.....

Create a short, melodramatic skit about a conflict and eventual resolution between two of your favorite cartoon characters. *You* come up with the cartoon characters, the conflict, and the location where the events are taking place!

.....

Create a short, melodramatic skit about a person who is forgiving his or her pet for doing something wrong. *You* come up with what kind of pet it is, what the pet did wrong, and where the conversation is taking place!

.....

Create a short, melodramatic skit about an animal who is forgiving another animal for doing something wrong. *You* come up with what kinds of animals are in the skit, what the animals did wrong, and where the conversation is taking place!

.....

Create a short, melodramatic skit about two nonliving objects in a classroom (example: a pencil and a pencil sharpener) that get in a conflict, say mean things to each other, and then forgive each other.

.....

Create a short, melodramatic skit about a conflict between two stereotypical high school groups. *You* come up with the groups, the conflict, and how the conflict is resolved.

.....

Create a short, melodramatic skit about a conflict between a salesperson and a customer at a retail store. *You* come up with the store, the conflict, and how the conflict is resolved.

.....

Create a short, melodramatic skit about a conflict between groups in your congregation. *You* come up with the groups, the conflict, and how the conflict is resolved.

.....





SESSION 6 FAITH STATEMENTS

God the Holy Spirit fulfills the work of reconciliation in human life. The Holy Spirit creates and renews the church as the community in which people are reconciled to God and to one another. 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.

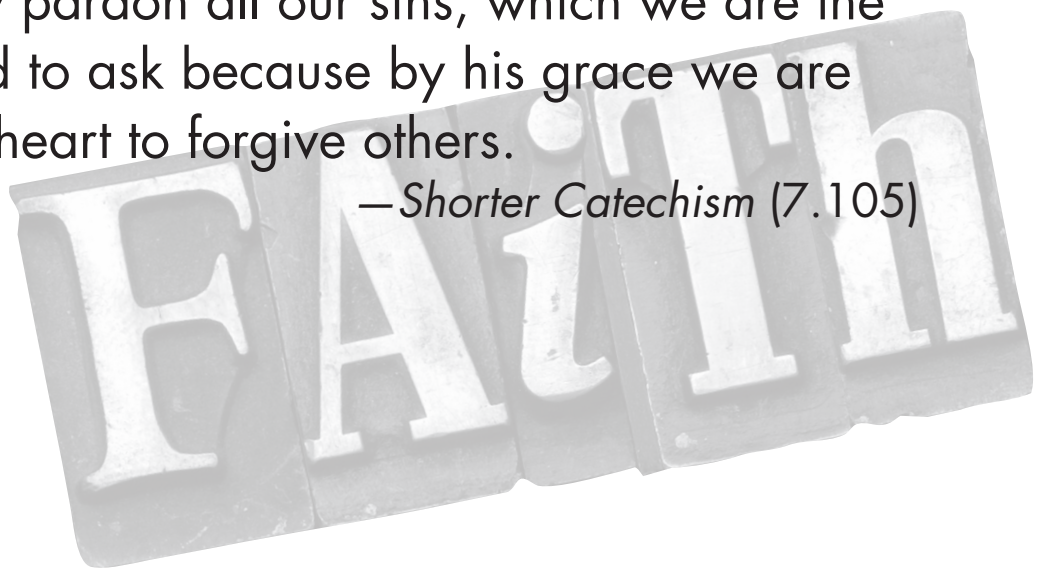
—*Confession of 1967* (9.20)

Inclusive Language Text

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

In the fifth 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 rather encouraged to ask because by his grace we are enabled from the heart to forgive others.

—*Shorter Catechism* (7.105)





CASE STUDY

A Terrible Accident

Mary graduated from college last year with a strong GPA and a promising future. She easily landed a well-paying job and just bought her first new car: a red convertible. Though she likes to go out with her friends from church and her colleagues from work, she isn't even close to living a wild lifestyle. In fact, her friends regularly make fun of her for never taking risks and for going to bed early.

One night last month, she was driving home from a friend's house and hit a man who was walking across the street. The guy was in a crosswalk, but it was a really dark area and she didn't see him. She wasn't speeding. According to the local laws, the accident was her fault because pedestrians always have the right of way in a crosswalk. However, the police officers at the scene all commented that there was no way that she could have seen him on such a dark night and that the city really needed to put up some lights there.

Mary wasn't physically hurt. Unfortunately, the man who was hit died the day after the accident. He left behind a wife and two young children. Mary's lawyer told her not to make any contact with the family of the man that she killed. Not being able to apologize to the family or attend the man's funeral made the situation really hard for Mary to accept. She felt horrible. She even told a friend that she knows that God will never forgive her for robbing this family of a husband and father and that there's no way she could ever forgive herself for what she did.

This morning, Mary received a call from Cristina, the widow of the man in the accident. Cristina told Mary that she'd had a realization when she was praying the Lord's Prayer with one of her children the night before. She was calling to tell Mary that she had forgiven Mary for the accident.

Discussion Questions:

- If you were Mary, how would you have responded to Cristina's call?
- If you were best friends with Mary, what would you say to her about forgiveness?
- What would you say to Mary if you were her pastor?
- How do Genesis 50:15–21, Matthew 6:7–15, Matthew 18:15–17, and James 5:15–16 shed light on the forgiveness needed in this situation?