

Sunday morning  
teaching plan

Date:  
7<sup>th</sup> June  
2026

<b>TITLE:</b>	Forgiveness
<b>THEME:</b>	Living Well.
<b>AIM:</b>	

### BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The idea of forgiving people isn't always easy or something we want to consider. Today, we are going to explore the idea of forgiveness and how it can help us to move past some of the scars we pick up in life. We will explore what forgiveness is and isn't, why we might want to consider it, and discover the difference it makes to our happiness and well-being.

### WARM UP

## Which 5 have 1?

Separate the group into teams (this can be pairs or larger). Give each team a pen and paper.

In advance select some categories and choose five answers of your own. Categories could include animals, chocolate brands, types of music, months etc.

Every team has to guess the five answers you have selected in the chosen category by writing them down. For each correct answer a team gets a point. You can then move on to the next category.

You could change the game slightly by allowing each team to select a category in turn and be in charge of choosing five answers which others have to guess.

# Clear water part 1

Take out the empty glass and jug of water and slowly pour the water into the glass as you explain the following. Fill the glass.

Ask the group to imagine for a minute their life is like this glass. As we go through life many positive things happen to us. At times we will be filled with love, kindness, friendship, care, acceptance, and positive experiences. These will usually leave us feeling safe, calm, content, and happy.

At this moment take out the food colouring and very slowly, drop by drop, put some in to the water as you continue to talk.

As we go through life people will sometimes say or do things that hurt or upset us. We might:

- Be let down by people we trust
- Be rejected
- Be bullied
- Be gossiped about or have something mean said about us
- Be left out
- Be unfairly treated
- Be blamed for something we didn't do
- Have arguments with family and friends
- Be shouted at or mistreated
- Be grounded by our parents or guardians
- Experience prejudice because of our gender, sexuality, religion or ethnicity

Every time we are hurt it can leave a mark or have a negative effect on us. If we allow the anger, bitterness, or desire for revenge to build up, or keep playing the event over and over in our head, it can begin to take over. Before long our life is coloured and stained by the negative experiences we have been through.

If we leave these emotions unchecked they can overtake our lives, disrupt our thoughts, prolong the pain and impact on our well-being. We can become stuck reliving the situation that has hurt us and find it hard to let go. This can sometimes lead to un-forgiveness. Un-forgiveness can lead to hatred and us wanting to harm others. Once established, hatred can be toxic, it is like a poison. It can take over our lives, and cause us stress and negativity. It can lead us to seek revenge or retaliate, and go on to hurt others as we have been hurt.

**Slide 2:** On 12th June 1964, Nelson Mandela was sentenced to life imprisonment for fighting apartheid. He spent 26 years in prison. Yet despite being imprisoned and mistreated for so long, Mandela knew he needed to let go of the way he was mistreated in order to live freely.

### **Slide 3:**

Nelson Mandela -

“Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies.”

“As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison.”

**Ask:** What do you think Nelson Mandela is trying to get us to understand? What might be some of the negative impacts that unforgiveness, holding a grudge or seeking revenge have on us?

### **Slide 4:**

**Ask:** Why do people find it hard to forgive or not seek revenge? What stops us from doing it?

Possible answers are: Revenge is sweet / A need for justice / Someone deserves to pay / Forgiveness is weakness / They hurt me / Don't let people off the hook

When they are hurt, many people can quite naturally find it difficult to respond with forgiveness. One of the main reasons we resist forgiveness is our powerful desire to protect ourselves, to seek justice, and to make sure that the perpetrator isn't allowed off the hook.

Unforgiveness is our way of legitimising that we were wronged. Why would we want to see someone who has hurt us feel better and benefit from our forgiveness? Surely this contradicts our desire that they should suffer some pain or consequence too. If we forgive, we may feel that what someone has done doesn't matter, and that the pain we feel is somehow invalid. By holding on to pain we are able to validate our sense of being wronged. We can declare “they hurt me, it matters, I didn't deserve it and I am not OK with it.”

Forgiveness feels like we are letting people off the hook whilst we are suffering. For many of us this isn't an option. However, once we understand what forgiveness actually is and what it isn't, along with how we can do it and the benefits it can bring, we are more likely to recognise forgiveness as something that is worth pursuing.

*Put the glass of coloured water to one side. You will need it later.*

**The point:** To explore what unforgiveness does to us.

# What forgiveness is and isn't

When it comes to forgiveness, people have different ideas as to what forgiveness is and isn't.

Place a line of masking tape across the floor from one side to the other (In the snug there can be a smaller line and counters for each player to place on the line). Explain that you will present a series of different statements and it is up to the group to choose what they think. Allocate one statement to one end of the line and the other statement to the opposite end. Ask the young people to indicate their response by placing themselves along the line.

Once they have chosen their position you can ask for feedback about why they responded in this way.

Remember that there should be no judgement based on anyone's responses. We can disagree with one another and still respect each other.

## **Slide 5: Forgiveness is...**

Forgiveness shifts our focus away from feelings of ill-will and retaliation. Surprisingly, as we shift our focus away from those who have hurt us we can start to truly look after ourselves and live for today. As long as we keep our attention on the pain, we remain living in the past and are not likely to find peace. People who hang on to grudges are more likely to experience depression and stress which can lead to other health conditions like increased blood pressure and anxiety.

## **Slide 6: Forgiveness is a choice...**

Forgiveness is always a choice. To those outside of the situation it can be easy to say 'forgive'. However, the practice can be much harder. No one can force you to forgive someone else. To make that choice you need to weigh up the pros and cons of doing so, for example how much the unforgiveness is hurting you and what the benefits will be for you if you forgive. Take your time. It is your choice and yours alone.

## **Slide 7: Forgiveness takes time**

Deciding to forgive and actually forgiving someone can take time. It is rarely a one-off experience.

You might have to keep forgiving the person in your head each time painful thoughts come back up. It is important to be patient with yourself and recognise that, at times, the hurt will resurface and you may have to make a decision to keep forgiving.

## **Slide 8: You can only forgive if people say sorry**

Forgiveness is a choice we make regardless of whether the person who has hurt us actually asks for forgiveness, deserves it or wants it. Forgiveness is normally unconditional — once we start saying "I will forgive you if..." then we are in danger of only

forgiving under certain terms. If we don't get what we want it can leave us stuck with the pain. Sometimes you may never know if the person is sorry or not.

**Ask:** Do they think it's easier to forgive when someone says they are sorry?

**Read:** 1 John 1:9 which tells us that God forgives us when we say sorry.

**Slide 9.** This Bible passage talks about how we need to love others because God loved us first. **Ask:** If this suggests anything about forgiveness.?

You could also read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 where it talks about what love is, and how it keeps no record of wrongs.

### **Slide 10: Dwelling on the past?**

Forgiveness can also be described as the willingness to stop repeating the story of what happened to us, who did what, and when. It's a decision to try and put the past behind us, rather than trying to change what has already happened. Harboursing negative thoughts can cause you to keep playing the injustice over and over in your head. As a result, you are likely to feel angry, sad or hurt, and develop a bitterness towards someone or something else. Rather than allowing those who have hurt us to be at the core of our thoughts, focussing on the present and looking to the future helps us to be happy.

### **Slide 11: Forgive and forget?**

Suggesting that forgiving and forgetting are the same thing is unhelpful, as it is impossible to delete things from our minds. The memory might fade over time and it can be helpful to try to reduce the amount of time we spend thinking about the person or situation that has hurt us. If someone tells you to forget, it may not help if you haven't been able to talk about and work through what has hurt you. If you can get to a place where you dwell on it less often that will be helpful, but to suppress feelings and just try to forget may not be helpful in the long run. Talking may help you to start dealing with it so you can dwell on it less. This may help the situation to take up less of your time and thoughts. It is also important to try to take action where possible to protect yourself if you are in a harmful situation. Forgiving someone who continues to hurt you, doesn't mean you have to continue to let them act badly.

### **Slide 12: Remember?**

Forgiveness isn't about pretending the harm caused doesn't matter. If you have been hurt it does matter, but trying to get others to agree with you, or seek revenge, may not be the best course of action.

In the same way forgiveness is not you condoning or excusing what has happened. Wrongs are still wrongs and justice may still need to take place, especially when a crime has been committed. If you choose to forgive someone you are not saying what they did was OK, but instead that you are trying to move on with your life so it doesn't keep dragging you down. It is also vital to realise that forgiving people still means we can report those who bully or harm us.

### **Slide 13: A change**

When it comes to friendships, or relationships in general, forgiveness isn't saying that everything will go back to how it was before. Sometimes relationships do get repaired, but this isn't always the case. Sometimes they come to an end. If we choose to forgive we also don't have to go back to situations where we are treated like a doormat or put up with being mistreated time and time again. Sometimes we have to set boundaries or walk away from relationships.

### **Slide 14: Look for the best**

When we are subject to strong emotions like anger we can easily lose perspective and even exaggerate people's faults, forgetting or ignoring their good qualities. We can also forget that those who have hurt us are people too. No one is perfect. That is not to say that people should not be held responsible for their behaviour, but when we focus on the faults of others it can give us the justification to hold onto pain, show animosity and even seek retaliation. As hard as it can be, taking time to try to understand others and realise that we too make mistakes can help us develop empathy, allowing us to share and understand the feelings of others. This can help us to be kinder to those around us. As someone once said, "When someone does something wrong, don't forget all the things they did right."

**Read:** John 8:7-11 where Jesus defends a woman caught doing something wrong. He tells the people accusing her that the first person to throw stones at her should be the one who has never done anything wrong themselves. In this passage, we see how Jesus, the only person there who had led a perfect life and so could judge her, chose to show compassion. This is a great example of how we should remember that we also need forgiveness, whether from the same people as have hurt us, or others. None of us are perfect.

To summarise the activity, explain the following:

- Forgiveness is not pretending the past didn't happen or suggesting that things don't need to change.
- Forgiveness is a conscious decision to start letting go of hurt and beginning to lessen its grip on us so we can start to live again. It is a decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance towards a person who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve it.
- It is an opportunity to heal yourself, and maybe others. It is about your release from pain and an opportunity for freedom to move on. It is a journey which can take time, but when we forgive it should lead to a happier life.

**The point:** To explore where on the scale of forgiveness we stand, and what the implications of forgiveness or unforgiveness may be.

# Bible study

Look up Matthew 18:21-35. Either read it together, or watch the video version below.

**Slide 15:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7c976lrlek&ab\\_channel=LifeKids](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7c976lrlek&ab_channel=LifeKids)

Ask the following questions:

- "What does this tell us about God?"  
That he is forgiving, kind and compassionate. His love never fails.
- "What can we learn from this?"  
As the video explains, God forgives us every single time we ask him to. Our challenge is to show this forgiveness to others.
- "How do you feel about this?"

Forgiving others doesn't mean we continue letting people hurt us, but it frees us from resentment and bitterness.

**The point:** To reflect on the story of the unforgiving servant, and how God challenges us to forgive others as he forgives us.

## Forgiving ourselves

**Slides 16 & 17**

**Ask:** How do people feel when they mess up?

What are some of the responses we can have to our mistakes?". Give time for responses.

Talk with the group about how often, when we mess up, we can:

- Feel bad about what we have done or said. We may feel angry, guilty, shameful and even embarrassed. Although these are not pleasant feelings, they can cause us to stop and learn from our mistakes. However, it is important that we learn from our mistakes and not beat ourselves up.
- We can easily become self-critical and view ourselves in a negative light. Whilst we may have made a mistake, we mustn't forget to put it into perspective and also focus on the good qualities that we have. When we focus too much on our mistakes and dwell on them, we can become stuck in a cycle of being unfair to ourselves.
- We may also move on without learning from our mistakes and pretending that what we did doesn't matter. This can be unhelpful too as it means we don't learn or adapt. It could mean that we go on to do it again, or stop realising or caring how our behaviour affects others.

**Slide 18: Ask:** What are some helpful things we could do and say to ourselves when we mess up?

Sometimes the hardest person to forgive is ourselves. Often, we are harsher with ourselves for when we do things wrong, than we are to others.

**Slide 19** To forgive ourselves we have to remember a few key points:

1. Everyone makes mistakes. No one is perfect. When we fail, the key is to admit it and then try to learn from it and move on. We should see mistakes as an opportunity to grow and become a better person.

**Slide 20**

2. You may need to apologise or correct your mistake. It takes a brave person to admit that they were in the wrong. Not everyone will accept your apology, but that is the other person's problem not yours. You can only deal with you.

**Slide 21**

3. Talk to someone about your mistake. This can help you to put things into perspective and think through your next steps.

**Slide 22**

4. Try to avoid making yourself feel better in ways that are not helpful or that could make you feel worse in the long run. This could include using drugs and alcohol or self-harming. You may find that no matter how many times you try to forgive yourself you still can't. In these times it can be helpful to write down what you are thinking about yourself and then challenge those thoughts as they could be what is holding you back. For example, you may think that because you have hurt someone you are a horrible person. However, if you remind yourself that everyone makes mistakes and that you are a human being like everyone else, it can help to change the way you think about yourself and make forgiving yourself possible.

**Slide 23**

5. Live out your forgiveness by putting the situation behind you and getting on with life. Don't keep punishing yourself. It is important to love yourself and others. Cut yourself some slack and fill your life with positive and enjoyable things.

**Slide 24:** Jeremiah 31:34 MSG [God says] "...I'll wipe the slate clean for each of them. I'll forget they ever sinned!"

Remind the group that God forgives us and if he can wipe our slate clean, then we can live life free from the wrong things we do.

**The point:** To discuss what we can learn from our own mistakes and look at practical ways we can forgive ourselves.

# Clear Water Part 2

**Ask:** What can happen to us when we don't forgive?

Unforgiveness is like the glass of water with the dye in it: it can leave a stain on our lives. The stain could be: Anger / Bitterness / Revenge / Retaliation / Dragging others into arguments / Getting physical / Sadness / Fear / Being stuck with the thoughts going over and over it in our heads.

Unforgiveness has the potential to really damage us, as we can become stuck in the pain we feel, we can explode with anger and revenge, or it can cause our emotions and reactions to go all over the place. We can become overwhelmed by the pain of what has happened to us and keep reliving it.

**Ask:** Can anyone think of why forgiveness could improve our happiness and help to prevent the stain lasting forever?

*Hold the glass over a bowl and keep pouring clean water into it from the jug so that it pushes the coloured water out.*

Explain that forgiveness is often seen as the solution to the powerful feelings and negative emotions we can experience when we are hurt. When we forgive there is less space for anger, hatred and hurt in our lives. Forgiveness helps to clear the negativity away. It is an important aspect in many of the world's religions, but it is also widely accepted by doctors, psychologists, counsellors and even victims of serious crimes, as a way out of the pain that we can feel.

## Question Cards

Place Question Cards face down on a table. The idea is that anyone can choose any card and pose the question to the group or answer it themselves. You can also put them in a pile and invite someone to take one off the top or fan them out and invite someone to pick a card.

Questions:

1. Should forgiveness be limited? Should you forgive someone again and again?
2. Why forgive?
3. Is forgiveness easy?
4. Is forgiveness letting people off the hook?
5. What is your definition of forgiveness?
6. What words do you associate with the word forgiveness?
7. Is there anything that should never be forgiven?
8. Is revenge a good thing?
9. What do you do when someone won't forgive you?

10. What are the steps to forgiving someone?
11. Forgiveness is a common aspect in many religious faiths, why do you think this is?
12. What is the most inspiring story you know about forgiveness?
13. What would your advice be to someone who has been hurt by someone else?
14. What should you do if you have offended or hurt someone?
15. If someone does wrong, should they be punished?
16. Should we feel compassion for people who have hurt us?

**The point:** To explore and discuss their thoughts and insights around the theme of forgiveness using the Question Cards.

### TAKEAWAY

### EXTRA INFORMATION

Clear cups  
Jugs of water  
Food Colouring  
Masking tape  
String  
Counters  
Questions Cards