

Session 5

Practising Forgiveness



Compact



35 mins



In-depth



60 mins



Custom



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Session overview



Intro

Summary of what this session is about

p4

5 mins



Holding on

Short activity symbolising forgiveness

p4

2 mins

[Letting go](#)



Film

Young people's perspectives on forgiveness

p5

5-10 mins



Bible story

Jesus and Peter on the beach (John 21:1-19)

p5

10-20 mins



Bible story

The prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32)

p7

10-20 mins



Bible verse

Ephesians 4:32

p8

5-10 mins



Stepping into the Bible story

Audio reflection on the story of Jesus and Peter on the beach

p9

10-20 mins



Letting go

Short activity symbolising forgiveness

p11

5 mins

[Holding on](#)



Myth-busting

What forgiveness is and isn't





p12

5-10 mins



or



	Would you forgive? (films) Use film clips to discuss when to forgive	p14	10-20 mins
	Would you forgive? (scenarios) Use scenarios to discuss when to forgive	p15	10-20 mins
	Vision board Reflect on this session	p18	5-10 mins
	Prayer and reflection Reflect on the learning and habits	p19	5 mins

	✓ or ✓	
✓	✓	
✓	✓	

Session summary:

Key learning

God invites us to discover the power of forgiveness, which is both complex and transformational

Application

Recognise a hurt and try to see if a better relationship is possible

Habits focus

Be present by recognising hurt. Reimagine the possibilities of relationship where forgiveness is lived out

Before the session

You will need:

- Paper clip/pebble/paper
[Optional – if you do **Holding on** and **Letting go** activities]
- A sign saying 'Would' and a sign saying 'Wouldn't'
[Optional – if you do **Would you forgive?** activity]
- Your group's vision board

- A clip from a film or TV show about forgiveness, a screen and speaker to show the clip(s) if you do the **Would you forgive?** (films) activity. Some possible clips include:
 - **Spider-Man and the Sandman, Spider-Man 3 (2007)** – the Sandman had killed Peter Parker’s uncle; Peter discovers the reason why and forgives him.
 - **Thomas and Peter Rabbit apologise to Bea, Peter Rabbit (2018)** – Bea blames Thomas for blowing up the rabbit burrow, but it turns out Peter was the one who pressed the button.
 - **Shrek and Donkey, Shrek (2001)** – Donkey and Shrek both feel badly treated by one another, but they have an important truth-revealing conversation which helps to heal their relationship.

For links to these, scan the QR code. →



Set up your room:

- Put the signs saying ‘would’ and ‘wouldn’t’ in different areas of the room – the young people will move between them.

i Important: Exploring the idea of forgiveness can be profound and valuable but it also has the potential to draw out reminders of painful experiences. Therefore, it is important to approach this topic with sensitivity. Participants may have experienced significant trauma and it is important that the session feels as safe as possible for everyone. Your role is not to tell anyone that they should forgive a particular person or a particular situation. No-one should feel compelled to forgive — suggesting that we should forgive someone who has harmed us can be traumatic in itself. The activity exploring what forgiveness is not is particularly important here. It may be helpful to focus on ‘small forgiveness’ (the forgiveness of minor wrongs) as a way of understanding the value and benefits of forgiving.


Be prepared in case the session draws out painful emotions. The young people need to know that they can take a break if they need to. If a young person discloses anything which raises a safeguarding concern it is vital that you respond to this in accordance with your church/organisation’s safeguarding policy.

Note: *If you are doing compact sessions of around 35 minutes, consider running two sessions focusing on Practising Forgiveness, as this will allow your group to explore the theme in more depth.*

Intro

 00:00

 5 mins

 Slide 1

Aim of the session

This session is called **Practising Forgiveness**.

In this session we are going to:


- Explore the idea of forgiveness – what it is and what it is not.
- Recognise the complexity of forgiveness.
- Practise reimagining by seeing how our relationships can be transformed by forgiveness.



Recap

Recap the previous session and remind the group of the three habits of being curious, being present, and reimagining.

Ask your group what they remember from the previous session and if they have any examples of actions or stories from the past week.

 Slide 2




Activity Holding on

 2 mins

A simple activity illustrating the power of forgiveness
(This activity links to the **Letting go** activity later in this session)

- Ask each person to find a small object that they can hold easily in one hand (e.g. paper clip, piece of scrunched-up paper).
- Challenge them to hold on to this for as long as they can while you continue with the rest of the session. (Explain that the point of this will become clear later on!)

 Slide 3



Film

 5-10 mins

Discuss: What do we learn about forgiveness in this film?

You might like to draw out examples of the following: recognising a hurt; saying sorry; finding hope.

Choose either Option 1, Option 2 or Option 3

Option 1



Bible story

 10-20 mins

Jesus and Peter on the beach (John 21:1-19)

Read the Bible story with your group. (You may like to invite the young people to take on the roles of Jesus and Peter.) It is important you give them the context that this is the first recorded meeting between Peter and Jesus since Peter pretended (three times) not to know Jesus, just before Jesus' death.

Note: If you choose this Bible story, there's an additional reflective activity you can do on p104.

Questions for discussion:

- How do you think Peter felt at the start of the story?
- Have you ever felt like Peter?
- Where do you see forgiveness in the story?
- How does Jesus give Peter a new perspective and a new way forward?



Key learning

Please highlight the points below:

- Peter takes a courageous step in moving towards Jesus.
- Jesus forgives Peter but goes one step further – he trusts him and invites Peter to take on the task of leading the Church. It can take time to rebuild trust and may not happen immediately.
- Jesus' and Peter's conversation is not easy – forgiveness can be complicated and messy.
- Jesus gives Peter the opportunity to have a future which is not determined by his past mistakes – this is an example of reimagining.
- Also draw on the **Key learning** from the Bible verse on p103.

Option 2



Bible story

🕒 10-20 mins

The prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32)

Read the retelling of a parable told by Jesus to group on p133.

(Young people could take on the roles of the father and sons.)



Questions for discussion:

- Where do you see forgiveness in the story?
- Which character do you find it easiest to understand or identify with?
- We don't know if the older brother forgave his younger brother in the end or not. What do you think would have made it easier for him to forgive and make a fresh start with his brother?



Key learning

Please highlight the points below:

- When the younger son decided to seek his father's forgiveness, this meant changing direction and stopping the behaviour that was hurting others.
- The father's decision to forgive was a free choice, not under pressure.
- The older son names the hurt that he is feeling and has an honest conversation with his father. This is an important part of being present.
- We may identify with different characters at different times. Sometimes hurts are done to us – sometimes we hurt others. Recognising this can stop us judging others unfairly.
- Also draw on the **Key learning** from the Bible verse on p103.

Option 3



Bible verse Ephesians 4:32

🕒 5-10 mins

Share the verse:

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” (NIV)



Questions for discussion:

- Is forgiveness important in friendships? Why/why not?
- What do you think about the idea that God forgives? What does that mean?



Key learning

Please highlight the points below:

- God is kind and compassionate and forgives us – we are invited to respond by forgiving others.
- Being kind does not mean pretending nothing has happened – it is good to recognise a hurt has been done to us.
- Forgiving others – doing good to them – doesn't mean trust is restored but it does mean the cycle of hurt can stop. It may take time to rebuild trust.
- Sometimes we are the ones who are asked to forgive – sometimes others are asked to forgive us and it is for us to say sorry. Recognising this can stop us judging others unfairly.



Additional activity

🕒 10-20 mins

Stepping into the Bible story

An opportunity to reflect on forgiveness prayerfully through our imaginations

Start here



Note: This activity will work best if you read the story of Jesus and Peter on the beach earlier in this session.

1

Tell your group that this activity is about 'stepping into' the story of Jesus and Peter on the beach.

2

Using the QR code, play your group this audio which is a reflection on the Bible story of Jesus and Peter on the beach.



Scan here! →

3

Read the following questions, giving the young people time to think silently about their answers (they may also like to write or draw):

- How do you feel as you move through the water towards Jesus?
- What does it mean for you to eat breakfast with Jesus on this beach?
- How do you know that Jesus has forgiven you?
- How does this moment change the way you see yourself? What about the way you see your relationship with Jesus? What about the way you see your relationship with others when they let you down?

4

After allowing time for silent reflection, bring the group back together and chat about these questions:

- What surprised or struck you as you reflected on this story and thought about the questions?
- What did forgiveness mean here? Are there any words or phrases that came to mind as you thought about the story and about how you felt?



Key learning

Please highlight the points below:

- Forgiveness is not easy – whether we are forgiving or being forgiven.
- Sometimes the most we can do is pray and ask God to help us want to forgive someone who has hurt us.
- When forgiveness is possible, it can have great power to heal and release us, opening up new possibilities.



Activity Letting go

 5 mins

(This activity links to the **Holding on** activity earlier in the session)

- Ask young people if they are still holding on to the object they started holding at the beginning of the session.
- **Ask:** If you have already let go of the object, why is that?
- Invite those who haven't yet done so to let go of the object.
- **Ask:** What does it feel like to let go of this object?



Key learning

Please highlight the point below:

- Choosing to let go of hurt and resentment is not just a gift to the other person – it can be liberating and a release for you too.



Activity

Myth-busting

🕒 5-10 mins

Explore what forgiveness is and is not

Start here



- 1 Challenge your group to come up with a definition of 'forgive' together.
Now look up 'forgive' in a dictionary.

- 2 **Discuss:**
 - Which is a better description - the one we came up with or the one in the dictionary?
 - If that's what forgiveness is, what is forgiveness *not*?

- 3 **Optional extension of this activity:**

Tell the young people:

Archbishop Desmond Tutu was a South African priest and activist and his daughter Mpho Tutu is also a South African priest and activist. They wrote a book together exploring forgiveness. In that book, they explain that there are five things that forgiveness is not.

- 4 Using the slides, show your group the sentences (also included below), which have the underlined words missing.

5

The young people get into teams to complete the sentences — the fastest team wins!

- Forgiveness is not [**easy**], it takes [**hard work**] and [**determination**].
- Forgiveness is not [**weakness**], it takes [**courage**] and [**strength**].
- Forgiveness is not the same as [**letting someone off a punishment**], but it does mean not seeking [**revenge**].
- Forgiveness is not [**forgetting**]. We can only [**let go**] of the past if we bravely [**remember**] it.
- Forgiveness is not [**quick**], it can take [**a long time**].

6

Talk through the answers together, with an opportunity to discuss the group's responses.



Key learning

Please highlight the points below:

- Sometimes there is a misconception that forgiveness is about brushing hurt under the carpet – it is the opposite. Forgiveness involves naming the hurt.
- Forgiveness is not the easy option but it can transform our relationships.
- Forgiveness is an important part of our everyday relationships – so that the hurt from the past can be addressed and we can see if a better future for the relationship is possible.

Choose either Option 1 or Option 2

Option 1



Activity

🕒 10-20 mins

Would you forgive? (films)

Think through situations when we feel forgiveness is or is not appropriate

Start here



Before the session:

- Find one or two clips from movies or TV shows on forgiveness (examples on p98).
- Put up signs saying 'Would' and 'Wouldn't' in two different areas of the room.

1

Play the video clip (explaining the context of the clip first).

2

- Invite the group to imagine that they are in the shoes of the person being asked to forgive.
- Ask participants to move to the appropriate sign that reflects whether they would or would not forgive.
- Ask a couple of people for feedback on why they chose that position

3

Once they have finished, open up a group discussion. You might want to draw out some of the following themes:

- Does forgiveness require an apology?
- What if the person who has hurt us is not sorry, or unwilling to apologise?
- What if someone in a position of responsibility isn't willing to say sorry?
- What makes it difficult to say sorry?
- Are there times we should forgive?



Key learning

Please highlight the points below:

- We've seen how forgiveness is presented in a film – this can be oversimplified, unrealistically quick and not representative of the way things are.
- Forgiveness is complex – we will not all respond in the same way to the same situations.
- Saying sorry and forgiving is an important part of our everyday relationships and friendships.
- Making amends for hurt caused can help trust to be restored.
- Forgiveness doesn't always mean maintaining proximity with the person who has hurt us.

Option 2

An alternative to the film clip activity



Activity

Would you forgive? (scenarios)

Think through situations when we feel forgiveness is or is not appropriate

🕒 10-20 mins

Start here



1

Read out each of the scenarios on the slides to your group (also included below).

- A good friend accidentally breaks something that belongs to you. The thing they broke was really special to you and your friend is very sorry.
- Someone you don't know very well at school loses their temper with you; they are not sorry. Later you find out that a member of their family is unwell.
- Your boyfriend/girlfriend was seen holding hands with someone else. He/she denied it at first but has now said sorry.
- Your two-year-old younger brother was sick on your favourite shirt – it is stained and ruined.
- You and your best friend have fallen out. You have both done things wrong but neither wants to say sorry first.
- You are very badly injured in a car accident. The driver whose fault it was died in the accident.
- Your house is broken into, and a lot of your possessions are stolen. The burglars are never caught.
- In an important cup match someone on your team commits a foul. The other team get a penalty and your team loses.
- A family member has a big birthday coming up. You had planned to get them a present, but you carelessly spent all your money on yourself. Now you feel really guilty.

2

Ask the young people to share aloud - or note down – if they would or would not forgive, with an explanation for why/why not.

3

Once they have finished, take some examples and discussion. You might want to draw out some of the following themes:

- Does forgiveness require an apology?
- What if the person who has harmed us is not sorry?
- What if someone in a position of responsibility isn't willing to say sorry?
- What if they are unable or unwilling to apologise?
- Are there times we should forgive?



Key learning

Please highlight the points below:

- Forgiveness is complex – we will not all respond in the same way to the same situations.
- Saying sorry and forgiving is an important part of our everyday relationships and friendships.
- Making amends for hurt caused can help trust to be restored.
- Forgiveness doesn't always mean maintaining proximity with the person who has hurt us.



Vision board

 5-10 mins

1. Ask your group to write the definition of 'forgive' that they came up with on the vision board.
2. Reflect silently:
 - Is there anyone that you would like to say sorry to?
 - Is there anyone that you would like to forgive?
3. Remind your group how to access support if anyone is finding any of this difficult and would like to talk further about forgiveness.
4. If you haven't used it earlier, you might like to share the following quotation from Archbishop Desmond and Rev Mpho Tutu:

Forgiveness is not easy, it takes hard work and determination.

Forgiveness is not weakness, it takes courage and strength.

Forgiveness is not the same as letting someone off a punishment, but it does mean not seeking revenge.

Forgiveness is not forgetting. We can only let go of the past if we bravely remember it.

Forgiveness is not quick, it can take a long time.



Top takeaway

Ask your group (to write down or say aloud):

What is something you want to remember from this session?

(Give them a minute to reflect before answering.)



Prayer and reflection

Please use this as a prayer or guide for reflection:

Loving God, fill us with your Spirit now. We thank you that you love and forgive everybody.

We think about the stories we have heard about forgiveness.

Help us to **be curious** about others' stories – listening as often as we speak.

We think about what we have learnt about recognising a hurt.

Give us the courage to **be present** – showing up and sticking around.

We think about the things we have learnt about forgiving and seeking forgiveness.

Inspire us to **reimagine** what's possible – finding hope, knowing that you can transform all things.

In Jesus' name. Amen

End of session 5

Notes