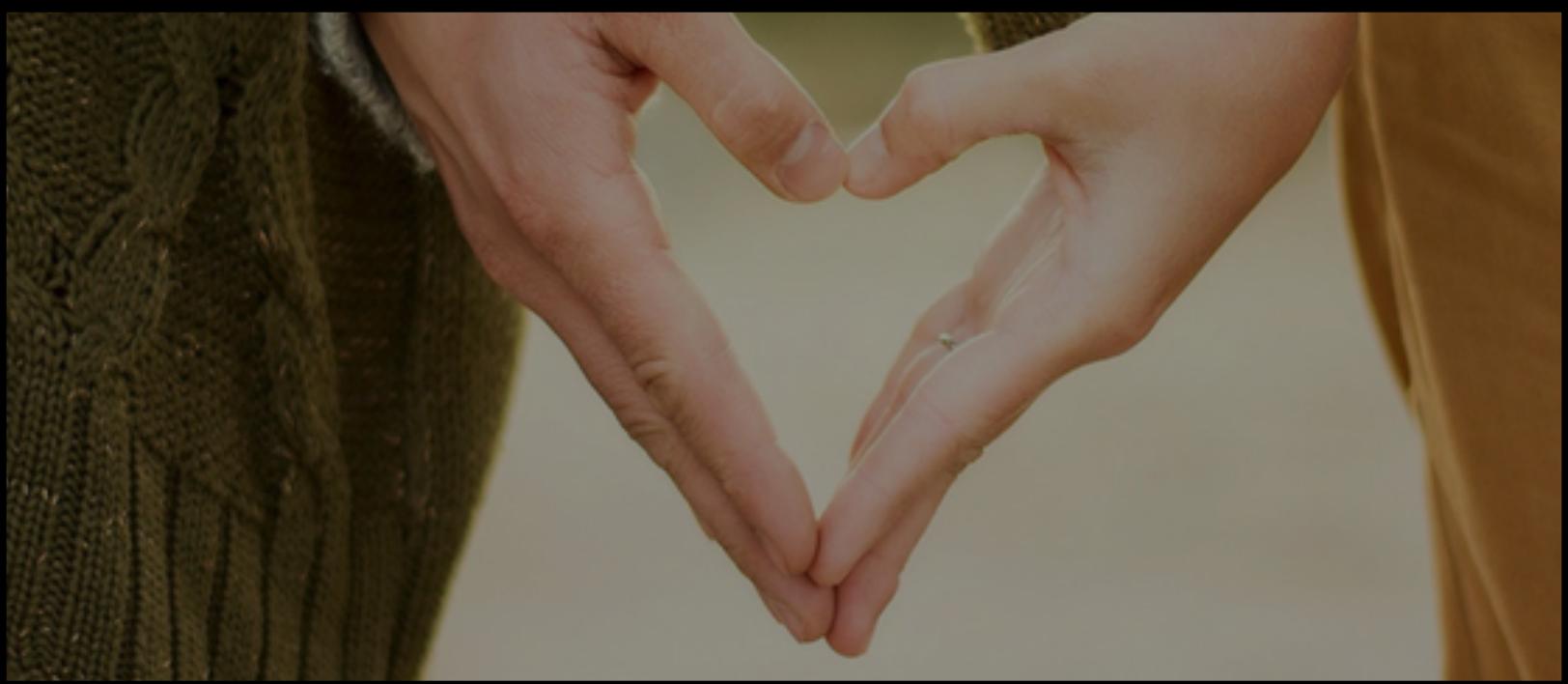




WEEK 1: THE CALL TO FORGIVE

For the week of February 3, 2019

This guide and all original content was developed by Rev. Chris Heckert and Rev. Christina Lelache. Other sources and references are cited throughout the guide and are the works of those individuals.



Purpose

The purpose of the Forgiveness series is to center our hearts, minds, and actions on one of the central themes of Jesus' life and teachings: forgiving others without exception, whether it is easy or difficult, they are deserving or undeserving, or they apologize or not. This session introduces Jesus' call to forgive without limitations. We will explore the importance of and need for forgiveness, both as givers and receivers, in our own spiritual lives and how we can support one another in the journey of forgiveness.



Share the following introduction with your group:

Welcome to Connect Groups at Haddonfield UMC! Our Connect Groups are designed to give each of us the opportunity for friendship, support, and accountability as we seek to live out our faith. We encourage you to find one group and stick with that group, rather than attending multiple groups. Connecting with one group will enable each participant to journey deeper. Readings and questions will provide an opportunity to reflect on our faith and how we live it out. You are encouraged to share as much as you are willing as we seek to support one another in our faith journey. Our prayer is that this time together is a blessing to you and your group!

Welcome your group. Light a candle to begin your time together. Take a moment for silent reflection (up to one minute), then invite someone in the group to open with this prayer:

"Oh God, thank you for forgiving each one of us for moments when we do what we should not, or for moments when we fail to do what we should. Help us to forgive those who have harmed us, betrayed us, and disappointed us. Here in this space, may we lay down our burdens of anger and resentment and walk together this journey of forgiveness which Jesus has modeled for us. Amen."

Go around your group and share your responses to the following conversation starter:

Share one of your favorite stories of forgiveness or redemption, as found in history, movies, or literature.





Inward

As we begin this four-week journey around forgiveness, in order to ground conversation in real-life situations, please take a moment for your group to reflect and engage in the following activity:

Have each person take a moment and silently write the name of one or more people for whom forgiveness has been an issue, either currently or in the past. What has made forgiveness difficult in this situation?

Do not invite people to share the names they have written. These names are to be kept private and are for each individual's reflection as we move through this series.

After giving space for the group to engage in this reflective activity, offer a brief prayer and then proceed with reading the gospel text.



Invite someone to read Matthew 18:21-22 aloud:

Matthew 18:21-22

²¹Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" ²²Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times."

Note that in verse 21, the word translated as "church" comes from the Greek *adelphos*, which has a broader meaning of brotherhood. Peter may be referring to the group of disciples or also to the broader Israelite community. Our understanding of church today would not have been what Peter had in mind when approaching Jesus. This conversation is grounded in the understanding of relationships between people, whether they be religious, civic, or familial.

In response to the scripture you read as a group, use these questions to reflect upon what the text is saying:

1. Why do you think Peter asks Jesus the question about how often he should forgive?



2. See if your group can put together consensus or a definition of what does it mean to truly forgive someone.
3. What are some of the things that cause us to want to limit the number of times or ways that we forgive others?

Invite someone to read Matthew 18:23-35 aloud:

Matthew 18:23-35

²³“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶So the slave



fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.'²⁷ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt.²⁸ But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.'²⁹ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.'³⁰ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt.³¹ When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place.³² Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.³³ Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?'³⁴ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt.³⁵ So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."



In response to the scripture you read as a group, use these questions to reflect upon what the text is saying:

4. Why do you think it was such a big deal to the person who had originally been forgiven to seek out retribution so swiftly and harshly from someone who owed him less than he had been forgiven?
5. What point is Jesus trying to make of the connection between our ability to be forgiven and our willingness to forgive?





Outward

Read the following excerpt from the article, "Forgiveness: Letting Go of Grudges and Bitterness":

What are the benefits of forgiving someone?

Letting go of grudges and bitterness can make way for improved health and peace of mind. Forgiveness can lead to:

- Healthier relationships
- Improved mental health
- Less anxiety, stress and hostility
- Lower blood pressure
- Fewer symptoms of depression
- A stronger immune system
- Improved heart health
- Improved self-esteem



What are the effects of holding a grudge?

If you're unforgiving, you might:

- Bring anger and bitterness into every relationship and new experience
- Become so wrapped up in the wrong that you can't enjoy the present
- Become depressed or anxious
- Feel that your life lacks meaning or purpose, or that you're at odds with your spiritual beliefs
- Lose valuable and enriching connectedness with others

Mayo Clinic Staff, "Forgiveness: Letting Go of Grudges and Bitterness." <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/forgiveness/art-20047692>

In response to the article, use these questions to reflect upon what the text is saying:



1. People often think of forgiveness as a spiritual issue, so why do you think the Mayo Clinic (and other international health organizations) devote a section of their website to forgiveness?
2. Have you ever seen, with yourself or someone else, either the negative or positive physical attributes of forgiveness or bearing a grudge?

Read the following excerpt from the article, "Why We Forgive," written by Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu:

"Why We Forgive" by Desmond Tutu & Mpho Tutu

"Is the injury new, or is it an old unhealed wound? Know that what was done to you was wrong, unfair, and undeserved. You are



right to be outraged. And it is perfectly normal to want to hurt back when you have been hurt. But hurting back rarely satisfies. We think it will, but it doesn't. If I slap you after you slap me, it does not lessen the sting I feel on my own face, nor does it diminish my sadness as to the fact you have struck me. Retaliation gives, at best, only momentary respite from our pain. The only way to experience healing and peace is to forgive. Until we can forgive, we remain locked in our pain and locked out of the possibility of experiencing healing and freedom, locked out of the possibility of being at peace.

Without forgiveness, we remain tethered to the person who harmed us. We are bound with chains of bitterness, tied together, trapped. Until we can forgive the person who harmed us, that person will hold the keys to our happiness; that person will be our jailor. When we forgive, we take back control of our own fate and our feelings. We become our own liberators. We don't



forgive to help the other person. We don't forgive for others. We forgive for ourselves."

To read the full article, follow this link: <https://spiritualityhealth.com/articles/2014/02/17/why-we-forgive#>

In response to the article, use these questions to reflect upon what the article is saying:

3. According to Desmond and Mpho Tutu, what is the primary reason we forgive?
4. What do they warn is the downside if we are unable to grant forgiveness?





Onward

1. Is there a particular situation in which you can use the prayers and support of the group as we journey together through forgiveness?
2. In light of this discussion, what does forgiveness look like to you this week?

Close your time together in prayer. Take some time to share prayer requests by asking the following question, then invite someone to close in prayer.

How can we be in prayer for each other?





WEEK 2: HOW DO I FORGIVE?

For the week of February 10, 2019

This guide and all original content was developed by Rev. Chris Heckert and Rev. Christina Lelache. Other sources and references are cited throughout the guide and are the works of those individuals.



Purpose

The purpose of this session is to move beyond the ideal of forgiveness and explore the practical application of letting hurt go and granting forgiveness to those who have hurt us. We will explore the obstacles to forgiving and weigh the personal costs of not letting go. This session will draw from *The Book of Forgiving*, which offers a fourfold path to forgiving in the spirit of Jesus Christ.



Share the following introduction with your group:

Welcome to Connect Groups at Haddonfield UMC! Our Connect Groups are designed to give each of us the opportunity for friendship, support, and accountability as we seek to live out our faith. We encourage you to find one group and stick with that group, rather than attending multiple groups. Connecting with one group will enable each participant to journey deeper. Readings and questions will provide an opportunity to reflect on our faith and how we live it out. You are encouraged to share as much as you are willing as we seek to support one another in our faith journey. Our prayer is that this time together is a blessing to you and your group!

Welcome your group. Light a candle to begin your time together. Take a moment for silent reflection (up to one minute), then invite someone in the group to open with this prayer:

"Lord, thank you for the gift of each person here. Help us to break the cycle of hurt and roundedness by practicing forgiveness. Give us courage to name our hurt, to offer it up to you, and to let it go. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen."

Have people read this quote by Richard Rohr:

If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly transmit it. — Richard Rohr



Go around your group and share your responses to the following conversation starter:

Share where you have seen, throughout history, movies, literature, the cycle of violence, hurt, and revenge repeated over and over again.





Inward

Invite someone to read Matthew 6:9-15 aloud:

Matthew 6:9-15

⁹Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us this day our daily bread. ¹²And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. ¹⁴For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; ¹⁵but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.



In response to the scripture you read as a group, use these questions to reflect upon what the text is saying:

1. Why do you think Jesus ties the clause, "as we forgive those who sin against us," with the request for God to forgive our sins in the Lord's Prayer? (v. 12)
2. If we tie the sense of our being forgiven to our willingness to forgive others, do you think it affects your ability to grant forgiveness to others?
3. Can you think of a time in which empathy from experience has made it easier or more possible to forgive someone who hurt you?



Invite someone to read aloud Isaiah 43:25-26:

Isaiah 43:25-26

²⁵ I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins. ²⁶ Accuse me, let us go to trial; set forth your case, so that you may be proved right.

In the book of Isaiah, God speaks through the prophet to the people of Israel who were unfaithful to God and their own people, to disastrous effect. Despite that, God speaks words of forgiveness, offering a renewed relationship so that the nation could rebuild itself on justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

In response to the scripture you read as a group, use these questions to reflect upon what the text is saying:

4. Why do you think God continues to offer people forgiveness?
5. Do you find the concept of God's forgiveness easy to receive or difficult to fathom?





Outward

Read the following excerpts and the chart, adapted from *The Book of Forgiving*, by Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu:

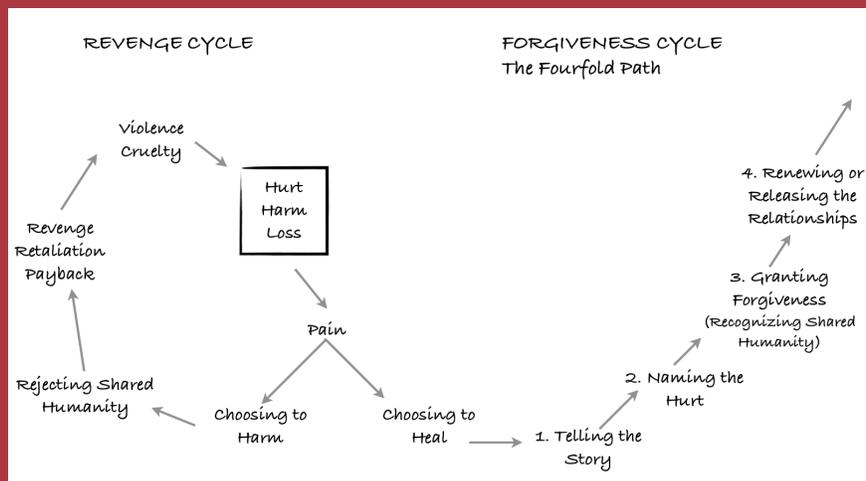
“Inevitably, because we are fragile and vulnerable creatures, we experience some hurt, harm, or loss. The wound can be physical, emotional, or psychosocial. We can be hurt with a weapon or a word.”

“Now comes the moment of choice, although for most of us our reactions are so habitual we don’t even realize we have a choice. What so often happens is that we step unawares into the Revenge Cycle. The affront is so painful, so intolerable, that we cannot accept it, and instead of placing our hands on our hearts and weeping for what we have lost, we point our fingers or shake our fists at the one who has harmed us. Instead of embracing our sadness, we stoke our anger. We feel compelled to restore our dignity by rejecting our pain and denying our grief.



That rejection places us in the closed loop of the Revenge Cycle.”

“While revenge may be a natural impulse, we do not have to follow its siren call. There is another way, which we call the Forgiveness Cycle.”



Desdmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu, *The Book of Forgiving*, pg 49-51



In response to these excerpts, use these questions to reflect upon what the text is saying:

1. Where have you seen the revenge cycle kept in perpetual motion, either in your own life or in the lives of others?
2. Where have you seen the revenge cycle broken through a choice to forgive, either in your own life or in the lives of others?
3. What is the first big step to breaking the cycle?





Onward

1. Reflect and share, if you are comfortable, where there is a need for you to practice the "Fourfold Path of Forgiveness." How can we support one another in the journey of forgiveness this week?
2. In light of this discussion, what does forgiveness look like to you this week?

Close your time together in prayer. Take some time to share prayer requests by asking the following question, then invite someone to close in prayer.

How can we be in prayer for each other?





WEEK 3: ONE STEP AT A TIME

For the week of February 17, 2019

This guide and all original content was developed by Rev. Chris Heckert and Rev. Christina Lelache. Other sources and references are cited throughout the guide and are the works of those individuals.



Purpose

This session will focus on the deeper hurts in our lives for which forgiveness is extremely hard and requires a staged process. Again, drawing from *The Book of Forgiving*, we will look at the “Fourfold Path of Forgiveness” and what each step can look like when practiced in our lives.



Share the following introduction with your group:

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Welcome your group. Light a candle to begin your time together. Take a moment for silent reflection (up to one minute), then invite someone in the group to open with this prayer:

"Thank you, God, for loving us just as we are and for forgiving us when we cause harm to You, ourselves, and others. Give us strength to name the hurts in our lives to forgive, even when it seems impossible. Bless our time together. Amen."

Go around your group and share your responses to the following conversation starter:

Where have you seen people break negative cycles by adopting new, positive habits?





Inward

Invite someone to read John 8:2-11 aloud:

John 8:2-11

²Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. ³The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, ⁴they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. ⁵Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."



⁸And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹When they heard it, they went away, one by one beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

In response to the scripture you read as a group, use these questions to reflect upon what the text is saying:

1. Why do you think the religious leaders brought the woman to Jesus in such a public way?
2. Were they justified in their desire to follow the law of Moses, which required her execution?



3. Why do you think everyone walked away in the end?
4. What does this passage have to teach us about the act of forgiveness?





Outward

Often, forgiveness is a choice to be granted. Once a person decides to forgive, they can move on. However, many times, according to the depth of the wound and pain caused by particular actions, forgiveness is more of a practice than an event, and requires stages for it to be authentic, enduring, and make way for real healing to happen.

In *The Book of Forgiving*, Desmond and Mpho Tutu lay out what they call the “Fourfold Path of Forgiveness.” These steps were incorporated in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was an integral part in South Africa’s healing after the end of apartheid in 1994. (Read more here: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth_and_Reconciliation_Commission_\(South_Africa\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth_and_Reconciliation_Commission_(South_Africa))).

Read the steps below:

Telling the Story

“We invite you to lay down your sorrows and trust that nothing will be asked of you that you are not able to give. Forgiving is always worthwhile in the end. To get to that end, we must make a beginning, a first step. The first step will be telling your truth. We begin by Telling the Story.



"But first, let us pause to listen to what the heart hears.

*You have stood at this junction before
You will stand at this junction again
And if you pause you can ask yourself
Which way to turn
You can turn away from your sadness
And run the race named revenge
You will run that tired track again and again
Or you can admit your own pain
And walk the path that ends
In this direction lies freedom, my friend
I can show you where hope and wholeness make their
homes
But you can't push past your anguish on your way
there
To find the path to peace
You will have to meet your pain
And speak its name."*

*Desmond and Mpho Tutu, *The Book of Forgiving*, page 59-60*



Use these questions to reflect on the step "Telling the Story":

1. What are the ways we can be imprisoned by our wounds?
2. Is it shame, isolation, and the fear of being judged that causes us to keep silent and to bear our grief alone?
3. What keeps you from sharing your story?

By telling the story, we can find release of the pain and newfound freedom, but sometimes it takes great courage and strength to tell the story of emotional, physical, or spiritual injury.

4. How can telling the story of being wounded be a freeing act?
5. How can telling the story bring us one step closer to forgiving?



Naming the Hurt

“Often it can seem easier or safer to simply dismiss a hurt, stuff it down, push it away, pretend it didn’t happen, or rationalize it, telling ourselves we really shouldn’t feel the way we do. But a hurt is a hurt. A loss is a loss. And a harm felt but denied will always find a way to express itself.”

Desmond and Mpho Tutu, *The Book of Forgiving*,
page 96

Like telling the story, naming the way we have experienced hurt is an important step along the way of released pain.

6. How have you seen or experienced naming hurt as a useful step in the practice of forgiveness?



Granting Forgiveness

“After we tell our stories and name our hurts, the next step is to grant forgiveness. Sometimes this choice happens quickly and sometimes it happens slowly, but inevitably it is how we move forward along the Fourfold Path.”

Desmond and Mpho Tutu, *The Book of Forgiving*,
page 121

Choosing to forgive is sometimes an event, but more likely, depending on the nature of the wound, a practice that has to be repeated and a choice that has to be made over and over

7. How do you know when you have been able to fully forgive someone?



Renewing or Releasing

“What does it mean to to renew or release a relationship? You might think you are not in a relationship with the stranger who assaulted you or the person in prison who killed your loved one or the cheating spouse you divorced so many years ago, but a relationship is created and maintained by the very act of harm that stands between you. This relationship, like every relationship that calls for forgiveness, must be either renewed or released. When your spouse says, for example, ‘I’m sorry for yelling at you,’ you may forgive and continue on in the marriage, renewing the relationship.



When a boyfriend or girlfriend says, 'I'm sorry for betraying your trust,' you may forgive but choose not to see that person again, instead releasing the relationship."

Desmond and Mpho Tutu, *The Book of Forgiving*,
page 147

Use these questions to reflect on the step "Renewing or Releasing":

8. How do you discern whether to renew or release a relationship?
9. If you decide to renew, how do you make that commitment, and what is involved?





Onward

1. Create a space for support & care — prayer exercise, etc.
2. In light of this discussion, what does forgiveness look like to you this week?

Close your time together in prayer. Take some time to share prayer requests by asking the following question, then invite someone to close in prayer.

How can we be in prayer for each other?





WEEK 4: DETOX



For the week of February 24, 2019

This guide and all original content was developed by Rev. Chris Heckert and Rev. Christina Lelache. Other sources and references are cited throughout the guide and are the works of those individuals.



Purpose

The purpose of this session is to focus on ridding ourselves of any residual anger, bitterness, or resentment that can linger, even after offering initial forgiveness. We will explore how forgiveness often has to be revisited over and over again, and is more of a practice than a one-time event.



Share the following introduction with your group:

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Welcome your group. Light a candle to begin your time together. Take a moment for silent reflection (up to one minute), then invite someone in the group to open with this prayer:

"Thank you, God, for the gift of love, and especially for the gift of each person gathered here. As we seek to live lives of forgiveness, help us to lay down our resentment so that we may find freedom, joy, and peace. May we love as You love us, and may we forgive as You have forgiven us. Amen."

Go around your group and share your responses to the following conversation starter:

Share examples of a fragile peace (peace has been achieved, but tension remains), either between people, nations, or other relationships.





Inward

Invite someone to read Ephesians 4:31-32 aloud:

Ephesians 4:31-32

³¹Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice,
³²and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

In response to the scripture you read as a group, use these questions to reflect upon what the text is saying:

1. What does it look like to put away wrath, bitterness, and malice?
2. What practices in the Christian life or church community gives space for a rhythm of forgiveness, offering regular space for us to live with one another in the spirit of reconciliation?



3. What helps you in extending forgiveness when old wounds or memories of hurt resurface?

Invite someone to read Luke 23:32-34 aloud:

Luke 23:32-34

³²Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. ³³When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing.



In response to the scripture you read as a group, use these questions to reflect upon what the text is saying:

4. Why does Jesus say that they don't know what they are doing?

More often than not, when people do things that offend or hurt us, there is usually not malice directed toward us personally, but instead a disregard of how we might feel or the priority of the other individual's needs being met over ours. In this spirit, Jesus says, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do." He also insinuates that their intention had more.

Sometimes, the hurt we experience isn't directed at us personally, but comes through because people don't always think about what they are doing and the consequences or harm it can cause others.

The reality is that while sometimes forgiveness is an event that occurs and is completed, forgiveness often needs to be approached as a practice, repeated over and over again when triggers occur, lingering resentment creeps in, or memories flood our mind even after we think we have moved on.



5. Share a time when you were surprisingly ambushed by feelings of residual resentment or hurt after you thought forgiveness had been granted.
6. How does Jesus' example challenge and inspire us to depersonalize the harm and let go of personalized bitterness?





Outward

Read the following excerpt from the book, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, by Barbara Taylor Brown:

“According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV*, sometimes called “the psychiatrist’s Bible,” patients grieving the death of a loved one are allowed two months for symptoms such as sadness, insomnia, and loss of appetite. If their grief goes on longer than that, they may be diagnosed with depression and treated with prescription drugs. ‘Grief,’ Greenspan noticed, ‘perhaps the most inevitable of all human emotions, given the unalterable fact of mortality, is seen as an illness if it goes on too long.’ Her mother, a Holocaust survivor, had actively grieved for the first ten years of Greenspan’s life ‘Was this too long a grief for genocide?’ Greenspan wondered.

The wondering led her to explore the idea that emotions such as grief, fear, and despair have gained a reputation as the ‘dark emotions’ not because they



are noxious or abnormal but because Western culture keeps them shuttered in the dark with other shameful things like personal bankruptcy or sexual deviance. If you have ever spent time in the company of the dark emotions, you too may have received subtle messages from friends and strangers alike that you were supposed to handle them and move on sooner instead of later.”

Barbara Taylor Brown, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, pg. 77

Just like the loss of a loved one triggers a grief process, sometimes the feeling of betrayal or trauma inflicted by others engage a similar grief process that has a timing all of its own.

1. How can we give ourselves or others permission to let the grief process do its work in its own time, and not feel guilty for grieving the loss of trust or normalcy as it was known?





Onward

1. Thinking over the last four weeks, what is one thing that has strengthened or inspired you along your own journey of forgiveness?
2. How can we support one another moving forward in this journey together?
3. In light of this discussion, what does forgiveness look like to you this week?

Close your time together in prayer. Take some time to share prayer requests by asking the following question, then invite someone to close in prayer.

How can we be in prayer for each other?



As we conclude this series, we encourage you to keep a forgiveness journal, in which you name where you are in the process of forgiveness and offer a prayer each week, offering to God what you feel you need to bring forgiveness to completion.





Forgiveness Sermon Series

These materials were created by Rev. Chris Heckert and Rev. Christina Lelache of Haddonfield UMC.

Week 1: The Call to Forgive - Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came and said to him, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.'* Matthew 18:21-22

Sermon Reflection Questions:

- When have I been granted forgiveness for something I did, or didn't do, which opened up new possibilities for relationship?
- How can living a rhythm of forgiveness change the way deal with conflict and disappointment?
- What individual, or situation am I being called to forgive in this season of my life?

Call to worship

Come, all who are heavy laden, and God will give you rest.

Our burden is heavy and our load is great.

Lay down pain, anger, resentment and grudge and take up new freedom in Christ Jesus.

It is not easy to forget when we have been hurt by those we love or wronged by strangers.

The call to forgive is ongoing and the path of reconciliation comes through embracing the unconditional love of God.

We have come today to let go, to walk forward and experience something different, by loving as we have been loved and seeking to forgive as we have been forgiven. Let us worship the God of love together. Amen

Week 2: How Do I Forgive?- Matthew 6:9-15

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
Matthew 6:11-12

Sermon Reflection Questions:

- What are some of the obstacles that makes granting forgiveness difficult?
- What steps can I take to break the hurt/revenge cycle when I am hurt by others?
- Who do I need to forgive in this season of my life?

Call to Worship:

Come and settle into the rhythms of God's grace

Once we were lost, but now we are found

As we sing, pray, listen and respond, let us remember that nothing can cut us off from God's unconditional love

We can love because we have been loved, we can forgive because we have been forgiven



Let us worship the God of love together, living into new possibility where healing and wholeness take root.

Week 3: One Step at a Time- John 8:2-11

Jesus straightened up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, sir.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.'* John 8:10-11

Sermon Reflection Questions:

- Is there hurt in my life that I need to name, or share the story with someone else for the purpose of moving towards forgiveness?
- What stories of forgiveness have inspired me in the past that can serve as a model for how to lay down my own hurt?
- What might it look like for me to seek to renew a relationship with a person with whom I have had conflict? What is the first step toward renewing the relationship?

Call to Worship:

Just as the sun has risen anew this day, God's mercies are new each morning

We are ready to lay down the hurts of yesterday

Our weeping endures for the nighttime, but joy comes with the morning

We believe that healing is possible, but we need a greater strength that only comes from God

Behold, God makes all things new. Here in this place, we are made new by God's grace. Amen

Week 4: Detox - Ephesians 4:31-32, Luke 23:32-34

Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Ephesians 4:31-32

Sermon Reflection Questions:

- How have I seen resentment harm others, who can't let go of their own pain?
- What situations in my own life still bring about resentment when I think about them, or encounter individuals involved?
- How can an understanding of God's forgiveness help me let go of anger towards others?
- What spiritual practices can help me work through residual resentment, even when I feel I have already granted forgiveness?

Call to Worship:

Come, and lay down bitterness, resentment and hatred

The journey is long, so let's walk together in kindness and humility

Only God's perfect love can drive out all fear, and regret

We come just as we are, seeking a balm for broken hearts, and resolution to conflict

Let us worship God together, laying down the things that hold us back, so we may be made perfect in love. Amen

Mission and Resource Center

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