

Chapter 8

Relationship with Family & Close Friends: Forgiveness

Opening Question: When you think of forgiveness, what emotions come to your mind?

DEBRIEF

Have group members share how they did with last week's "Respond" step (Praying for non-Christian family or friends) and repeat the memory verse (1 Corinthians 3:6-7) as they arrive.

OPENING

Open with prayer for the Spirit to illuminate the group during the study.

Context: Our first few studies focused on relationship with God and then we turned to relationship with others. Last week we focused on how to sensitively yet boldly share Jesus and his love with others. This week we consider our closest relationships, those with family members and friends. It is in those relationships that we are most likely to be hurt and need to forgive, which is what we see in the story of Joseph.

Sold as a slave into a foreign country by his half brothers at seventeen, Joseph may have been deeply impacted by their treatment. He may have fought to forget his brothers and what happened. Later he experienced false accusation and imprisonment and more bad treatment when a friend forgot about him.

Our stories may not be as painful as Joseph's, or they may be more painful. However, we live in a fallen world where every aspect of humanity, including relationships, is impacted by sin and brokenness.

HEAR THE WORD

Context: Joseph's story

Of twelve sons, Joseph was his father's favorite, and his father made that clear to the family. This favoritism may have stemmed from the fact that his mother (Rachel) was loved by his father, unlike the mothers of his brothers (Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah). To

make matters worse, Joseph told his family about two dreams he had that portrayed his brothers and parents bowing down to him. Watch a short video about it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHzduqGyyt8>

Genesis 39: Joseph was bought by Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's (the Egyptian king's) officials. When Potiphar saw that the Lord was blessing all of Joseph's work, he entrusted everything to Joseph. Potiphar's wife tried to lure Joseph into a sexual affair. When he refused repeatedly, she falsely accused him of trying to rape her and he was imprisoned. Again, the Lord gave him favor, so that the prison overseer put him in charge of all the prisoners.

Genesis 40: Two prisoners assigned to Joseph, the wine taster and baker for Pharaoh, each had a dream no one could interpret except for Joseph. Just as the dreams predicted, the wine taster was restored to his position while the baker was executed. However, the wine taster forgot all about Joseph...

Genesis 41: ...until two years later, when Pharaoh had two dreams no one could interpret. Joseph was then invited to interpret these dreams: Egypt would have seven years of abundance, followed by seven years of famine. Joseph not only interpreted the dreams but recommended a plan. Pharaoh appointed Joseph to be in charge of the plan—to oversee a storage process during the harvest years in preparation for the famine years. During the famine, people from all over Egypt and around the world came to Joseph to buy food.

Genesis 42-44: Joseph's family also came to buy food. Joseph recognized his brothers but they did not recognize him. He tested them multiple times to see if they had changed.

Genesis 45-50:14: When Joseph could no longer hold back the truth from them, he revealed his identity to them, leading to a tearful reunion. He reassured them that God had sent him ahead to save lives. He invited his father's entire family to live in Egypt. Later, Jacob died in Egypt.

Genesis 50:15-21 (NIV)

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" ¹⁶ So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: ¹⁷ 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

¹⁸ His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. ²¹ So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

OBSERVE (What does the text say?)

1. Take turns reading the summaries of chapters 39-50:14 above. Are there any unfamiliar words? What stands out to you and what questions do you have?
2. Read Genesis 50:15-21 aloud, with different people playing and identifying with a character or group (Joseph, Joseph's brothers, narrator). If you were one of Joseph's brothers, how would you have felt? What might be going through your mind?

INTERPRET (What does the text mean?)

3. What does the early part of Joseph's story (Gen 39-50) reveal about human nature? How do people's sins impact themselves and others around them?
4. What does Joseph's life demonstrate about God? How might Joseph's words in Genesis 50:20 have helped to bring healing to family brokenness?

APPLY (What does the passage mean to me and my community?)

[Note: As you consider what to share in the group, aim to honor the people you share about as well as the people in your group. Watch out for the temptation to expose someone out of resentment.]

5. What aspects of Joseph's family story are especially meaningful to you as you consider your relationships with family and friends? What impact might your family patterns have had on you?
6. In Matthew 18: 21-35, Jesus told a story that shows that our ability to forgive is related to our awareness of God's forgiveness of us and our sense of his grace

(God's goodness to us despite our sin or indifference) and unconditional love.
How is grace viewed in the culture you grew up in?

RESPOND: Steps Of Forgiveness

1. Ask God, "Where do I need forgiveness?" For only yourself, write down some ways you've hurt or sinned against family members or friends. Share those sins with the Lord (not others) and pause to allow the Holy Spirit to assure you of God's grace and forgiveness.
2. Ask God, "Who do I need to forgive?" Write the first name(s) that come to mind. Choose one person (or group) to reflect on. Identify the ways you've been sinned against and the wounds you experienced. Facing the reality of what happened may feel shameful, scary, and even overwhelming. Press into your pain with Jesus.

[Note: "Facing reality" does not mean forcing ourselves to deal with something we're not ready to face. For some, especially those who've been through trauma or abuse, it may be critical to share the pain with your staff member, a mature Christian friend or a professional counselor rather than thinking it through by yourself.]

3. Ask God how He sees this person(s). Pray to remember good things about this person and ask for gratitude for him or her.
4. *Important Note on what forgiveness is not: First, it's not making excuses for someone or minimizing what has happened; when we do so, we deny everyone involved the opportunity of a reconciled and truthful relationship. Second, it is not the same as reconciliation, which requires two willing people. Forgiveness can be done on our own, even if the other person is unwilling to seek forgiveness and reconciliation or admit how they have hurt us. Third, it doesn't mean we trust automatically; while Jesus calls us to forgive as many times as needed, it takes time to rebuild trust. We may need to take steps to prevent the same hurts from being repeated until we have seen needed change in the other person. Forgiveness is mainly a choice not to repay or punish someone for the harm they've caused us and to not hold on to resentment toward them, which only hurts us. The ability to forgive is a gift God gives to help set us free.
5. A possible but not necessary step: Write a letter to this person(s). The letter is likely just for you. Ask God how he'd like you to address this hurt or conflict. Depending on your cultural background, it may or may not be appropriate, honoring, or effective to address the person who has hurt you directly. You may need to look for indirect ways

of handling the situation. God may give you a sense of peace and resolution without directly communicating with someone.

6. Forgiveness is a journey. As needed, repeat some of these steps at a later time. If your wounds are deep, expect a process rather than a one-time healing. Growth and forgiveness can be like a spiral—God may take us to the same area of hurt over and over but often at a deeper place. Notice how your feelings toward the person(s) change(s) over time.

Memory Verse: Genesis 55:20 (NIV)

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”

Memorize it in your heart language and English this week.

CLOSING

Sin and forgiveness are not easy issues in life. Said another way, they are spiritually deep, and the devil and his ilk will fight fiercely against our practicing forgiveness and being forgiven. Pray as a group for the courage and commitment it takes to acknowledge sin and seek forgiveness, and to forgive freely when we have been sinned against.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

At age nine, Eva Liu Glick emigrated from Hong Kong to a town in the US where there were few Asians—a life-changing, challenging, and beautiful experience that God has used for his glory. Learning a new language, adapting to a new culture, navigating family immigration dynamics, being in a cross-cultural marriage and being a mom are some of the ways God has shaped her for international student ministry. She hopes to set foot in as many places and experience as many different cultures as possible in her lifetime. She became a campus minister with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in 1997 and began working with international students in 2002. YeChan Park, a campus minister from South Korea ministering in Hammond, IN, commented on this chapter.

Facilitator's Notes

Objectives of the Study

To help participants...

- Recognize how our fallen nature leads to broken relationships that require forgiveness to be restored.
- Remember that all of us need to repent and receive God's grace for our own sins in relationships.
- Grow in awareness of God's healing work in our brokenness.
- Walk through practical steps of forgiveness.
- Embrace deep forgiveness as an ongoing journey.

Notes On The Questions

Question 1: If you feel that reading all the summaries will take too long, use the second video to continue the story through verse 41. Jesus is mentioned at the end of both videos, but Joseph clearly foreshadows Jesus, so it may be good for students to hear this.

 [Joseph Explains Dreams | Elementary | The Gospel Project](#)

Question 3: You might ask your group to define sin as they understand it using these chapters as examples, since sin is apparent. Without a biblical understanding of sin, forgiveness cannot be rightly practiced. Sin clouds our relationship with God, does injury to ourselves and others, and has a harmful effect on our community.

Question 4: God does not prevent us from sinning, but his purposes are not stopped by sin either. He knows what happens to Joseph and the family, but brings the opportunity for forgiveness and healing.

Question 6: You could ask your group members, "How deeply have you experienced that grace? If you have not yet known this grace, talking and praying with your staff member or a Christian friend might open up a path to it."

Notes on the Respond Step

1. Recognizing our own sin and how much God has forgiven us will aid our forgiveness of others.
2. Gratitude aids in forgiveness.

3. Student leaders, be sure to obtain the help of your staff worker, or other qualified helper if you are asked to help someone who has been deeply wounded and you are unsure of how to help. Perhaps you can suggest to the student that the two of you meet together with this person. Staff members may need to get help with this as well.