

TEACHER PREPARATION

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Most people have difficulty forgiving unless they've seen models of forgiveness or have experienced forgiveness themselves.
2. When we forgive others, we free ourselves to move forward toward our personal life goals.
3. We can forgive others who may have hurt us as a result of their misuse of drugs or alcohol or premarital sex.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. Explain the relationship between experiencing forgiveness and being able to forgive.
2. List several reasons we should forgive others.
3. Describe what it means to forgive another person.

MATERIALS / PREPARATION

In the Box: The Grandmothers' Letter.

If you read this lesson and do not feel confident teaching it, we suggest you refer to *Foundations of Christian Ethics, Part 2, The Moral Person an Asset to Society: Lesson 27, "The Challenge of Forgiveness."* It contains a lot of background material you may find quite helpful.

Preparation for the next lesson (Lesson 32): If possible, make enough copies of the Table of Contents found in the front of this curriculum so you can give a copy to each of your students. If this is not possible, make a copy of the Table of Contents on a piece of large newsprint or a series of posters, one for each unit.

Have a piece of poster paper for each small group of four in your class and markers for the "Gallery of Learning" activity at the end of Lesson 32.

LESSON

BEGINNING THE LESSON

In the last two lessons, we've been exploring the spiritual aspect of our lives and how that dimension can influence our decisions to avoid dream breakers. In this lesson, we will look at another issue crucial to achieving our dreams – how we respond when someone hurts us.



STORY

[Read the story, “Ludmilla Finally Forgives”:]

Tatyana Alexandrovna was late. Sasha, Dima, and Natasha were bored. Summer holidays had settled into an uncomfortable distance – too close to ignore, too far away to savor. Their grandmothers' box was nowhere to be seen.

“Hey Dima, is that a pimple you are growing on your forehead?” questioned Sasha.

“There's no pimple on my forehead,” said Dima. “At least there wasn't one when I looked this morning.”

“You looked in a mirror before coming?” Sasha asked. “I don't think so. If you did, you'd scare yourself!”

“What are you doing, Sasha?” asked Natasha. “You're making Dima self-conscious.”

“Dima should be more self-conscious, Natasha. Sometimes I'm embarrassed to be around him; he's such a slob,” said Sasha.

“Ouch!” exclaimed Dima, wincing.

“I'm just being a truthful friend,” said Sasha.

“That's not truthful!” retorted Dima, rubbing his forehead.

“I think it was cruel!” said Natasha.

Sasha shrugged. “I wasn't trying to hurt you. I was just trying to help you. Will you forgive me?”

Dima's eyes narrowed. “I'll think about it in 10 or 15 years when my face clears up. I can't avoid pimples like you seem to be able to.”

At that moment, their teacher came into the room. “What's going on here?” Tatyana Alexandrovna asked.

All three of them were frowning, but didn't say anything.

The teacher's face softened. “Last time we were together,” she began, “your grandmother, Natasha, wrote quite a bit about God's forgiveness through Christ – how God is willing to receive us back and forgive us like the Runaway Boy was forgiven in the story.”

“This time your grandmothers want me to talk with you about another dimension of forgiveness. They've asked us to explore the importance of us learning to forgive other people who've hurt us.”

Sasha, I think this might be a good time to read a letter that your Grandmother Ludmilla wrote for the three of you.”

Dear Ones,

I've told you the sad story of what drinking did to my husband, Alexei, and I've also told you some of what it did to me. Even after he was gone, the hurt of what he'd done stayed with me, smoldering just under the surface.

But I promised myself that I would be the best possible mother to our only son, Vasily – your father, Sasha. Now that his father was dead, I vowed to be mother and father to him. And I thought I was doing a pretty good job – until the day Vasily turned 14. He came home from school very late. I was already worried. As he came through the door, I rushed to hug him, relieved he was all right. That's when I smelled the vodka on his breath.

I screamed at my son. I slapped him in the face. Through tears of rage, I shrieked that he would end up just like his father.

Vasily said nothing. Instead, he turned and strode back through the door, slamming it behind him, just like his father used to do. I collapsed to the floor and wept for what seemed like hours.

I felt trapped. It was happening all over again, and I was helpless to stop it. I waited for Vasily to return, not knowing what I would say to him. Finally, exhausted, I fell asleep around midnight.

During that fitful night, I was visited by a nightmare I will never forget. In my dream, Vasily and I were taking flowers to lay on Alexei's grave. As I stood there crying, a bony hand reached up out of the earth, clutched Vasily by the leg and dragged him down until the earth closed over him. I woke up screaming.

That very day, I sat down with Yelena and Olga and asked them what to do.

“You are the one who is going to have to break the cycle,” said Yelena. “Vasily is almost certainly too young and in too much pain from his father's death.”

“Cycle?” I asked.

“The cycle of addiction,” Yelena responded. “It is a slavery that cycles through each generation as hurt children grow up to protect and comfort themselves with the same drugs or alcohol their parent or parents did.”

“I agree,” I said. “But what can I do? Vasily doesn't even listen to me anymore.”

Yelena waited a moment before she answered. Then, very quietly she said, “You can forgive Alexei.”

“What?” I was astonished. “What good would that do? Besides, he doesn't deserve my forgiveness!”

“No, I don't suppose he does,” said Yelena. “But that's not the point. You need to forgive him to break his grip on you.”

“What grip?” I said. “I'm not the one who's getting drunk!”

Then Olga spoke up. “His grip on you is your anger, your bitterness, your pain, and your hurt.”

“Your pain and anger burst into hot flame last night when you smelled Vasily's breath. And it will keep on burning you – and Vasily – again and again until you break the cycle. The only way you can do that is to forgive Alexei.”

I thought a long time before I answered.

“I . . . I don't see how I can,” I said. “The pain is just too great.”

EXPLORING THE LESSON



PROJECT

10 MINUTES

Write the following question on the board:

“How can someone forgive a person who has hurt them badly and never even asked to be forgiven?”

When the groups are done with their discussions, have each reporter briefly summarize the group’s ideas.

[Suspend reading the story.]

Before we finish reading Ludmilla’s letter, let’s arrange our class into four or five groups. Each group needs to appoint a reporter who will take notes and report back to the whole class.

In each group, I want you to try to answer the question, “How can someone forgive a person who has hurt them badly and never even asked to be forgiven, as in the case of Alexei hurting Ludmilla?”

Now let’s finish the story for today and see whether Ludmilla’s conclusions are similar to any of yours. When we left off, Ludmilla had just said she didn’t think she could forgive Alexei because her pain was too great.

 = 25 minutes



STORY RESUMES

5 MINUTES

[Continue reading the story.]

“I think part of the problem,” said Yelena, “is that you haven’t seen many good models of forgiveness. I didn’t get the impression when we were growing up that your parents were very good at asking for or giving forgiveness.”

“That’s an understatement!” I agreed.

“Yelena’s right,” said Olga. “Most people have trouble forgiving, especially life-wrenching hurts, unless they have experienced what it is like to receive forgiveness themselves.”

I looked at my two friends with tears starting to form. “Is it just hopeless, then?”

That was when Olga began to tell me how God could forgive all my sins through Christ’s death.

Dear ones, it was not until I had drunk deeply of God’s love and forgiveness that I could begin to truly forgive Alexei.

I don’t want you to imagine that I became a perfect mother. I still got angry at Vasily from time to time. And it took several years of struggle with drinking before Vasily himself decided to quit. But the unquenchable fire pit of pain and anger was finally out.

I was truly able to forgive Alexei as Jesus Christ has forgiven me.

Your Grandmother,

Ludmila

When Tatyana Alexandrovna finished reading the letter, she sat silently for a moment, a faraway look on her face.

“Sasha,” Natasha whispered, “did you know that stuff about your dad drinking when he was young?”

Sasha shook his head “No”, saying nothing. He glanced at her but avoided looking at Dima.

Finally Tatyana Alexandrovna spoke: “The grandmothers have a little project for you.”

“Why am I not surprised?” muttered Dima.

“They would like the three of you to work together to make two lists. As you already know from your own lives, there are many things people do to you that hurt you.”

Without even realizing it, Dima rubbed his forehead.

“Sometimes people are trying to hurt us, but other times the hurt is unintentional or accidental.”

“What your grandmothers would like you to do is to make one list of things that hurt you but are not that difficult to forgive. An example might be that you say hello to someone in the hall and they don’t say ‘hi’ back. This might be easy to forgive, particularly if you thought the person was distracted or didn’t hear you.

“Then, they would like you to make a second list, this time of things that are harder to forgive. This might include someone telling lies about you behind your back, things that close family members or friends have done on purpose, etc.”

 = 30 minutes



PROJECT

10 MINUTES

1. Arrange the class into groups of three to five.
2. Review the instructions from the story.
3. Have one student take notes and share the group’s lists at the end.
4. When three minutes have passed for the activity, have each group’s note-taker read the lists to the class.

[Suspend reading the story.]

Let’s do the same project the students in the story were doing.

You probably noticed that some hurts were hard to categorize as “easy to forgive” or “hard to forgive”.

There are at least two reasons:

1. **One is that people react differently to the same kind of hurt. Some people are more sensitive and will feel deeply hurt by the same thing that someone else would hardly notice. This is not right or wrong. We just have different personalities.**
2. **Another reason your groups may have had trouble categorizing everything is that sometimes it depends on the circumstances and who is doing the hurtful behavior. A close friend or beloved family member can often hurt us deeply with something that would seem small if a stranger did it to us. That is because we trust those close to us to be “on our side” or to treat us more kindly than everyone else.**

Now let’s finish our story for today.

 = 40 minutes

**STORY RESUMES**

3 MINUTES

[Read the following:]

Tatyana Alexandrovna read the lists the three children had compiled.

“A very thoughtful job,” she said.

She looked at the three for a moment.

“One more thing before you go. I wonder whether you are ready to tell me what was going on when I arrived here today.”

Sasha and Dima looked at each other and then back at their teacher.

Sasha swallowed. “I criticized Dima and excused what I said as just telling him the truth.”

“What was going through your mind when you criticized your friend?” asked the teacher.

Sasha looked at the floor. “It really wasn’t so much about telling him the truth. I guess I just wanted to make him feel bad.”

He looked at Dima, “I really am sorry”

Tatyana Alexandrovna looked at each of the students and then leaned back in her chair. “I wonder which category of hurt this is – easy to forgive or difficult?”

There was a little smile starting to turn up the corners of Dima’s mouth.

“I think maybe it just changed categories. Sasha, if your grandmother can find a way to forgive your grandfather after all he did, I guess I can forgive a little criticism.

“Besides,” said Dima, “ever since signing my name last week, I’ve . . . I don’t know the right way to say it. I guess what I mean is, I’ve been feeling so forgiven myself, it just feels right to pass a little of it on to you.”

Tatyana Alexandrovna smiled at them. “Even when it’s hard to forgive, it’s one of the most important ways you can free yourself to pursue your dreams.”

Sasha grinned.

| *[End of the story.]*



= 43 minutes

ENDING THE LESSON

2 MINUTES

Let me finish this lesson with this thought. Sometimes we tend to think that someone who forgives another person is being weak. We think that the strong thing to do is to stay angry and try to get revenge. However, many great moral leaders of the world have taught the exact opposite. Let me read to you a statement by Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), the renowned Indian statesman. Gandhi said, "The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong."

[If you have chosen to keep the end-of-class celebration within your learning community, just tell your students that the class session in two weeks will be a celebration they can look forward to.

If you have chosen to open Lesson 33 to parents, ask your students to invite their parents to the session in two weeks. This will double as a teacher-parent conference and will also be the celebration of your year's work together as a learning community.]

Before dismissing your students, remember to dictate the Parent-Teacher questions to them.



= 45 minutes

RESOURCES

GOING DEEPER

Our lesson today suggested several reasons people sometimes find it hard to forgive and sometimes do not forgive those who have hurt them. But I think there are more, maybe many more, reasons people sometimes do not forgive each other.

WHY WE DON'T FORGIVE BRAINSTORM

Compile a list of reasons one might not forgive or not forgive right away. Write these on the board.

[Arrange your class into groups of two to five students, whatever is practical in your situation. Instruct students to first appoint in each group someone to serve as a "scribe-reporter" who will write down all of the group's ideas and later report back to the whole class. Then, tell the group to brainstorm as many reasons as they can think of that someone might not forgive or might not forgive right away. Tell them it is all right to include reasons suggested in today's lesson. Circulate from group to group, helping any who get stuck. When it looks like some groups are slowing down, call everyone back together and have each of the scribes report while you write all the reasons on the board.]

Now we are ready to look at our passage for today.

[Read this verse from your Bible or read the following paraphrase, or both:]

"Stop being bitter and angry and mad at others. Don't yell at one another or curse each other or ever be rude. Instead, be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ" (Ephesians 4:31-32).

You have listed some reasons why people often don't forgive those who have hurt them, but the story about the grandmother, Ludmilla, eventually forgiving Alexei and the other story about Dima forgiving Sasha suggest a powerful motivation to forgive. Can anyone remember what the motivation was?

[Let one or two answer.]

The powerful motivation for Ludmilla and Dima was that they had experienced God's forgiveness and that gave them the strength and desire to forgive others. That is what this Bible passage is saying. If we have believed in Christ and accepted his forgiveness, we can turn around and pass that forgiveness along to those who have hurt us.

Some of you may be wondering, “Exactly how does God’s forgiving me help me to forgive others?” I think there are at least two possible ways:

1. The first was mentioned in today’s story. Do you remember what Olga told Ludmilla? She said most people have trouble forgiving until they have experienced forgiveness themselves. But those who believe God has forgiven all their sins through Christ’s death are in a much better position to pass some of that forgiveness along to those people who have hurt them.
2. There’s also a second way God’s forgiveness of us may help us forgive others. Christians believe that when we accept Christ’s forgiveness, God Himself comes to live spiritually inside us. God’s Spirit then gives us the power to begin to change to become more like Christ. If that’s true, then that is a second way receiving God’s forgiveness might help us to forgive others. God’s Spirit could give us the power to forgive, even when it seems humanly impossible.

FOCUS POINT

Be sure to leave time for discussion at the end of the learning activity so your students can discuss the connection between the learning activity and the lesson. Listen to see whether they seemed to understand the key points listed. If you sense that one or more of these points may have been lost, be sure to guide the discussion to make sure they get these main ideas.

1. We can forgive others because God has forgiven us.
2. Like receiving the gift in the last lesson, forgiving is a choice we have the power to make.

PARENT-TEACHER CONNECTION

For Family Discussion:

Share with your son or daughter a time when you had an opportunity to forgive someone else or share an instance when you received forgiveness from someone.