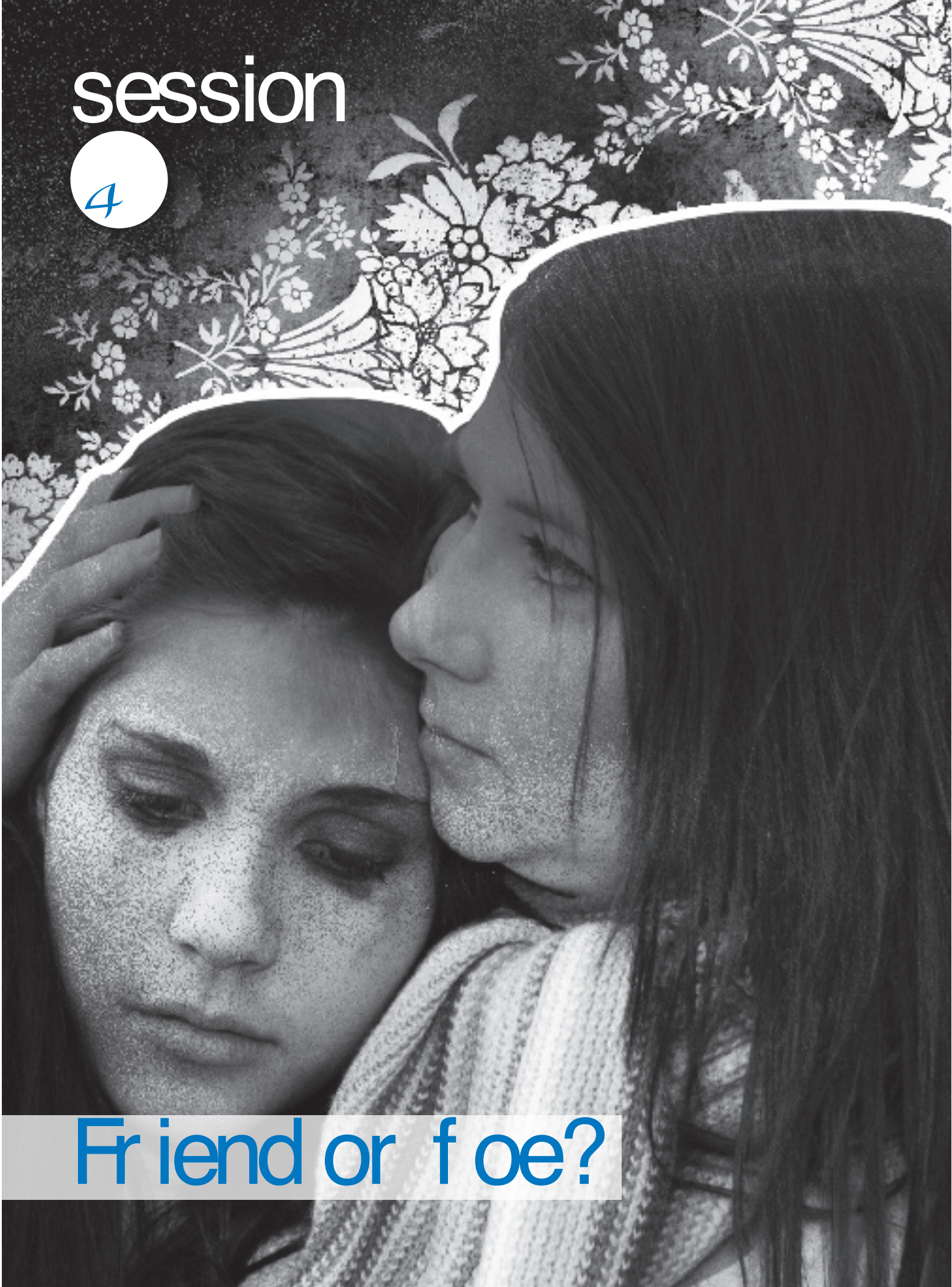


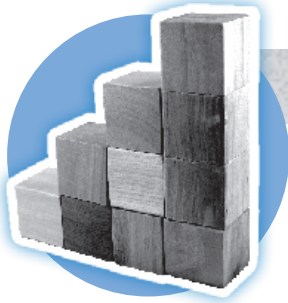
session

4

Friend or foe?







## Set up

Set up TV/DVD player; DVD with the “*Friend or Foe?*” session; pens/pencils; make copies of the “*Square Accounts*” handout (pgs. 56-57) for the entire class. Or, for 8 ½ x 11 version; go to [www.bluefishtv.com/handouts](http://www.bluefishtv.com/handouts) and click the **Teens vs. Parents** series. Then click on the “*Friend or Foe?*” lesson to download the “*Square Accounts*” handout and make copies for the entire class.



## Kicker

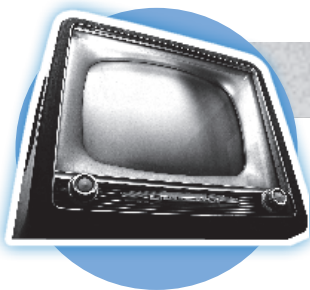
**Who is your favorite villain? On TV, in movies, in books, in comic books, in video games—wherever—who is the nemesis you love to hate?**

**What is it about that character that you find so compelling? Do they scare you? Anger you? Tempt you?**

**Most “bad guys” have some weakness that finally brings them down? Does your favorite villain have one?**

**Leader:** *Be ready with an example or two of your own.*

Sometimes in real life our parents can become our worst enemies. What can we do about that? Let's watch.



## Video

Show: “*Friend or Foe?*”  
(12 minutes)



## Discuss

**At the start of the video, there was a clip with a teen arguing about going out and getting spending money from her mother. Her mother was frustrated that the daughter had not done anything she was asked to do and said “no” to the spending money, at least until the chores were done. As the girl started folding laundry, she found some cash and hesitated. The end of the clip asks our question, “What would you do?”**

We’re used to talking about kids misbehaving. But what happens when parents misbehave? Clearly, Rachel’s father is not living right. He’s letting alcohol run his life, and he’s letting down his family.

**Do you think Rachel has a right to be upset with him?**

**But doesn’t she also need to treat him with honor and respect? How can she do that?**

**Forgiveness is tough in a situation like that. If she decided she needed to forgive him, how would she begin?**

“I haven’t forgiven my father,” she said. “For what he did, I don’t think he deserves forgiveness.”

Many kids could say the same thing about fathers or mothers who have abandoned the family, cheated on the marriage, or practiced abuse in the home. Sometimes parents commit flagrant sins against the family, and the wounds run deep. They have misbehaved so badly, they don’t “deserve forgiveness.”

But that’s an interesting phrase. How does a person “deserve” forgiveness? Forgiveness is a matter of saying, “You did wrong, but I’m going to treat you with love anyway.” It would seem that the wrongness of a person’s actions is a *qualification* for forgiveness, not a *disqualification*. When you forgive, you’re **not**



saying, “That’s okay. It wasn’t so bad. No harm no foul.” On the contrary! You’re saying, “*You did wrong!*”

So nobody really *deserves* forgiveness. It’s a gift you give someone because you want to restore a relationship. And maybe that’s where you start this difficult process. Wanting to restore the relationship. If you want it badly enough, you’re willing to push through the pain they’ve caused.

Mark Matlock said this in the video: “Don’t have any expectations that forgiveness will completely just magically make all your problems go away. Just because you forgive your parents doesn’t mean that you won’t still have some hurt feelings from time to time. It doesn’t mean that you’ll instantly have trust, nor does it mean that you should trust them just because you’ve forgiven them.”

### **Why is that? Shouldn’t forgiveness wipe the slate clean? Why is it so difficult?**

Forgiveness is a way of moving forward. It doesn’t erase the past. It just keeps the past from poisoning the future. Forgiveness does not put things back the way they were, but it does allow you to build a new relationship. And maybe that relationship has to have boundaries so you won’t get hurt. Unlike the common saying, you don’t always “forgive and forget.” You remember the problems of the past, but when you forgive you’re choosing not to dwell on those problems.

### **Mark also said this: “Forgiveness is sometimes more for me than for the person I’m forgiving.” What did he mean by that?**

Here’s how he explained it. “It helps take the pressure off my life of what’s been done to me. It keeps me from allowing bitterness to stir up in my life, and anger to form in my life, spinning my life out of control.”

When we hold a grudge, we’re the ones who get poisoned. We feel the bitterness. But when we forgive, we release ourselves from those bitter feelings.

**What do you think about Ben, the guy whose rich parents don't buy him enough stuff? Have you ever felt like that?**

**What do you think his parents are doing wrong? What does Ben need to forgive them for?**

**What do you think Ben is learning from his ordeal?**

**Leader:** *This might be an interesting exchange. Some kids might completely identify with Ben. Aren't parents supposed to provide for their kids? But others will see Ben as a spoiled brat. How can you complain about going without a plasma TV when there are kids in the world who go to bed hungry every night?*

We can certainly agree on this. Ben is disappointed because his parents aren't treating him the way he thinks they should. And that creates tension in the home. Whenever they do anything with their money, he's feeling cheated.

**How does forgiveness enter into this situation? Who needs to forgive whom?**

**How will that change anything?**

When you start talking about forgiveness, it forces you to think about what exactly you're forgiving someone *for*. And often it turns back on yourself. You realize that you yourself are part of the problem. When you open your heart to forgive someone else, you sometimes realize how much you need to ask forgiveness.

The truth is, when a relationship gets messed up, there's usually a problem on both sides. Not always. Rachel certainly isn't at fault for her father's drunkenness. But Ben is blaming his parents for not buying him the cool stuff that other kids have. Maybe his expectations are out of whack. And maybe they're neglecting him in other ways. We don't know, but they could surely use some communication. They need to sit down and open their hearts to each other, forgiving and receiving forgiveness.



## Bible

Would someone read Luke 23:33-34?

**When and where was this happening?** (Jesus' crucifixion, at Golgotha.)

**What reason does Jesus give for forgiving his crucifiers?**

(They don't know what they're doing.)

**Do you think that's true? Didn't they know what they were doing?** (They knew they were crucifying somebody they thought was a criminal, but apparently they didn't know they were executing the Son of God.)

**Why do you think Jesus said this?** (He was all about grace and love. Even at his death, he wanted to make sure his killers had a clean slate. He was focused on mercy, not punishment.)

**Can you think of a situation where you might say this about your parents? "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing."**

I know this will come as a shock to you, but your parents don't always know what they're doing. Parenting is a hard job. As hard as they try to be fair and wise and protective and creative—a lot of times it's trial and error. And sometimes those errors end up hurting you. (Of course you make errors too, which sometimes hurt them.) When you realize that they are human, just like you, it's easier to accept—and forgive—their mistakes.

Turn to Colossians 3:12. Somebody read that.

**Let's get some definitions down. What's compassion?** (Deeply feeling what other people feel.)



**What's kindness? We kind of know what it is, but how would you describe it to somebody from Neptune?** (Acting in ways that please others.)

**What's humility?** (Treating others as more important than you.)

**What's gentleness?** (Being careful about your impact. Not forcing your own way.)

**What's patience?** (Being willing to wait for something you want or to put up with something you don't.)

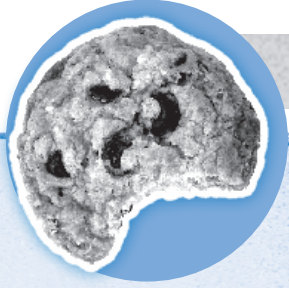
**Now picture yourself "putting on" these qualities like an old comfy T-shirt and wearing them around your home. How would that change things in your family?**

Someone read verse 13.

**What does it mean to "bear with" someone?** (It means it's a less than perfect situation, but you put up with it. They bother you, annoy you, push your buttons, and you endure it without retaliation.)

**On what basis should we forgive others, according to this verse? Why, as Christians, do we have to forgive?**

"Forgive as the Lord forgave you." We are sinners and we know it. Christians are not people who have learned how to be perfect. We are merely those who have found forgiveness in Jesus. In the Lord's prayer we say, "Forgive us our trespasses [or debts] as we forgive those who trespass against us [our debtors]." It makes no sense to be forgiven if we don't extend that forgiveness to others.



## Crunch

**Leader:** Break into groups of 4-6 people and distribute the “Square Accounts” handout. Give them about ten minutes, or as long as they seem engaged with the project. Then bring them back and hear all the stories. If you prefer a different version of the Bible, just have them read Matthew 18:23-24 and hand out page 2 of the handout for the rewrite. After reading it with your group, rewrite it with different characters, but the same basic story line. Try to include at least one parent and a teenager.



## Just Do It

Forgiveness is a strange and wonderful thing. Take a look at the five principles of forgiveness at the bottom of your sheet. We could probably make up fifty more.

But when forgiveness becomes a part of your home life, it rescues relationships. It brings new joy into that home. It knits hearts together.

In the verses right before the parable we just worked with, Peter came to Jesus and asked how many times he should forgive a brother or sister who hurts him. Seven?

You know how Jesus answered? “Seven! Hardly. Try seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:21-22).

Forgiveness is something we have to keep working at, especially among the people we live closest to.





# Square Accounts

*This is a story Jesus told. After reading it with your group, rewrite it with different characters, but the same basic story line. Try to include at least one parent and a teenager.*

The kingdom of God is like a king who decided to square accounts with his servants. As he got under way, one servant was brought before him who had run up a debt of a hundred thousand dollars. He couldn't pay up, so the king ordered the man, along with his wife, children, and goods, to be auctioned off at the slave market.

The poor wretch threw himself at the king's feet and begged, "Give me a chance and I'll pay it all back." Touched by his plea, the king let him off, erasing the debt.

The servant was no sooner out of the room when he came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him ten dollars. He seized him by the throat and demanded, "Pay up. Now!"

The poor wretch threw himself down and begged, "Give me a chance and I'll pay it all back." But he wouldn't do it. He had him arrested and put in jail until the debt was paid. When the other servants saw this going on, they were outraged and brought a detailed report to the king.

The king summoned the man and said, "You evil servant! I forgave your entire debt when you begged me for mercy. Shouldn't you be compelled to be merciful to your fellow servant who asked for mercy?" The king was furious and put the screws to the man until he paid back his entire debt.

— *Matthew 18:23-34 (The Message)*

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## Five Principles of Forgiveness

- 1 Forgiven people forgive others.  
*It's easier to forgive when you understand how much God has forgiven you.*
- 2 "I forgive you" doesn't mean "What you did was okay."  
*If it were okay, it wouldn't need to be forgiven.*
- 3 Forgiveness doesn't put a relationship back to where it was.  
*People grow through grief, and relationships change. Forgiveness moves you forward, not back.*
- 4 You don't have to be perfect before you offer forgiveness to others.  
*We recognize our common sinfulness, and we offer forgiveness from a humble heart.*
- 5 Forgiveness does not erase the consequences of the crime.  
*Your parents can forgive you for sneaking out and still ground you.*