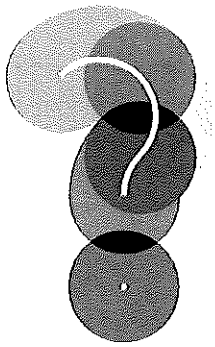
Practicing the Practice at Home

WHAT IS *FORGIVE* ABOUT?



Forgiveness is about relationships and has several important functions. Before forgiveness can begin, the sin or wrongdoing must be recognized and named. We seek forgiveness from God for our mistakes and poor choices. Sometimes we need to forgive someone who has hurt or upset us. Sometimes it is about asking someone else to forgive us when we have hurt or upset them, or when we have made poor choices. Finally, if it is possible, building a bridge and working to repair the relationship can heal hurt. This can take time and may not be possible or appropriate, and that is all right. Each of these features of the Christian practice of forgiveness connects to our faith. Activities and ideas below explore different elements of forgiveness.

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURE STORY TOGETHER

The sessions on the topic of forgiveness focus on the story of the prodigal son found in Luke 15:11–32. Read this story from the Bible or a story Bible version. Wonder together about each character's feelings and experiences.

- How does the younger child feel when leaving home?
- How does the child feel differently when returning home?
- How might the father have felt when the younger child left?
- What does the story tell about the father's feelings when the younger child returns?
- An older child remained with the father; how does this child feel?
- What can you imagine happens after this story ends?
- Where might forgiveness be found?
- How might bridges be built to repair relationships?

FORGIVENESS THROUGH PRAYER WITH SIGN LANGUAGE

Learn together the American Sign Language signs for "forgive" and "thanks be to God."

- Forgive: Use the middle three fingertips of your right hand to brush twice across the palm of your left hand. The same sign is used for the words *forgiving* and *forgiveness*.
- Thanks be to God: Place your fingertips of your right hand on your lower lip and raise your hand out and upward. Then fold your thumb to your palm and bring your hand down, palm facing left. End with your pointer finger at your lower lip. To see a video of the signs for "forgive" and "thanks be to God," watch the YouTube videos "Learn How to Sign the Word Forgive" (bit.ly/FMASLForgive, 0:18) and "ASL Minute—Prayer, Thanks Be to God, Amen and Hawaiian Goose" (bit.ly/FMASLThanksGod, 4:04, starting at 0:41 and ending at 2:00).

In praying together as a family, use the American Sign Language signs for these words as you pray. Have one person lead and others repeat after them. Have different family members take turns leading each time you pray this prayer.

Gracious God, /
we believe you forgive. /
Forgive us the times /
we hurt others and your creation. /
Forgive others, /
who also make mistakes. /
Help us be as forgiving to others /
as you are to us. /
Forgive us our sins, /
as we forgive those who sin against us. /
Thanks be to God. /

FORGIVE US AS WE FORGIVE

In the Lord's Prayer, we ask God to forgive our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us. While different churches and denominations change some of the words of the Lord's Prayer, the essence remains the same. We recognize that God promises to forgive us, and that God expects us to forgive others. When we are hurt or upset, it is easy to forget about forgiving what someone else did. As you explore other activities

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listed here, take time to think about when you should forgive others. Know that God forgives your actions as much as forgiving another's actions.

TELLING OURSELVES ABOUT OUR MISTAKES

Supplies: construction paper, stapler, crayons, markers, colored pencils, scissors

Make prayer chains out of strips of paper. On one side of each strip, write or draw a mistake or poor choice you made that you want to ask God to forgive. On the other side, write, "God forgives all." Form a loop with the strip, staple the ends together to make a link. Combine links to form a chain. Make personal chains, then combine into a family chain.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Many churches include a Prayer of Confession each week during worship. Those gathered express together their sins and shortcomings, mistakes and poor choices. Write your own prayer, use the prayer printed in your weekly bulletin, or use this prayer of confession:

> Dear God, we do not always do the best thing or the right thing. Sometimes we make mistakes, like (*name your mistakes*). Sometimes we make poor choices, like when we (*name things you may have done*). We know you love us even though we make mistakes. We are grateful. Thank you for always being with us and helping us to make better choices that show your love to others. Amen.

GOD TAKES AWAY OUR MISTAKES

Supplies: bowl, water, coffee filters, washable markers

Talk about mistakes we make that we want to tell God. Use washable markers to draw or write the mistakes or poor choices on a coffee filter. Lay the coffee filter into a bowl of water. Swirl the coffee filter in the water until the marker disappears. When the marker disappears, say together: "I am forgiven and loved."

I AM FORGIVEN!

Supplies: paper, colored pencils, markers, and/or crayons

On a piece of paper, write or draw a mistake or poor choice you made that you want to ask God to forgive. Tear the paper into tiny pieces and shout, "I AM FORGIVEN!" Then throw the pieces away! Go around the circle and tell each other "You are forgiven!"

TALKING WITH GOD

When you pray this week, tell God about mistakes or poor choices you have made. Talk about this as a family. It is important to talk about prayer with children. You can ask questions like: "When do you like to talk with God?" "Do you ask God to forgive you and forgive others?" Help the children brainstorm times when they can pray. Examples include: at dinner, before getting into bed, when waking up, when feeling lonely.

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

- Is it hard to forgive others? Why or why not?
- Is it hard to believe God always forgives us? Why?
- How can we ask for forgiveness when we make a mistake, or hurt or upset someone?

PRAYER

Thank you, God, for loving us and forgiving us. Remind us that we can always talk with you and say, "I'm sorry." Amen.

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