

Unit 3



boundless *forgiveness*

Author: Charles Newman

Unit 03 overview

In this unit we will talk about and experience God’s boundless forgiveness for us and through us. Forgiveness has always been a highly valued characteristic of Christians. Christ’s death on the cross was for the purpose and promise of forgiving all our sins — not just some, but all. Christ urges us to forgive others as well, without regret. Jesus is quite emphatic about this point, even saying that we should forgive repeatedly. But the truth is, it’s not that simple. While we long to know that God forgives us all our sins, yet sometimes we can be reluctant, hesitant or even fearful of forgiving others. The challenge is that God’s boundless forgiveness is a gift for each of us and learning to share that forgiveness helps us in knowing the freedom of feeling forgiven.

Session one: The focus is on God’s boundless forgiveness for us. The parable of the Prodigal Son shows the deep love of a father (our creator/parent) for the lost child. God the parent stands waiting for the time when each of us children will be ready to return home and embrace one who loves us deeply. Some participants in your group may find themselves in a position similar to that of the child in the parable, estranged from a parent or friend, by choice or by circumstance, and feeling unable to return to the relationship. As a leader, be conscious of those who may be aching to reach out and begin to mend a broken relationship.

Content warning: Session two is about how we can forgive those who hurt us. This may bring to the surface unspoken pain, hurt or trauma in you or your participants. This will be a challenging lesson for anyone who has been hurt deeply, whether by abuse, crime or personal, systemic or other trauma. As a leader, you are encouraged to venture gently through this session, always encouraging participants that forgiveness can take time and that God’s boundless love and forgiveness continue to be with them as they struggle. If you are the one struggling with this lesson, take this opportunity to bring in another adult to partner with you on this whole unit.

Session two: The focus here is on how we can share in God’s boundless forgiveness by forgiving others, even those who hurt us deeply. In this session, we learn about Joseph from the Hebrew Scriptures and how he learned to forgive. From Joseph’s experience, we can learn how to forgive others who have hurt us. Together, we will ponder a pathway to sharing God’s boundless forgiveness, even when it’s hard or when we might not be ready.

Watch to recognize icons and fonts throughout this curriculum:

- Take-home sheet — Each lesson has a sheet for post-lesson reflection. Use these to make connections at home and with the congregation.
- ***Bold italics*** indicates words that should be read aloud by the leader.
- **Regular font** indicates the lesson plan and leader information.



Clock to tell you how long each section should take. Feel free to use more or less time depending on your group.



Bible to tell you when you need your Bibles and are reading from Scripture.



Video to tell you when you are playing a video. Videos can be found on the Gathering resource list on the Gathering website.



Music to tell you when you are using music or a song in the lesson. Songs can be found on the Gathering Spotify playlist ([@elcagathering](#)). Just search for the unit name (boundless love, boundless creation, etc.)



Computer to provide alternative tips and suggestions if your group is meeting online



Social media for opportunities to add to the conversation online. Take note of the Gathering handles below.



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UNIT 3 – SESSION ONE:

receiving God's boundless forgiveness

Overview for adult leaders:

The parable of the Prodigal Son is one of the most memorable stories in the Bible, illustrating the radical nature of God's boundless forgiveness. In this lesson, we'll explore our sinful nature and the grace of God's boundless forgiveness.



If you are doing this session online see “suggested uses for this resource” on page 9 for ideas to be able to use the whiteboard feature in a digital meeting and share videos effectively in a digital meeting.

suggested supply list

- An internet-connected device on which to show videos/play music
- Copies of the take-home sheet for each participant (available on page 51)
- Post-It notes or scraps of recyclable paper, and a writing utensil
- A football or something of similar size that is safe to play with
- Print or projected image of Rembrandt's *The Prodigal Son*, http://www.rembrandtpainting.net/prodigal_son_large.html

gather | building of your group

Warm-up:



- As youth arrive, have music from the Gathering Spotify playlist (@elcagathering) playing. Show participants the famous Rembrandt painting [The Prodigal Son](#) but **do not** display the artist or title. Also, **do not** tell the participants anything about the painting.
- Have the participants guess what is going on in the story. Whom do they think the people are and what are they doing in the painting?
- Provide Post-It notes so participants can write their guesses and stick them on the wall around the painting.



Invitation:

I invite you to this place and this time with a daring vision to experience God's boundless forgiveness for you.

Team building/ice-breaker:



- **We are going to play a game of “Steal the Bacon.”** Divide your group into two even teams. You will need one person to be the leader or umpire.
- **Now that our group has been divided in half, each team must form a single-file line that is parallel to the other team. The two teams should then turn to face each other and take a big step back, leaving room between the teams.** Assign each person in line a number, counting from one to how many people you have in a line. Then place the “bacon” (this could be a football or something of similar size) in the space between the teams.
- **The umpire will call out a number. The players on each side who are assigned that number are the players for that round. No other team members leave their side of the field.**
- **Neither player may touch the other player until someone touches the bacon. Once a player touches the bacon however, the other player may tag them. If a player can grab the bacon and carry it back over to their own side, that team scores a point. If a player is tagged after touching the bacon and before they return to their own side, the team that tagged them scores a point.**

GATHERING CONNECTION

Downtown Minneapolis is home to the longest continuous indoor pedestrian walkway in the world. The Minneapolis Skyway links numerous buildings, spanning 69 blocks and covering seven miles. This amazing walkway alleviates foot traffic on the streets, keeps pedestrians warm in the winter and gives a great view of the street below. Using the Skyway, a person can walk from business to entertainment, find dinner and return to their hotel without ever stepping outside.

Jesus had his own skyway view of the world. From there he saw the people down on the street below. Jesus saw their needs, their hurts and their sin. Knowing what needed to be done and what it would cost, Jesus responded. He left the comfort of a heavenly sky and came down to earth to be with us. Jesus came to serve, love, forgive and redeem.

What could Jesus' example mean for us? We know doing the hard stuff, the dirty work, and leaving our comfort zone behind is never an easy job. Sometimes loving others and forgiving others can go wrong, breaking our hearts and costing us everything. Because of this, many times we choose not to get involved. God will ask, “Who can I send?” Sometimes we reply, “Find someone else.” No one understands hurt and forgiveness the way Jesus does, yet God forgives us every time we turn away. God forgives us every time. That's because God's forgiveness is as boundless as the sky. I wonder what it would look like if we could forgive as Jesus does?

Note that the sequence of play usually involves the two kids running out and hovering over the bacon, waiting for a slight advantage to grab it and run back before the other player can react. The game is over when a predetermined number of points are scored, or when all numbers have been called – you decide.



Zoom Game Alternative: Steal the Bacon Scavenger Hunt. Ask youth to search their house for an item in an attempt to find it, and be the first to bring the item back to the screen. The first item announced is Bacon. The second is a Ball. The last item announced is a Bible.

Gather the whole group back together and take a moment to settle in. Share with them: **Today we'll be talking about God's boundless forgiveness.**

Continue with a prayer (youth led/read):

God, our parent, we hurt others with things we say and do, as well things we don't say or do. Yet you long to forgive us. Guide our hearts that we can seek your forgiveness and trust that it is boundless. Please help us to experience our actions with your grace. Help us to remember that boundless forgiveness is your gift to us, if we but ask. Amen.

word | learn about God's word
and connection to our lives

"I want you to know (head) all about Christ's love (heart), although it is too wonderful to be measured. Then your lives (body) will be filled with all that God is (community)."



Today we are going to tell the story of a guy who ate with pigs. Of course, the story is deeper than that. It's the story of how a father welcomed his son home. We will learn that no matter how far away from God we may run or find ourselves, God will always love us and we can always find our way back to God.

Our head:



Read Luke 15:12-32:

- Read the parable through one time. Pause after the reading to allow time for participants to take it in. Then briefly reflect on the following questions.

Luke 15:12-32: 12 The younger son said to his father, "Give me my share of the property." So the father divided his property between his two sons. ¹³Not long after that, the younger son packed up everything he owned and left for a foreign country, where he wasted all his money in wild living. ¹⁴He had spent everything, when a bad famine spread through that whole land. Soon he had nothing to eat.

¹⁵He went to work for a man in that country, and the man sent him out to take care of his pigs.

¹⁶He would have been glad to eat what the pigs were eating, but no one gave him a thing.

¹⁷Finally, he came to his senses and said, "My father's workers have plenty to eat, and here I am, starving to death! ¹⁸I will go to my father and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer good enough to be called your son. Treat me like one of your workers.'"

²⁰The younger son got up and started back to his father. But when he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt sorry for him. He ran to his son and hugged and kissed him.

²¹The son said, "Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son."

²²But his father said to the servants, "Hurry and bring the best clothes and put them on him. Give him a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. ²³Get the best calf and prepare it, so we can eat and celebrate. ²⁴This son of mine was dead, but has now come back to life. He was lost and has now been found." And they began to celebrate.

²⁵The older son had been out in the field. But when he came near the house, he heard the music and dancing. ²⁶So he called one of the servants over and asked, "What's going on here?"

27The servant answered, “Your brother has come home safe and sound, and your father ordered us to kill the best calf.” 28The older brother got so angry that he would not even go into the house.

His father came out and begged him to go in.

29But he said to his father, “For years I have worked for you like a slave and have always obeyed you. But you have never even given me a little goat, so that I could give a dinner for my friends. 30This other son of yours wasted your money on prostitutes. And now that he has come home, you ordered the best calf to be killed for a feast.”

31His father replied, “My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32But we should be glad and celebrate! Your brother was dead, but he is now alive. He was lost and has now been found.”

Explore one or two of these questions with participants:

- ***What do you think kept the son away so long?***
- ***Who do you think is looking for forgiveness in this story? Who needs it?***
- ***What are the different kinds of separation you notice between people in this story? Who do you think is more separated from whom?***
- ***The painting we guessed about as you entered today is The Prodigal Son by Rembrandt. How did our story line up with your guesses from earlier?***
- ***What do you notice in the painting now that you know the context of the story?***

Our body:



- Divide the participants into no more than four groups, give each group a section of the story (The creative retelling of story is available on page 50.) and have them come up with a creative way to share their part of the story. Make sure to involve every person in your group because once you're done, we will have a chance for each group to share their retelling of the story. As best you can, show us what you think Jesus was trying to get across through this story.

- Give the groups five minutes to plan. Then, retell the whole story.

Our heart:



- Help participants recall times when they have been like each character in the parable.
- When, if ever, have you been like the younger son, who felt too ashamed to ask for forgiveness?
- When, if ever, have you been like the older son, who always did what he was supposed to do yet was unable to forgive his sibling?

Wondering questions (choose one or two):

- ***What would you do if you found yourself alone and estranged from your family?***
- ***What might keep you from reconciling a broken relationship? (pride, fear of rejection, self-destructive behaviors, etc.)***
- ***Put yourself in the place of the younger son. How do you imagine he felt to be welcomed home and forgiven?***

Our community:

Search for opportunities to seek the forgiveness of others throughout the week. This might mean asking a sibling or parent for forgiveness because you said something hurtful. It might mean speaking to a classmate you ignored or excluded because you were with another friend. Remember that seeking forgiveness is like the Prodigal Son coming home: some people will respond with forgiveness like the father, but some may respond with bitterness like the elder brother. This is OK, and we'll talk about it more next time.

sending

reflect on what we
have learned and
ask questions

- **Feeling as if we don't deserve or need forgiveness can keep us from asking for it. But God's forgiveness is boundless. Next session, we'll wonder together what it would be like to be the father in the parable, who offered both sons forgiveness.**
- Include your local group announcements here.
- Refer to the calendar/timeline on pages 76-81 in your Official Gathering Handbook for timely announcements.

Closing prayer (youth led/read):

God of boundless forgiveness, you know our hearts, hear our prayers and care about all that concerns us. You understand the burden we carry and how we want, more than anything, to know your forgiving love. Help us to remember that you always forgive and that you desire to extend that boundless forgiveness to us and through us. Help us to forgive as you do. Amen.

Dismissal/blessing — call and response:

Leader: **God's love is ...**

Participants (place hand over heart): **boundless**

Leader: **God's creation is ...**

Participants (open arms wide): **boundless**

Leader: **God's forgiveness is...**

Participants (cross wrists): **boundless**

Leader: **God's invitation is...**

Participants (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched): **boundless**

Leader: **God's promise is...**

Participants (cross on another's forehead or hand):
boundless

CONGREGATION CONNECTION

As a congregation, we are invited by God to experience boundless forgiveness every week.

Many of our community worship services begin with an order of confession and forgiveness. As we enter into worship, we are given this moment to come before God admitting that we are sinners in need of forgiveness. Our God is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. God grants us forgiveness, and our worship begins. The next time you attend church and hear the pastor proclaim God's forgiveness of our sins, look around the sanctuary. Notice a room full of God's children, pardoned and freed by the power of forgiveness. By the way, you don't need to wait for Sunday morning to be forgiven. God's boundless forgiveness is there for us, all day and every day.

*Pass out the
take-home sheet!*

Creative retelling of the story

Hand out sections of the story to participants to have each create part of the story. When they are finished, have them present the story to each other in order.

Group 1:

¹²The younger son said to his father, “Give me my share of the property.” So the father divided his property between his two sons.

¹³Not long after that, the younger son packed up everything he owned and left for a foreign country, where he wasted all his money in wild living. ¹⁴He had spent everything, when a bad famine spread through that whole land. Soon he had nothing to eat.

Group 2:

¹⁵He went to work for a man in that country, and the man sent him out to take care of his pigs. ¹⁶He would have been glad to eat what the pigs were eating, but no one gave him a thing.

¹⁷Finally, he came to his senses and said, “My father’s workers have plenty to eat, and here I am, starving to death! ¹⁸I will go to my father and say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer good enough to be called your son. Treat me like one of your workers.’”

Group 3:

²⁰The younger son got up and started back to his father. But when he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt sorry for him. He ran to his son and hugged and kissed him.

²¹The son said, “Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son.”

²²But his father said to the servants, “Hurry and bring the best clothes and put them on him. Give him a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. ²³Get the best calf and prepare it, so we can eat and celebrate. ²⁴This son of mine was dead, but has now come back to life. He was lost and has now been found.” And they began to celebrate.

Group 4:

²⁵The older son had been out in the field. But when he came near the house, he heard the music and dancing. ²⁶So he called one of the servants over and asked, “What’s going on here?” ²⁷The servant answered, “Your brother has come home safe and sound, and your father ordered us to kill the best calf.” ²⁸The older brother got so angry that he would not even go into the house.

His father came out and begged him to go in. ²⁹But he said to his father, “For years I have worked for you like a slave and have always obeyed you. But you have never even given me a little goat, so that I could give a dinner for my friends. ³⁰This other son of yours wasted your money on prostitutes. And now that he has come home, you ordered the best calf to be killed for a feast.”

³¹His father replied, “My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³²But we should be glad and celebrate! Your brother was dead, but he is now alive. He was lost and has now been found.”

Take-home sheet for Unit 3 – Session one:

receiving God's boundless forgiveness

We want you to find ways to share the boundlessness of God with your friends, family and congregation. What happened here today should be shared, and we hope that the lesson doesn't end here, that it continues in conversations on the car ride home, with families around the dinner table, at school tomorrow... that this multiplies and becomes boundless!

With the parable of the Prodigal Son we explored our sinful nature and the grace of God's boundless forgiveness, which is available to all of us. In a world of broken relationships, the parable of the Prodigal Son teaches us a lesson of deep love, hope and, yes, forgiveness.

Share what you remember. Try to retell our story from today, Luke 15:12-32, or look it up in your Bible app (we were using the CEV: Common English Version).

Other Scriptures to explore:

- Ephesians 4:31-32: Stop being bitter and angry and mad at others. Don't yell at one another or curse each other or ever be rude. 32 Instead, be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ.
- 2 Corinthians 5:17: Anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The past is forgotten, and everything is new.

Wondering questions

(discuss these questions with someone at home):

- How did this passage help you understand God's boundless forgiveness?
- Is there more than one way to express forgiveness?
- Who do you need to forgive right now?
- From whom do you need to ask forgiveness?

congregation connection

Pay close attention in worship to what you feel during the confession and forgiveness. What words stand out to you?

If your congregation doesn't have confession during this season, where in the liturgy do you hear words of forgiveness? During the peace, encounter each person as a beloved, forgiven child of God. Greet someone that you usually don't. Talk to your family about how that felt.



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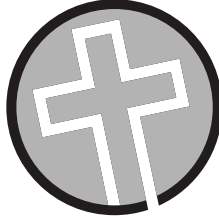


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Prayer:

God of boundless forgiveness, you know our hearts, hear our prayers and care about all that concerns us. You understand the burden we carry and how we want, more than anything, to know your forgiving love. Help us to remember that you always forgive and that you desire to extend that boundless forgiveness to us and through us. Help us to forgive as you do. Amen.



The story of the Prodigal Son that we spent time with in this session paints a picture of the long road that the younger son walked to come back home to find forgiveness and reconciliation. Find the longest road or path you can fit into a picture to post on social media. Make sure to use the hashtags **#ELCAYG2022** and **#boundlessforgiveness**.



Dismissal/blessing — Call and response:

- God's love is (place hand over heart) boundless.
- God's creation is (open arms wide) boundless.
- God's forgiveness is (cross wrists) boundless.
- God's invitation is (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched) boundless.
- God's promise is (make the sign of the cross on another's forehead or hand) boundless.



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UNIT 3 – SESSION TWO:

living God's boundless forgiveness

Overview for adult leaders:

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, “We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies.” (from “Loving Your Enemies” Martin Luther King Jr., *A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.*)

It does not take one a long time to figure out that forgiveness, while it may be hard, has an interesting way of bringing incredible good out of incredibly bad situations. Forgiveness feels good to the person offering it and the person receiving it. Holding onto hurt, pain, anger and grudges hardens our hearts, as it did for the elder brother in the Prodigal Son story. It's not easy, but God intends for us to live and feel the freedom that comes from both receiving and extending forgiveness. Together, we will ponder a pathway to sharing God's boundless forgiveness, even when doing so is hard.




If you are doing this session online see “suggested uses for this resource” on page 9 for ideas to be able to share videos effectively in a digital meeting.

suggested supply list

- An internet-connected device on which to show videos/play music
- Copies of the take-home sheet for each participant (available on page 59)
- Copies of closing prayer
- Poster paper
- Some old XL T-shirts, red ones if available. Have enough T-shirts to hand out one to every three to five participants. On the night before the session, ball up the T-shirts, dip them in water and keep them in the freezer until the session begins.
- Enough balloons for every participant

gather | building of your group

Warm-up:

 Have poster paper on the walls or butcher paper on a table as participants enter. Play music from the Gathering Spotify playlist (@elcagathering) in the background. Ask participants to write or draw about a feeling of anger, despair, suffering or pain that they are currently experiencing or recently have experienced. Allow their work to hang on the walls throughout the lesson.



Invitation:

I invite you to this space and this time with a daring vision to experience God’s boundless forgiveness.

Team building/ice-breaker:



Online game alternative - "One Word Story." Going around the digital circle, participants contribute one word apiece for a few rounds until the group has created a story. The leader can talk through the end result of the story as well as the creation along the way. Feel free to play this through a couple of times, processing what it felt like to have the story go in directions that participants might not have wanted or imagined.

Our ice-breaker today will be the frozen T-shirt challenge. This is a fun but difficult team challenge that will be used to illustrate the pain of a heartbreak. You will need to divide your group into teams of three to five people. Give each team a balled-up T-shirt that has been dipped in water and kept in a freezer overnight. Try to use old T-shirts that won't be missed should they be damaged in the game. Sizes XL or bigger are a better fit for the challenge. If available, use red shirts. A balled-up red shirt will look more like a heart.

GATHERING CONNECTION

“Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to get through this thing called life.” Born in Minneapolis in 1958, Prince was a chart-topping singer-songwriter for more than four decades. His music is celebrated the world over for its passionate lyrics and funky rock rhythms. Both onstage and off, Prince lived his life as an expression of love.

A passionate, compassionate, forgiving and indiscriminating love. Prince understood the challenges we all must face in “This Thing Called Life.” His music expressed that the best way to overcome life’s struggles was through the practice of love and forgiveness. By 1993, Prince had changed his stage name to a single, unpronounceable character that fans referred to as the “Love Symbol.”

In a 1997 interview Prince stated, “Compassion is an action word with no boundaries,” poetic truth that might have been found in a psalm. Prince’s life was a symbol of love; withholding forgiveness was never his brand. Prince passed away from this earthly life in 2016, but his music and message live on. Such art has the power to endure, to outlive the artist, and to go on for future generations to discover and inspire. Love has that same power, and forgiveness will never go out of style.

“We all have our problems, some big, some are small. Soon all of our problems will be taken by the cross.” —Prince, “The Cross”



Have a classic heartbreak song ready to play during the game. We suggest “I Will Survive” by Gloria Gaynor.

- **Today we are going to hear another story of God’s boundless forgiveness. A story where relationships are restored even after painful heartbreaks. Asking for forgiveness can be a challenge. Extending forgiveness can be even harder. In today’s challenge, we will be working together in teams.**
- After the group is divided into teams of three to five people, continue with the following instructions. **It’s time for the frozen T-shirt challenge. I’m going to give each team one balled-up T-shirt that has been frozen overnight. The T-shirt is representative of a heart. The object of the challenge is for the teams to break the heart, open up the T-shirt and try to pull the shirt over one of their teammates. The first team to wear their shirt will win the challenge. The teams cannot use tools, hot water or heaters to break their frozen shirts. Only their combined strength and abilities are allowed. Additionally, I will play a popular heartbreak song during the challenge. The game will be over at the end of the song. At that time, whichever team is closest to wearing their shirt will win. Furthermore, the challenge is to break the heart/shirt, not anyone or anything else. Let’s not cause any damage to people or property. Any questions? Ready? Go!**

Continue with a prayer (youth led/read):

Merciful Lord, thank you for your gift of forgiveness. Your only Son loved us enough to come to earth and experience the worst pain imaginable so we could be forgiven. Your mercy flows to us in spite of our faults and failure. Teach us to let that blessing of boundless forgiveness continue to flow through us and out into the world. Help us demonstrate your boundless forgiveness today.

word | learn about God’s word and connection to our lives



“I want you to know (head) all about Christ’s love (heart), although it is too wonderful to be measured. Then your lives (body) will be filled with all that God is (community).”

Our head:



Have a youth read Genesis 50:15-21 (CEV).

¹⁵After Jacob died, Joseph’s brothers said to each other, “What if Joseph still hates us and wants to get even with us for all the cruel things we did to him?”

¹⁶So they sent this message to Joseph: Before our father died, ¹⁷he told us, “You did some cruel and terrible things to Joseph, but you must ask him to forgive you.”

Now we ask you to please forgive the terrible things we did. After all, we serve the same God that your father worshiped.

When Joseph heard this, he started crying.

¹⁸Right then, Joseph’s brothers came and bowed down to the ground in front of him and said, “We are your slaves.”

¹⁹But Joseph told them, “Don’t be afraid! I have no right to change what God has decided. ²⁰You tried to harm me, but God made it turn out for the best, so that [God] could save all these people, as [God] is now doing. ²¹Don’t be afraid! I will take care of you and your children.” After Joseph said this, his brothers felt much better.

- **There’s a familiar saying, “Don’t get mad, get even,” that sums up the world’s philosophy of how to deal with someone who wrongs you. But in contrast to the world’s way, God urges a radical approach when we are wronged: we are to be kind and tenderhearted, forgiving one another just as God in Christ has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32).**
- **When Joseph’s brothers approached him, he wept. This shows his tender heart. Then, he reassured his brothers. Whereas the CEV translation we studied reads, “I have no right**

to change what has God decided,” in the New Revised Standard Version, Joseph asks, “Am I in the place of God?” (50:19). Even though Joseph was the second most powerful man on the face of the earth, he remembered that he was not in God’s place.

when you’re tempted to withhold forgiveness or to seek vengeance against someone who has wronged you: Am I following God’s will? Joseph was powerful in the world’s eyes, but he knew he was never big enough to take God’s place. How might we take our proper place with God?


Wondering questions (choose one or two):

- **What makes forgiveness so hard?**
- **Why is forgiveness important?**
- **Would you be able to forgive someone who hurt you as Joseph’s brothers hurt him? Why or why not?**

Our heart:




Being forgiven is great. Forgiving others is hard, but Jesus enables us to forgive.

 Option 1: Watch this video for inspiration *If you choose this option, we recommend skipping or abbreviating the body section (forgiveness balloon) to keep the lesson under 60 minutes. (Content warning: descriptions of violent crime and trauma).*

“Why Forgiveness Is Worth It,” TED Talk (15:53)
https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah_montana_the_real_risk_of_forgiveness_and_why_it_s_worth_it/transcript?language=en

Wondering questions:

- **What steps did Sarah use to get to a place of forgiveness?**
- **What was the essential question she needed to ask herself?**
- **Does Sarah’s journey to forgiveness look like one you could make? Why or why not?**

 Option 2:
Dig into the Bible story



Wondering questions:

- **What steps made it possible for Joseph to get to a place of forgiveness?**
- **Does Joseph’s journey to forgiveness look like one you could make? Why or why not?**
- **Joseph’s question is a good one to ask yourself**

Allow participants to come up with a list of ways that we cannot “be in God’s place.” Before closing out their brainstorming, be certain they’ve covered these key points.

- Be honest with God about our feelings. Speak the truth in love.
- Give it to God. Allow God to be the judge.
- Remain humble. Remember, you are not God.
- Don’t use your power to make the other person “pay” for what they did.

- **Joseph could have said, “I forgive you, now get out of my life.” Instead, he provided personally for his brothers and their families (50:21). His words of forgiveness proved themselves in his kind deeds long after the facts. Words are nothing if they aren’t backed up by action. If you say that you forgive someone but couldn’t care less what happens to that person, you haven’t really forgiven. A forgiving spirit shows itself in kind deeds.**

If participants are struggling with this, it can be good to note that it took time for Joseph to reconcile with his brothers. He provided for them, but he did not live with them. He remained in Pharaoh’s court and the brothers in the land apart from him (Genesis 47:1-12). It’s okay to keep our distance from those who have hurt us.

Our body:



“Forgiveness Balloons”:

- Hand out one balloon to each participant. Have them walk around the room reading and looking at the words and images of pain they drew at the beginning of the session. For each item they read, blow one breath into the balloon. When they have looked at all the papers, they should return to their seats without releasing any air from the balloon.



If meeting online, and youth don't have balloons, group leader can illustrate this activity with a balloon of their own.

- **The pain in our lives has been surrounding us all through our lesson. It may be hard to imagine being forgiving for some of these situations. But let's see if we can get to forgiveness by following Joseph's (or Sarah's, if you watched the video) example.**
- **Blow up your balloons about half full. At any point, as we go through each step, you can take one of three actions:**
 - 1. add air/pain to the balloon,**
 - 2. release air/pain from the balloon or**
 - 3. do nothing.**
- **There's no judgement here in your choices. These are your feelings. Let's see if this helps.**

Proceed by reading the steps below. If you watched the video, read only the title of the step and the additional boldface phrase(s). If you dug into Scripture, you can read additional, non-bold phrases. Pay attention to what your group may need to hear. It's OK to skip some phrases and choose others.

- Analyze your emotions: Ask yourself hard questions. Am I easily offended? Did this person intentionally try to hurt me? Was this an accident? Can I see the other person's perspective? What is the hurt I feel? Remember that it's OK to be angry when hurt and that naming the pain is an important part of healing.**
- Realize God has forgiven you: You can forgive someone without being OK with what happened. You can forgive someone without trusting that person for a very long time, or ever. Forgiveness is about letting go of hurt and pain. By keeping in mind how much God has forgiven us, we can be better equipped to find the freedom to forgive others.**
- Pray for yourself: Ask God for help in letting go of the pain. Forgiving people who have inflicted harm and pain on us is impossible without God's love and forgiveness working through us.**

- Pray for your offender: This might be really hard or feel awkward. Trust God to be the judge. Remember that God will work things out according to God's timing and plan. It's OK if God's timing says, "Not right now." Be authentic in prayer.**
- Depend on and trust in God: Ask yourself, Am I ready to forgive? Can I let the pain go? As we forgive others and rely on God, we learn to depend on and trust in God because God is the only one that will never let us down. God is the true provider for peace, joy and love. God is trustworthy. God will always be there for you.**

Close this activity by having the participants let go of their balloons. Fuller balloons will careen around the room; smaller balloons will deflate in place.

sending

reflect on what we have learned and ask questions

- **What happens when we hold onto our hurt and pain?**
- **How have you overcome hurt or negative feelings in your past? How long did it take?**
- **What advice would you give someone who is hurting?**
- Include your local group announcements here.
- Refer to the calendar/timeline on pages 76-81 in your Official Gathering Handbook for timely announcements.

Closing prayer (youth led/read):

Today was a hard lesson. Learning to forgive is hard, and I am proud of each of you for the work you have done. We're going to close our time with a prayer of forgiveness. If you are able, join me in reading this prayer out loud. If not, pray this silently or just sit back and listen.

(Make a copy of this prayer to give to participants, so they can pray with you.)

God of forgiveness: I bring to mind (name). I bring them before you. I feel hurt by them. Right now, I confess any negative feelings I have about them. Help me forgive the wrongs they have done toward me. Unbind me from any deliberate or unintentional things they have done that have caused me pain and from any grudges I may hold. In the best way that I know how, I forgive them. I release them to your boundless forgiveness. Thank you that, as I am praying now, you are freeing my inner self to live again, free from resentment, pain and bitterness, because God's power and work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Dismissal/blessing — Call and response:

Leader: ***God's love is ...***

Participants (place hand over heart): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's creation is ...***

Participants (open arms wide): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's forgiveness is...***

Participants (cross wrists): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's invitation is...***

Participants (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched): ***boundless***

Leader: ***God's promise is...***

Participants (cross on another's forehead or hand): ***boundless***

***Pass out the
take-home sheet!***

Take-home sheet for Unit 3 – Session two: **living God's boundless forgiveness**

We want you to find ways to share the boundlessness of God with your friends, family and congregation. What happened here today should be shared, and we hope that the lesson doesn't end here, that it continues in conversations on the car ride home, with families around the dinner table, at school tomorrow... that this multiplies and becomes boundless!

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said: "We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies." (from "Loving Your Enemies" Martin Luther King Jr., A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Share what you remember. Try to retell our story from today, Genesis 50:15-21, or look it up in your Bible app (we were using the CEV: Common English Version). Here is some additional Scripture to help support these themes:

- Luke 17:3-4: So be careful what you do. Correct any followers of mine who sin, and forgive the ones who say they are sorry. 4Even if one of them mistreats you seven times in one day and says, "I am sorry," you should still forgive that person.
- 1 John 1:9: But if we confess our sins to God, [God] can always be trusted to forgive us and take our sins away.

Wondering questions

(discuss these questions with someone at home):

- How did this passage help you understand God's boundless forgiveness?
- What happens when we hold onto our hurt and pain?
- How have you overcome hurt or negative feelings in your past? How long did it take?
- What advice would you give someone who is hurting?

congregation connection

Let your congregation know that your group is learning about God's boundless forgiveness.

Reach out to members of your church and invite them to share a personal story of forgiveness. Find a few willing people and invite them to attend your next youth meeting. Ask the members to share from the heart their personal stories of forgiveness. You may also ask them the wondering questions above. Ask any follow-up questions as well. Be sure to thank the people for sharing their stories.

With their consent, take a picture with the person who shared their story of forgiveness with you and post it to social media. Make sure to use the hashtags **#ELCAYG2022** and **#boundlessforgiveness**.



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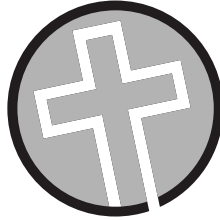


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Prayer

Merciful Lord, thank you for your gift of forgiveness. Your only Son loved us enough to come to earth and experience the worst pain imaginable so we could be forgiven. Your mercy flows to us in spite of our faults and failure. Teach us to let that blessing of boundless forgiveness continue to flow through us and out into the world. Help us demonstrate your boundless forgiveness. Amen.



Dismissal/blessing — call and response:

- God's love is (place hand over heart) boundless.
- God's creation is (open arms wide) boundless.
- God's forgiveness is (cross wrists) boundless.
- God's invitation is (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched) boundless.
- God's promise is (make the sign of the cross on another's forehead or hand) boundless.



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