2020 Youth Week of Prayer Readings

March 21-28

- **GLOBAL YOUTH DAY**
  March 21, 2020
- **HOMECOMING SABBATH**
  March 28, 2020

THE EMBRACE

FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

daily small group discussion questions included

General Conference Youth Ministries

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21 MARCH 2020

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#GYD20

GLOBAL YOUTH DAY

EDITORIAL

PAKO MOKGWANE

Associate Youth Director at the
World Church Headquarters

pakoedson
pakoedson
MokgwaneP@gc.adventist.org

We were created social beings. The thread of the desire to be cherished or to give love weaves the social circle of human beings. Relationships are critical in our social lives; inevitably everyone want some form of connection to others. In fact, we thrive because of relationships. The closer the link, the higher the expectation of loyalty from those in the relationship.

Ellen White asserts that "We sustain a loss when we neglect the privilege of associating together to strengthen and encourage one another in the Service of God (Mind, Character and Personality, Vol 2, p.627)." The cultivation of the social elements opens countless opportunities for gospel proclamation. Wasn't that the method of Jesus? He connected with people first before He bid them, "follow me!"

The Christian journey is punctuated by moments of joy and moments of sorrow; highs and lows. Some of the low moments include dips and brokenness in relationships that begs for reconciliation. When something uncomfortable happens in the relationship, whether it's between individuals or between individuals and the church/organization, it is always best to talk about it instead of allowing it to fester and become a sore, and manifests into a deeper crisis.

However, sometimes broken relationships are unavoidable.

It is often said, prevention is better than cure. In relationships, agreed-on ground rules help to mitigate possible challenges. Just as Christ reconciled us to Himself, we too should take the initiative to seek peace with everyone. It takes great spiritual maturity to do that. The power of love can subdue the ego and pride through Christ.

Furthermore, we should forgive others to receive mercy and grace from the Lord (Matthew 6:12). Who hasn't been hurt by the actions or words of another? Being hurt by someone, particularly someone you love and trust, can cause anger, sadness and confusion. However, choosing to forgive is a grace we must all learn. Forgiveness brings emotional and spiritual freedom. While it may not always be possible to reconcile with everyone, it is ALWAYS possible to forgive.

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Writer: Debbonnaire Kovacs

Editor: Pako Mokgwane
Project Coordinator: Maria Manderson
Senior Editorial Assistant: Kenia Reyes
Layout / Designer: Advent Press Ltd.
Maria Manderson
Reviewed by: Biblical Research Institute

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ABOUT THE WRITER

Debbonnaire Kovacs has been writing since she was a small child and sold her first story to Guide magazine (known in those days as Junior Guide) when she was eleven years old. When she was fourteen, she was "tricked" (when she missed Sabbath School because she was sick) into doing a mini sermon for a large youth convention and thought she would die! But she didn't, so she wrote a sermon herself for a youth Week of Prayer at Mount Vernon Academy when she was seventeen. She lived through that, too!

Today she is a full-time author and speaker who has published 19 books including the first, second, fifth, and sixth grade Bible textbooks used in Adventist schools in North America, and over 500 stories and articles, including lots of stories for Primary Treasure. She speaks at camp meetings, women's retreats, and other events, and is hardly ever afraid anymore. Praise God!

Mrs. Kovacs strongly encourages young people to follow their dreams, and not wait until they are grown up to do something God is calling them to do. Her greatest prayer is that everyone who reads her words will deepen their own walk with Jesus. Her website is www.debbonnaire.com.

She lives on a mini farm in Berea, KY, with milk goats, chickens, gardens, and orchards, and is also a fiber artisan who does spinning, weaving, lacemaking, and many other textile arts. Gaela's Gardens, which has a theme of forgiveness and reconciliation, is her first novel. It is available at CreateSpace.com, amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com. Also available for Kindle, Nook, or Kobo.

Try the 15-MINUTE Rule

For every 15 minutes

of preaching/teaching, include an energy-burning activity or game. Maybe the activity illustrates a point, or it could be completely random. A strategically placed activity might break your flow, but it greatly enhances a youth's ability to stay mentality engaged.

for activity ideas
youth.adventist.org

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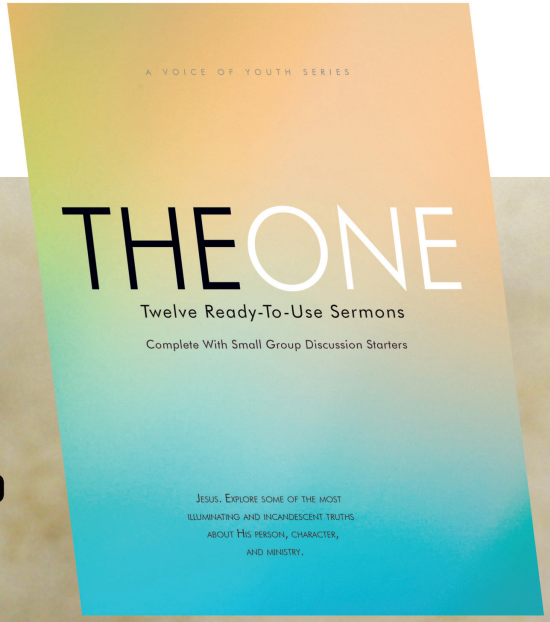

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START YOUR PLANNING NOW.

We know that leadership sometimes changes at the end of the year, but please, if you will no longer be the AY leader next year, do not let that stop you from planning for this special week. Start your planning, develop your target, get your team together, and make sure your pastor is a part of that team.

GLOBAL YOUTH DAY INFORMATION.

Get information on the Global Youth Day project. This day will be the launch of the Youth Week of Prayer. Please visit our website, youth.adventist.org, or contact your local youth director to find out how you can participate.

COMMIT YOUR PRAYER WARRIORS.

Get a team of adults together who will commit to praying for you and your ministry on a regular basis. Make sure this is a group with whom you can confidentially share both your personal and ministry prayer needs.

CHOOSE A THEME SONG.

Involve your youth choir. If your church does not have a youth choir, this is the perfect time to get one started. Pick out songs that you all like and which fit the topic of each evening, or choose a song for the entire week.

FORM A WEEK OF PRAYER DEVELOPMENT/REVIEW TEAM.

Depending on the size of your church, this group can be four to eight persons who will go through all eight readings with you. Include on your team only interested and committed young adults and youth ministry leaders (Pathfinder, Sabbath School, etc., your pastor/s); this is important because it gives ownership to the entire group, rather than just you and your assistant. Ask the group to commit to meeting for at least three weeks—at least one week for four lessons, and an extra week to wrap things up. Be sure to identify the goal and direction you want to go, preferably at the first meeting, and choose a young person to speak for each day.

INTEGRATE GLOBAL YOUTH DAY (GYD) INTO YOUR WEEK OF PRAYER PLANS.

Ideally, GYD should be a time to teach youth how to sacrificially give of themselves by providing opportunities in the church and the community. If you are a small youth group and do not have the resources to arrange a community-based GYD event, you can use this opportunity to break down denominational barriers in the area by partnering with and pooling resources and ideas with other youth groups from other churches in your area.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

WITH A SMALL OR LARGE GROUP

Journal Space. This book is designed to be filled with your thoughts. Use the space provided to record your reactions to the something you may hear in the sermon and the questions at the end of each day. It can also be used to write a prayer request or praise to God. Encourage participants to use it anyway they want. It's their journal! Tell them there are no rules, just guidelines. The important thing is to listen to the Lord and open their heart in response to His leading. Leaders, if you take the time to read the daily readings prayerfully and with the anticipation that God will reveal new things to you, you will be surprised at what will flow through your pen or pencil onto the pages of these journals.

Start a Prayer Journal. Nothing is greater for your personal spiritual growth than time spent in prayer. Your youth group will grow as you grow. Prayer journaling will help you encounter God in new and exciting ways. You will be able to "track" your walk with God as you go back and review answered prayers and see how He has led you step by step each day. New, fresh ideas will come to mind as you spend time in His presence journaling your prayers. You can find many ideas online on starting and keeping a prayer journal. Just go to www.google.com and type in the words "starting a prayer journal."

Daily Questions and Activities. Included with each sermon are questions, statements, and activities designed to get you thinking. Form small groups and discuss these questions and do the activities. Take a moment to really think about the point the question or activity is trying to get across. Listen to the Holy Spirit as He teaches you through Scripture. Encourage participants to record their thoughts in their journal.

Global Youth Day is set to launch the official week of the Youth Week of Prayer meetings. The theme for 2020 is CARING. Ahead of time, please contact your pastor or conference youth leader to see what projects your church will be involved in on this day, March 21. If you are planning a full day event, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) has an amazing activity, In Their Shoes, that can be done during your afternoon AY program.

In Their Shoes is an interactive poverty experience that takes teens on a 24-hour journey into the lives of teens from other countries around the world. Through the eyes of this new identity, they will begin to understand the challenges that millions of people in developing countries face every day. You'll discover what ADRA is doing to help and what the Bible has to say about living a life of Christian service. Download the files from our website at: youth.adventist.org/GYD (scroll to the bottom of the page).

Plan a

Homecoming Celebration

FORM A BARNABAS SUPPORT GROUP

The Bible says, "Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith. And many people were brought to the Lord" (Acts 11:24, NLT). Barnabas strongly believed in giving people a second chance. When Paul was converted the Church was afraid to just throw the door open and let him in. It was Barnabas who put his reputation on the line for the terrorist-turned-Christian, Paul. When Paul decided that he did not want to take John Mark on a journey with him, because he had let him down before, it was Barnabas who decided to give the young John Mark, who some thought of as a failure, a second chance. So strong was their disagreement that Barnabas and Paul separated for a while. Later on Paul saw the value in this young man, and even sent for him to help in his missionary journey.

Sometimes young people who make mistakes just need someone to believe in them. Form a Barnabas Support Group to encourage and help those who may have grown up in the church, but decided to leave. You don't need to know the reason. Just decide to pray, five minutes a day, every day for any young persons you know who have left the church and plan the best way to reach out to them. Find a way to share testimonies from Global Youth Day and Week of Prayer with them and invite them to come for the closing program.

Will you be a Barnabas today?

Will you encourage a young person to come back Home?

Help them find their way back home!

for ideas on planning your Homecoming program visit:

gcyouthministries.org

SENIOR YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER 2020

INTRODUCTION

A theologian named Miroslav Volf wrote a book called *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World.* In this book, he details his years-long struggle to learn what forgiveness and reconciliation really mean. He had been arrested and held for months by Communists, interrogated and mistreated for no just cause.

Could he—should he—forgive his abusers?

What would that forgiveness entail?

Clearly, true reconciliation, which requires the acceptance of both parties, was not possible.

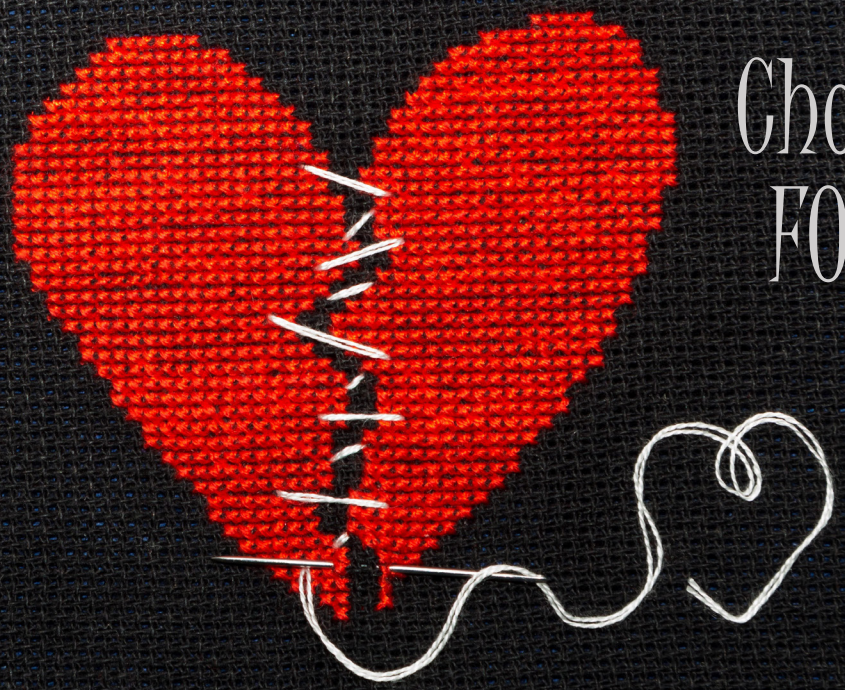
Dr. Volf has become famous for his work in reconciliation, writing several more books on this large, sometimes overwhelming subject. They are difficult, but very fruitful, reading. I once heard him speak. In his presentation, he described reconciliation as a three-step embrace:

1. **opened arms**
2. **the hug**
3. **letting go and walking on, changed.**

It is this, one of his simpler pictures, that we will use as a framework for this Youth and Young Adults Week of Prayer. Our theme passage will be 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. We will read different parts of this passage on different nights.

But life happens.
Life can hurt.

Choose to
FORGIVE.



Where have
you been
wounded?

YOUR BROKEN HEART CAN PROVE GOD'S GLORY TO THE WORLD

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:[a] The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5 16 -19)

SPECIAL ACTIVITY FOR THE WEEK

This will require some planning and is only a suggestion.

A similar project could be made with torn colored paper, or with purchased mosaic tiles, but glass or pottery broken by participants is especially meaningful.

1. In advance of the Week of Prayer, invite participants to bring pottery, china, or glass which is already broken or damaged, or which they are willing to sacrifice.
2. Create a safe space, lined with tarps or other materials, and make a ceremony of throwing and breaking the items.
3. Have each person think of the damaging, harmful, and painful things they have done, or that have been done to them, that broke up God's plan for a loving world. Think of how God is and will be recreating even these broken pieces into something beautiful.
4. Collect and sort the pieces by size and color. It is helpful if one or a small team of artists guide in this project throughout.
5. You will need a large board with a design outlined on it. You could put some kind of geometric design: a spiral, or a star of David, or some symbol that is meaningful to your group. Or you could have a simple picture outlined, such as a picture of Jesus and a child, or a picture of two people embracing each other in reconciliation.
6. You will also need the kind of grout or mortar material that tile is set into.
7. Over the course of the week, a section at a time, the group will fill one section of the design with a thick layer of grout, then press broken pieces to fill it in, creating a work of art you can be proud of for years to come. Be sure it is fully dried before being displayed.

THE PLAN

Music - Find songs your youth know or would like to learn, that express God's love, grace, and forgiveness. If you are blessed with a song writer, especially if it's one of your youth, see if you can have a special theme song written just for your group. A song that shows God's willingness to give Himself in Christ to bring us back into oneness with Himself and His love. You could work together on this song over the first couple of nights.

INTRODUCTION (READ AT THE FIRST MEETING):

Begin by saying the Lord's Prayer together.

Then open a discussion on the phrase, "Forgive us...as we forgive (others)." You may wish to take some form of notes to keep track of what people think about this subject and see what might change by the end of the Week of Prayer.

Try to imagine a scene long, long, long ago, before the universe was even created. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are communing together about creating other beings. They love each other so much. In fact, it's like loving one's own self. They are so united. They want other beings to love, too. We know we can't possibly imagine what this communion was like, but let's try to reverently imagine some of the things They might say. What do They want to create, and why?

Allow a few minutes for the youth to come up with some things they think God might say among Themself. (We know "Themself" is not a real word, but it's like what God is—one self with plurality to it!)

God has a problem, though. If these new beings are to truly love, they must have freedom of choice. Today we can make robots and computer programs say, "I love you," or perhaps even hug a person, but it's nothing like real love. *Do you think God could have created beings who could truly love if they couldn't choose not to?*

More discussion, only a few moments.

So, you have to have freedom in order to truly love, then? Would you agree? To tell someone that you love them, and to act in a loving way toward them, shows that you could have not loved them, or not acted lovingly.

God thought about this. Perhaps it was God the Spirit who said something like, "If We make people who can choose, sooner or later one will choose not to love."

Maybe God the Father said, "But We're creating the whole universe out of love. How could someone choose to try to break that?"

And God the Son might have asked, "If someone does, what will We do?"

That was the billion-dollar question. On that question, the fate of the whole universe rested. God had choices:

- Don't make a universe at all. Continue to exist as the Godhead in perfect love.
- Make a universe of beings who can only be "loving," but we've already figured out that's not real love.
- Make a universe that will immediately cease to exist if someone chooses to break away from love.
- Make a universe in which the person who chooses to break away from love will cease to exist.
- Or...God can figure out a way to heal the universe if it's broken by un-love.

That's what They did. God the Son might have said something like, "If someone breaks the universe that's made out of love, then I will throw Myself across that tear and I will close the gap for a while so that those who want to cross back into the universe of love can cross on Me. Then We will close the gap and the universe will be whole again."

There were still some problems with this idea.

First, it would mean that all of God's beloved children who refused to come across the body of the Son would die when the tear in the universe was closed. This made God weep just to think of it! Second, how could They heal those who did come across so that they didn't just tear the universe again?

Third, and worst of all, in order to throw Himself across that gap, the Son would have to go down into the created universe and live as a created being. And that meant that when He threw His body across the break in love, it would kill Him! How could God die? And how could the other two-thirds of the Godhead continue without Him?

There was no solution to the first painful dilemma. If God created people who could love, they would have to also be able to refuse to love. If they did that, they would never be happy in a universe made of love, so they would have to be allowed to die forever by their refusal to join God's loving family.

The third painful problem, They decided, is the one They would accept. God would love Their children so much that dying for them would be an acceptable choice. They were willing.

The second problem—how to heal those who are sinners but do want to be healed and live in God's recreated universe of love—is what we will study in this Week of Prayer. God chose to forgive and to reconcile the broken world to Himself—before there was any world to break! Imagine that!

LESSON 1

SENIOR YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER 2020

FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

God chose to forgive those who sinned against the universe of love. Most of us have some idea of what forgiveness means, though humans tend to confuse it with excusing. We talked about it a while ago and we will clarify our concepts over the course of this week. But what does reconciliation mean?

The word reconcile means to bring back together. For example, if you have money in a bank, and the amount the bank thinks you have and the amount you think you have are not the same, you have a problem! Somebody made a mistake. Usually it's not the bank, but it might be. It's probably you. Or it might even be both. You and someone from the bank will have to go over your records to reconcile them; that is, to make them agree again. When you figure out the mistake, it might just be a math mistake. If it's a real money mistake, one of you will owe the other the amount to make the accounts agree again.

Sin can be like that. If you steal something, you must give it back, and if it's not in the same condition it was when you stole it, you might have to pay extra, too. Now the person's possessions are restored. But his or her heart might not be. Have any of you had something stolen? Allow answers. Did you get back what was stolen? How did you feel? Did you immediately trust the person who stole it? That's not so easy, is it? It might not even be wise.

Full reconciliation, the kind God is after, requires more. In order for someone who sins and someone who is sinned against to become reconciled, there are three steps (and they are not easy and can sometimes take a long time!)

Ask for two volunteers who know each other well—or choose people in advance. They must be willing to hug in front of the class. You could use two adults if it's better for your circumstances.

What's a hug?

We all know what that is, right?

Volunteers show us a hug. Great!

Now, let's try to break down the steps.

Take a few moments to show that a hug usually begins with one person opening their arms. That's step one. When the other person also opens their arms and the two embrace, that's step two. And the third step is to complete the hug, let go, open arms again, and walk on. We don't usually think of that last step as being part of the hug, but it is, and it's important.

Let's look at 1 John 1:9. Many of you may know this verse by heart. *If anyone does, let them say it.*

Notice the last part: God forgives and cleanses of all unrighteousness. That's how God can reconcile us—bring us back—to Himself. We can't do that part. But we can cooperate with it. We can choose to forgive.

Offering forgiveness is like opening your arms. The other person might or might not accept and hug you back. If they don't, full reconciliation can't happen, but you can still forgive, and you will be able to move on. The goal is for both people to be healed and to move on, transformed by God's grace. We're going to learn a lot about this in the coming week. Right now, we're going to do some role plays that might bring up more questions than answers, and that's okay.

Everyone break away into pairs (two persons). I'll give each of you a mini-situation on paper. In each pair, take turns acting out your feelings and actions if the other person did what is on your piece of paper. You may choose to act out forgiving or unforgiving words or actions, but no actual unkindness is allowed. If you think you really would be unkind or angry, you may tell the other person about it and discuss it.

You might also share quick stories of a time when something really happened to you and you did or didn't forgive. **But first let me say something very important.** I know there are probably people in this room who have had really terrible things happen to them. Don't bring those up tonight. If you have something you need to talk to someone about, come and talk to me after class and I will help you find a godly person you can trust and talk to.

You have six minutes for these role plays. I'll let you know when three minutes pass and it's the other person's turn.

ROLE PLAYS

Put the following mini-situations on small cards or slips of paper.

Make as many copies as you need and/or add others that fit your group better.

You could also put them all on the board and let people choose. An advantage is that all can discuss the variations among escalating actions. Keep the cards or list because you will look at them again tomorrow night.

1. **Someone accidentally trips you.**

2. **Someone deliberately trips you.**

3. **Someone hits you.**

4. **Someone beats you up.**

5. **Someone lies to you.**

6. **Someone laughs at you**

7. **Someone calls you names**

8. **Someone lies about you to others.**

9. **Someone hurts someone else you love.**

10. **Someone steals something of great value.**

11. **Someone steals something of little value.**

12. **Someone borrows something without asking but returns it without damage.**

13. **Someone asks to borrow something of yours and damages it.**

14. **Someone borrows something of yours without asking and damages it.**

15. **Someone hurts a child or other vulnerable person you love.**

16. **Someone steals something that has little physical value but means a lot to you.**

17. **Someone makes fun of something you already feel sensitive about.**

18. **Someone makes fun of you because you are a Christian.**

19. **Someone threatens you because you are a Christian.**

20. **Someone harms you because you are a Christian.**

NOTE: COPY THIS PAGE BEFORE CUTTING THE ACTIVITY STRIPS

SPECIAL ACTIVITY

We have a special art project we are going to work on together all week. Those of you who were able to be a part of breaking up all this glass and pottery already know something about it. Tonight, we will choose some pieces and begin to fill in our design. ***You may either try to find pieces of the particular item you broke, or you may choose other pieces. Work together to decide on color and design. Take your time working out ways for pieces to fit well together and make the design beautiful.***

While we are working, let's think about the broken places in our lives, and how God is working to make them into something beautiful, even though they will never be what they once were.

CLOSING

We don't know how many worlds God made before He made this one, but Mrs. White said she visited some, so we know they're there. [Early Writings 39, for example.] But this is the one where the very first people God put on the planet decided to turn away from love.

Let's look at two places in the Bible. First, let's look at Genesis 3:6-8. Have someone read.

What has happened here?
Most youth should know the basic story of the Creation and Fall. Help those who are unfamiliar to understand and spend extra time in more of Genesis 3 if necessary, because this is foundational.

Now let's read verse 15.
Discuss what this promise means.
The Godhead knew that the promise They had made must now be put into action. From that point, in heaven's records, it was as if Jesus had already come and died for us. Let's read Revelation 13:8. Discuss the meaning of "Lamb slain before the foundation of the world."

As Adventists, in our *Fundamental Belief #9, we put it like this:*

> *In Christ's life of perfect obedience to God's will, His suffering, death, and resurrection, God provided the only means of atonement for human sin, so that those who by faith accept this atonement may have eternal life, and the whole creation*

may better understand the infinite and holy love of the Creator. This perfect atonement vindicates the righteousness of God's law and the graciousness of His character; for it both condemns our sin and provides for our forgiveness. The death of Christ is substitutionary and expiatory, reconciling and transforming. The bodily resurrection of Christ proclaims God's triumph over the forces of evil, and for those who accept the atonement assures their final victory over sin and death. It declares the Lordship of Jesus Christ, before whom every knee in heaven and on earth will bow. (Gen. 3:15; Ps. 22:1; Isa. 53; John 3:16; 14:30; Rom. 1:4; 3:25; 4:25; 8:3, 4; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4, 20-22; 2 Cor. 5:14, 15, 19-21; Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 2:15; 1 Peter 2:21, 22; 1 John 2:2; 4:10.)

And finally, let's read **2 Corinthians 5:17, 18.** This will be our main theme passage all week. God—all of God, the whole threefold Godhead—was here, in Christ, giving Their all to try to bring every person in the world back into agreement with Himself and the universe that was originally created out of love.

Ask people to silently hold in their hearts individuals they need to forgive or ask forgiveness of. You could gather around your begun art project for prayer if you like. Thank God for His immense grace and love and forgiveness for each one. Pray for each person to be able to give and receive forgiveness and to be reconciled to themselves, to others, and to God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What does Jesus mean?
2. What is forgiving? How do you do it? Is it easy or hard, and why?
3. Discuss the different words some versions of this prayer use. Some say "debts" and "debtors." Some say "trespasses" and "those who trespass against us." Some say "sins" and "those who sin against us." Discuss these variations and their baggage, emphasizing words used in your own language and region.

LESSON 2

SENIOR YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER 2020

ARMS WIDE OPEN

Introduction for Leaders

Tonight, we will focus on the first part of the embrace of reconciliation offered by God. There is some popular imagery right now which you can find on the internet if you have access, in which the general idea is that Jesus says, "I love you this much," then spreads out his arms (on the cross) and dies. If you can find one of these images, it would be good for tonight; if not, any good crucifixion painting will work. You will also need enough paper and writing instruments for each person. Envelopes would be good if possible but are not necessary. If it is possible and safe, prepare a place where some paper can be burned to ash.

Music

Find songs your youth know or would like to learn, that focus on the crucifixion and what it means to us. If you have been blessed with a personal theme song, be sure to use it every night.

Nightly special music suggestions (please make sure):
Matthew West: Forgiven https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1Lu5udXEZI
Crowder: Forgiven https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_ZWEO36jok
Amazing Grace (My Chains are Gone) by Chris Tomlin

Introduction for Youth

Do you remember our image of the three-part embrace of reconciliation? Allow answers. Tonight, we are going to think about that first step, forgiveness, which is offered first of all from God, because no human being could ever forgive, or even love at all, if God didn't do it first.

First, let's talk about something important. Forgiveness is not excusing!

Sometimes someone does something that annoys or inconveniences you, but it's a complete accident. Can you think of any examples? Allow answers. Possible examples would be accidentally running into or tripping someone, accidentally damaging something even though the person was being careful or saying something the person did not know would hurt another's feelings.

These things are not sins; they are innocent mistakes. When you bump into someone and say, "Oh, sorry!" they may say, "That's okay." These actions do not require forgiveness.

Do you remember the role plays we did last night? Let's look at that list again and try to determine which of these things actually require forgiveness. Go through the list or cards and separate them into groups of honest mistakes and sins. Some could possibly be either, depending on the intentions of the person.

But what if an honest mistake actually hurts you? Once, a little boy ran out in front of a car. The woman driving the car hit him (which was not her fault) but then, because she was an inexperienced driver, she stopped while the car was still on his leg. She froze and couldn't move, even though everyone was yelling at her, "Back up! Back up!" Another person had to get in and move the car. This part of the accident was both people's fault—it would not have happened if the boy had not run out in front of the car, but also, the woman should have kept her wits enough to back up quickly when told to. Do you think either person needs to

be forgiven? Discuss. People may have differing opinions, and that's okay.

What if the woman had been drinking? What if she had been talking on her cell phone? Let the youth decide at what point this mistake, which broke the boy's leg, would have become sinful.

One important point is that whether it was a sin or not, there would still be consequences. The boy still had to have a cast on his broken leg for weeks. The woman got a ticket. If she had been drunk or had deliberately done it, she might have gone to prison.

When it's a sin, when there is no excuse for it, when it is not okay, and no one can say it is, that's when we need forgiveness. And that's when it can be very difficult to forgive! Many people who have been really hurt think they cannot forgive because they think forgiving means excusing. They think it means the person is off the hook and doesn't have to face any consequences. This is not true. But consequences can only really change a person when he or she realizes that they are forgiven and can do better.
It's still hard, though. Forgiveness doesn't come from the human heart. The truth is, only God can set forgiveness in motion. Let's look at two Bible verses which help us to see this. Have one person look up Genesis 39:9 and another look up Psalm 51:4. Read each and discuss. In each case, the sin would be against another person or people, yet in one sense the sins were ultimately against God.

You see, since God made the universe out of His great love, then everything we do that goes against that love, no matter who else it hurts, hurts God most. Thank God, by His grace, He is the ultimate source of forgiveness, too. When God forgives, He chooses to set the person free from their guilt. But, because this is not an excuse, He also says not to do it again! He usually does not set the person free from the consequences of their actions. And He is the one who gives the power to change so that is possible. We will talk more about these concepts every night this week.

Open Arms

Offering forgiveness to someone who has sinned is like opening your arms to offer a hug. But not everyone accepts. Let's try something. Everybody open-up your arms as if you are going to hug somebody, but then just freeze like that. Wait a few seconds. How does it feel, just waiting for a hug that might never happen? You may put your arms down now.

Have you ever offered a hug to somebody who didn't want it? It's always a good idea to ask first, especially if it's someone you don't know well, and it's fine to say, "No thank you, not right now." Everybody has moments when they don't feel like being touched, and some people like being touched more or less than other people do.

That's all perfectly fine. But what if it's someone you love, and they never let you hug them? Over time, that can make you feel sad, can't it?

Now imagine that the hug represents forgiveness. Somebody does something hurtful to you, and you offer forgiveness, but they don't want it. Maybe they even insist they didn't do anything wrong. How does that feel?

That's the situation Jesus found Himself in.

THE STORY FOR TONIGHT

Throughout the Old Testament, God offered His love, grace, and forgiveness, even though Jesus had not come to earth yet to officially throw Himself across the "tear" that rebellion had made. Finally, after thousands of years, Jesus came to earth. How, exactly, did He obtain forgiveness for us? For our story tonight, let's read Matthew 26:36-44. One person or several people may read this passage.

Try to imagine Jesus all alone in the Garden of Gethsemane that dark night. If you ever think that Jesus didn't get frightened as you or I do, you can see from this story in the Bible that it's not true. Over and over, He tells God, "I don't want to die! Please take this away from me!"

It isn't a sin to be afraid. It's a sin to let fear win. Jesus didn't do that, not even for a minute. Every time, He said, "Not what I want, but what You want."

Does that mean God wanted Jesus to die? Absolutely not! But the Godhead remembered that promise They made way, way back in the beginning—even before the beginning. The Son offered to throw Himself into the breach, to sacrifice Himself so that people could get free of the destruction. Now, here He was, tired and anxious, but He was still holding with all His heart to His promise.

And what was the worst thing? He knew many people wouldn't even care! Can you imagine offering up your whole self to live for people, and then offering your life to die for them, and they refuse you? I wonder how much harder it made that night for Jesus when He remembered Judas, His dear friend, turning away from Him, betraying Him to the soldiers.

Here comes Judas now, with the soldiers. Look at verses 48 and 49. How that kiss must have broken Jesus' heart. He had tried so hard to save Judas, to make him a true friend. But no, Judas refused. The soldiers arrest Jesus and take him away to a trial that is a mockery of justice, with liars paid to testify. He is sent from Pilate to Herod and back to Pilate. He is beaten and abused. Even His beloved friends all run away. And finally, after being tormented all night and part of the next day, Jesus is nailed to a cross. Someone please look up Luke 23:34. What did Jesus say, even while the men were hammering nails through His hands and feet? Unbelievable! We don't know whether even one of those men accepted that offered forgiveness, though there is some slight evidence that the Centurion might have. But Jesus offered forgiveness anyway.

On this cross, something happened that the wisest genius in the history of the world could never understand, let alone explain. We know Jesus died. We know He died for us, and that in so doing, He brought forgiveness and the promise of reconciliation and restoration to all who would accept it. But there was more there than we can see. Somehow, on that cross, Jesus began to pull back together the torn edges of the universe God meant to be only a place of love, which Satan, and all of us, have torn and bruised and broken apart. Somehow, the Bible says, Jesus became our sin!

Have someone look up and read the last verse of our theme passage: 2 Corinthians 5:21. This verse says Jesus *became our sin so we could become His righteousness!* That's amazing!

It's impossible! Fortunately, with God impossible things are possible.

But first, there's a necessary step that is missing.

Let's look at this picture, which is an artist's imagination of that scene. Hold your painting so all may see. *Give a few moments for it to sink in.*

Do you see what position Jesus' arms are in?

> ***They are outstretched as if to hug someone. They are outstretched to embrace you! And me! And the whole world! That day on the cross, Jesus provided enough forgiveness for every single human who ever lived or ever will live to be delivered, changed, and restored into God's universe of perfect love. Every single one.***

And many, many have said "No."

Can you imagine that?

> ***No, we can't, not really. For 2,000 years, it's as if Jesus has stood, up in heaven where He is now, with His arms wide outstretched, saying, "Come, let me hug you! I love you! I want to forgive you and reconcile with you and restore you. Please come!"***

Have you said yes?

> ***It may be necessary to take some time now, if some are ready to give themselves to Jesus, before going on with the activity.***
>
> ***Place the crucifixion painting where it can be seen front and center for the rest of the evening.***

ACTIVITY

We are now going to do something alone, each by ourselves.

1. You may move so you are farther from others if you wish.
2. Depending on your circumstances, you might even go outside.
3. Pass out paper and writing instruments.
   - I invite each of you to write a letter to Jesus.
   - Write down the things you have done that Jesus died for, so that you could be forgiven and restored.
   - Then write how you feel toward Jesus for taking away those sins and forgiving you.
   - Ask Him any questions you want to and ask Him to transform you completely.
   - Ask Him to help you see how they are actions against the love the universe was made from, because if you can see that, it's easier to choose to do differently.

Afterward we may share or not, as we wish.

Definitely do not share anything that is private, especially if it involves another person, but you may, if you like, share general things like, "I sometimes use my tongue in hurtful ways, but God has forgiven me and I am cooperating with Him to change." Now and then, while you are writing, look up at our painting and remember that Jesus does not condemn you no matter what you have done, but is holding out His arms to you

all the time. Tell Him how you feel about Him, thank Him, and when your letter is finished, fold it up and seal it in an envelope [if applicable.]

Allow ten minutes or so for the letter writing.

Gauge your class to determine if more time or more personal prayer and help is needed at this time. If you have a safe place to do so, allow the youth to burn their letters, burning up the sins Jesus has forgiven, and sending their prayers and thanks to Him on the smoke, just as the incense in the sanctuary represented the prayers of the people.

SPECIAL ACTIVITY

Determine how much time to spend by how many people you have, how much time is at your disposal, and try to have it come out so that you complete it on the final night.

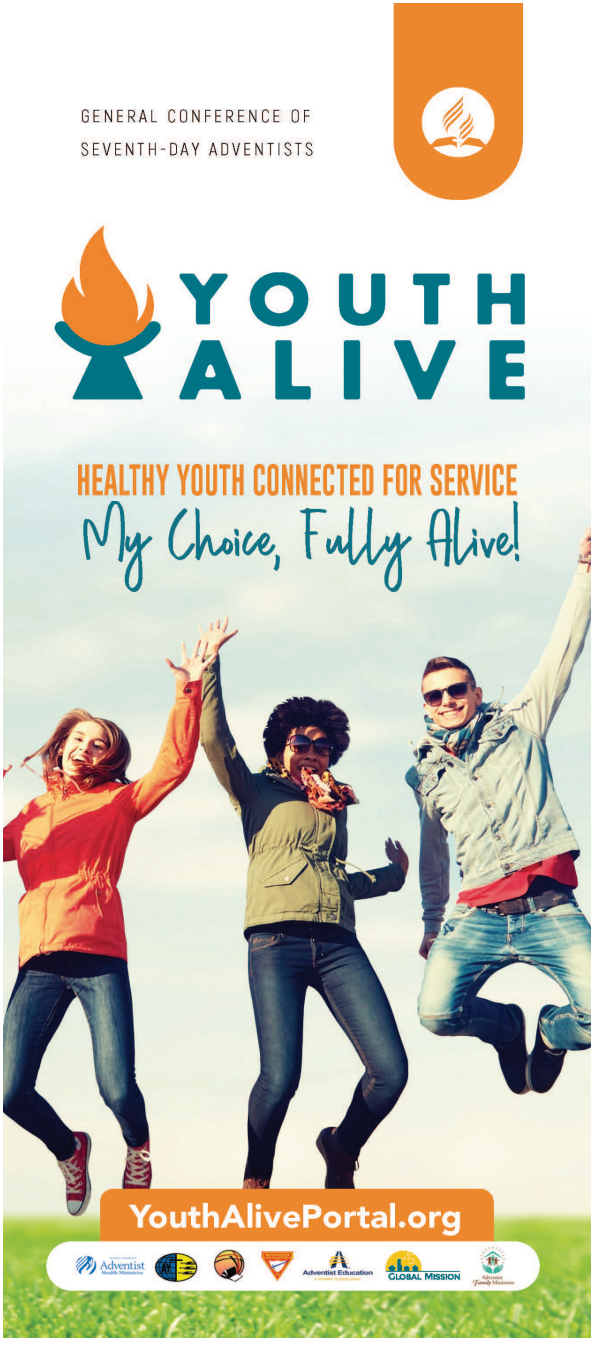
As we continue with our special art project, think about the fact that no amount of forgiveness or reconciliation can undo what already happened and make the sin never happen. Something was broken, or at least dented.

Forgiveness heals but does not always totally restore.

However, God can and does create something new and beautiful from every life turned over to Him, and from every relationship that is healed by forgiveness and reconciliation.

CLOSING

Sing your theme song or a song about forgiveness such as "Just as I Am without One Plea," and then pray together, perhaps said in a circle holding hands.



LESSON 3

SENIOR YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER 2020

THE EMBRACE

Introduction for Leaders
Tonight, and tomorrow we will focus on the second part of the embrace of reconciliation offered by God: when someone accepts forgiveness and returns the embrace. This is more than just forgiveness; it is the beginning of true reconciliation. It is our part of God's mission to restore the universe to love.

If you can, find a painting showing Jesus looking at Peter in the courtyard. There are many available, especially online if you have access.

Music
Find songs your youth know or would like to learn, that focus on forgiveness, restoration, and unity with God. If you have been blessed with a personal theme song, be sure to use it every night.

Introduction for Youth
For two nights, we have talked about what forgiveness is and what it is not—can anyone tell me what it is not? We hope that by now, youth can automatically respond, "It is not excusing!" We have talked about how it began with God and will end with God. We have used the imagery of an embrace. Show me the first step. We hope they open their arms like a hug. Do you remember what the second step was? Accepting the embrace, sharing a completed hug of two people. Some may demonstrate if they wish.

We have seen that on the cross, Jesus opened His arms of love and offered forgiveness and restoration to how many people? All! That's right. Every single one. Not all say yes. But some do. Tonight, we will

consider some stories of people who accepted Jesus' forgiveness and what happened.

THE STORY FOR TONIGHT

So, having made that promise about what to do if someone chose to act against love, we know that God created the world. How do you think the Godhead felt when They were making it? Allow a few moments of discussion.
And what happened next? Read Genesis 3:6-8 again if you think it is necessary in your group.
In the Bible it seems as if it happened almost immediately! Adam and Eve decided maybe the serpent (which was really Satan in disguise) knew more about living a good life than God did. Do you think it "broke love" when they ate that fruit? How was that an unloving act? They shared, didn't they? Allow some answers, and if necessary, help youth to see that it was an act of lack of trust in God, which was unloving.

Then what happened?
Have someone read verse 9.

That's God opening His arms and offering forgiveness, isn't it? Did Adam and Eve say yes? Allow answers. It is clear by the next chapters that they did. They were very sorry, and they will be in heaven. In fact, Mrs. White saw a vision of them closing that embrace with God when we all get to heaven.

But did God excuse Adam and Eve's sin? Did He save them from the consequences? What were some of the consequences? Allow answers. Guide them to see that we are still living with those consequences today, besides adding more of our own.
So, the world slides headlong into the darkness of sin and despair. The very first son kills his own brother. In only a few generations, people are already warring with each other and worshiping themselves and demons instead of God.
Over all the centuries of the Old Testament, people in general do more rebelling than loving, although there are always some faithful ones in every generation.

Finally, the time comes in God's heavenly plan for the Son to be born as a human being. Let's use our imagination again to examine some stories during Jesus' life when He offered forgiveness. Can anyone think of a time when Jesus offered someone forgiveness? If they have suggestions, spend a little time on those, because it's great if they are thinking on their own about this. But they might feel "on the spot" and if so, offer the stories suggested here.

Open your Bibles to John 4 and skim for a few seconds.

Do you recognize this story?

Let them answer, or... This is the woman at the well.

Look at verses 17 and 18. Has this woman been living a pure life? Clearly not! And yet it is also clear that she is a seeker of better things, and Jesus tells her something He has told no one else. Look in verse 26 to see what it is.

Can you find the word "forgiveness" in this story?

No.

- How do we know that Jesus offered her forgiveness?
- Did she say yes?
- Look at verses 28-30.

What did she do? And what was the result?

A whole town came to a knowledge of Christ because this woman accepted Jesus' offer of forgiveness and new life!

1. ***Now let's look at the story of another woman, also in the gospel of John. Turn ahead to chapter 8, verses 3 and 4. Let someone read. Use your imagination to set up the scene. Who is there?***
2. ***Let the youth describe the scene and characters as they imagine it. Who needs forgiveness here?***
3. ***Help them see that not only the woman, but also the man she was with, who apparently is not present, as well as the Pharisees who are being harsh and judgmental, publicly humiliating and shaming this woman.***
4. ***What does Jesus do? Take another minute looking through the rest of the story, letting the youth give their insights.***
5. ***Now look at verse 11. Have someone read.***

There it is. Still no literal word "forgive," but "I do not condemn you" means "I forgive you."

Again, forgiving is not excusing! Jesus doesn't just say, "Oh, that's all right." It wasn't all right, was it, what she did? He says, "Don't go around feeling shameful—that won't help—but don't do it again!" How do you suppose her life changed after that?

Let's look at one more story of Jesus offering forgiveness. We mentioned it a little, in passing, last night.

Important note: If you have been using stories suggested by your youth, be sure to include this one if they do not.

For three-and-a-half years, Jesus walked the earth as a man, with all the weaknesses like getting tired or hungry, but with no sin. In other words, He lived in perfect harmony with the love of God that created the universe originally. He loved everybody, all the time, no matter how they acted, and no matter whether they loved Him back. He rebuked when necessary and healed when He could and taught everyone who would listen.
In the story we will read He's facing the end of His time here on earth. It's Passover, and He's having the meal with His disciples, and He knows it will be His last, though they don't.

Let's read John 13:1-5. Whose feet does Jesus wash? Did He wash Judas' feet? How can you tell?

For this story, we have additional light given to Ellen White. This is from *The Desire of Ages, p. 645.* Read the following, and then look up into the eyes of your class for a moment, letting it sink in.

> *Jesus hungered for [Judas'] soul... His heart was crying, "How can I give thee up?" The constraining power of that love was felt by Judas. When the Savior's hands were bathing those soiled feet, and wiping them with the towel, the heart of Judas thrilled through and through with the impulse then and there to confess his sin. But he would not humble himself. He hardened his heart against repentance.*

Could there be anything more heartbreaking?

Jesus opened His arms, offering forgiveness, but Judas wouldn't take it. He went on to betray his Lord to shame and death. But did you know someone else betrayed Jesus that night?

Let's read Luke 22:54-60. What happened here?

Allow some discussion and retelling of the story. Was Judas' betrayal of Jesus any worse than Peter's? Both turned against Him when it came down to it, didn't they?

Now, we're going to compare and contrast these two stories. **Look at verse 48.** When Judas betrayed Him, Jesus spoke to him, and knowing Jesus, we know He looked at him with love. Judas could still have repented at that point. But he didn't. What did he do?

Now look at verse 61. Luke is the only gospel writer who gives this detail. Jesus was on the porch or balcony, involved in the false trial that would end His life. He was not in a position to speak to Peter. But He looked at him, just as He had looked at Judas earlier.

Show your painting if you have found one.

So, let's list some things that are the same about the two stories. Allow answers. Now let's see what is different. **Someone please read verse 62.**

What is different about Peter's story? Allow answers.

This is very important! Jesus loved both disciples. He reached out to both. He warned both. He tried to regain the love of both. When He sent a look of love and sorrow to Peter, Peter looked back!

What did Peter do? Why?

Peter closed the embrace, didn't he? He couldn't really hug Jesus, not then, and the truth is, he didn't feel forgiven, not yet. There's another piece to this story.

Turn in your Bibles to John 21:4-7. Have someone read.

Peter couldn't hug Jesus in Pilate's courtyard, but he wants to now! He still feels so sorry and ashamed about what he did. He wants to tell Jesus again how sorry he is and be sure that Jesus forgives him.

Let's read verses 15-17 together.

These verses show Jesus and Peter closing the embrace of reconciliation, whether they physically hugged or not.

Peter sinned.

Jesus forgave.

Peter accepted forgiveness.

Now, Jesus has some instructions for how Peter is to live in the future to keep from betraying the Lord again. Remember 1 John 1:9?

Jesus doesn't just want to forgive Peter—He wants to cleanse him of all unrighteousness.

We know that Peter became a great leader in the early church, and that because he had fallen and been restored himself, he was very tender and encouraging with others who fell and needed to be forgiven and reconciled.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Make and decorate some posters you can put up at school, at church, or wherever you think they might be helpful.

The posters could say, **"Forgiveness cost Jesus everything. It's free to you."**

If you have better ideas for the poster, you can make them any way you like. You could also draw Jesus and/or other people with their arms open wide.

SPECIAL ACTIVITY

Spend a few more minutes filling in another part of your design, talking as you do about the ways God makes something new and beautiful out of things that have been broken and torn.

Tonight, you may wish to especially note how betrayal of any kind breaks things and how trust can be restored.

CLOSING

Close with your theme song and with a prayer.

Ask forgiveness from God for each person's sins, and also ask for a forgiving spirit.

Allow a silent time for each to ask forgiveness for their own sins.

LESSON 4

SENIOR YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER 2020

A HUMAN EMBRACE

Introduction for Leaders

In God's great plan to reconcile the world to Himself, He first had to offer forgiveness. Humans could never have done that by themselves. So, our first step is to accept God's forgiveness, and the second is offering it to others. For this night, we will focus on verses 18-20 of our theme passage in 2 Corinthians 5. We will consider the "ministry of reconciliation" God has committed to us and study some stories of people who have offered forgiveness to others, even when it seems the other may never accept the forgiveness and close the embrace.

Music

Find songs your youth know or would like to learn, that focus on forgiveness and unity. If you have been blessed with a personal theme song, be sure to use it every night.

Introduction for Youth

For three nights, we've been talking about forgiveness. Last night we learned some of the ways Jesus brought forgiveness to the earth while He was here. When He left, He gave us the commission of carrying on His work. Paul talks about that in our theme passage. Will someone please read 2 Corinthians 5:18?

In the second half of this verse, Paul names the ministry Jesus gave us to do after He left. What is it?

Now read verse 19. This verse has two parts. You may wish to have a scribe write the following points on the board.

First, what did God do?

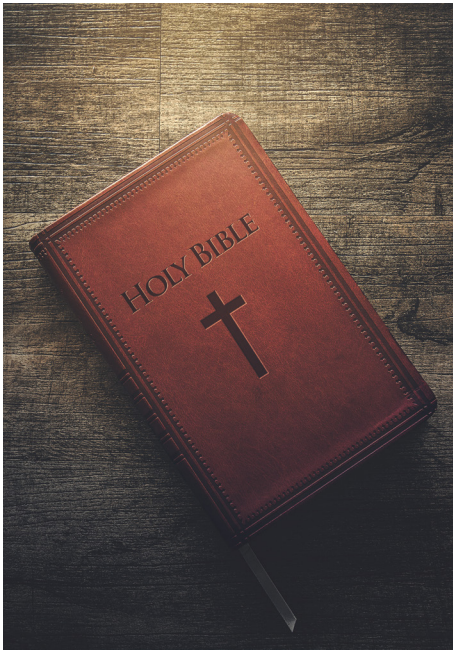
Right—He came to earth in Christ, to reconcile whom to Himself? The whole world! Exactly.

The next phrase describes just what that means. How does God reconcile people to Himself? "Not counting their trespasses against them" (NASB)—you may compare versions in your group.

Then, the second part is what God gave us to do. What do you think it means that God has "committed to us the word of reconciliation" (NASB)?

Allow a few moments to discuss these things.

This is still the first part of our embrace of reconciliation, right? First, we talked about God opening His arms, because forgiveness can only come from the Creator, and now we are going to talk about people opening their arms to offer forgiveness to others.



THE STORY FOR TONIGHT

There is a very good example of someone who offered forgiveness early in the Old Testament. Who can tell us a quick overview of the story of Joseph? Help, if necessary, to cover the basics of Joseph's brothers' jealousy, their sale of him into slavery, and the fact that God was with him and raised him to Prime Minister of Egypt and Minister in charge of famine management, and that his brothers had to come bowing before him for grain in the famine but did not recognize him.

Everyone turn to Genesis 45. What happens in the first three verses? How do you think the brothers felt when this mighty Egyptian official declared himself to be their lost brother, Joseph? Why?

Allow answers. Have them try to put themselves in the brothers' places, and in Joseph's place.

If you had been Joseph, and your brothers sold you as a slave to [name a nearby country], how would you be tempted to treat them?

Allow answers.

Now, let's read what really happened.

One or several could read verses 4 through 8.

Why was Joseph able to be so forgiving?

Look at verses 7 and 8. Joseph gives the glory to God. Do you think that when he was in prison, Joseph thought this was God's plan for his life? We can be sure that it certainly was not God's plan for Joseph's brothers to be so hateful, or to sell Joseph as a slave. God could have gotten Joseph to Egypt some other way, right?

But ever since sin began, God has been in the business of bringing good even out of the greatest evil. Joseph had learned that, because from the very beginning, when he was young and frightened and didn't know what would happen to him, he had chosen to cling to God and to faith. We can do that, too.

Did Joseph's brothers close the embrace and accept his forgiveness? ***Allow answers.***

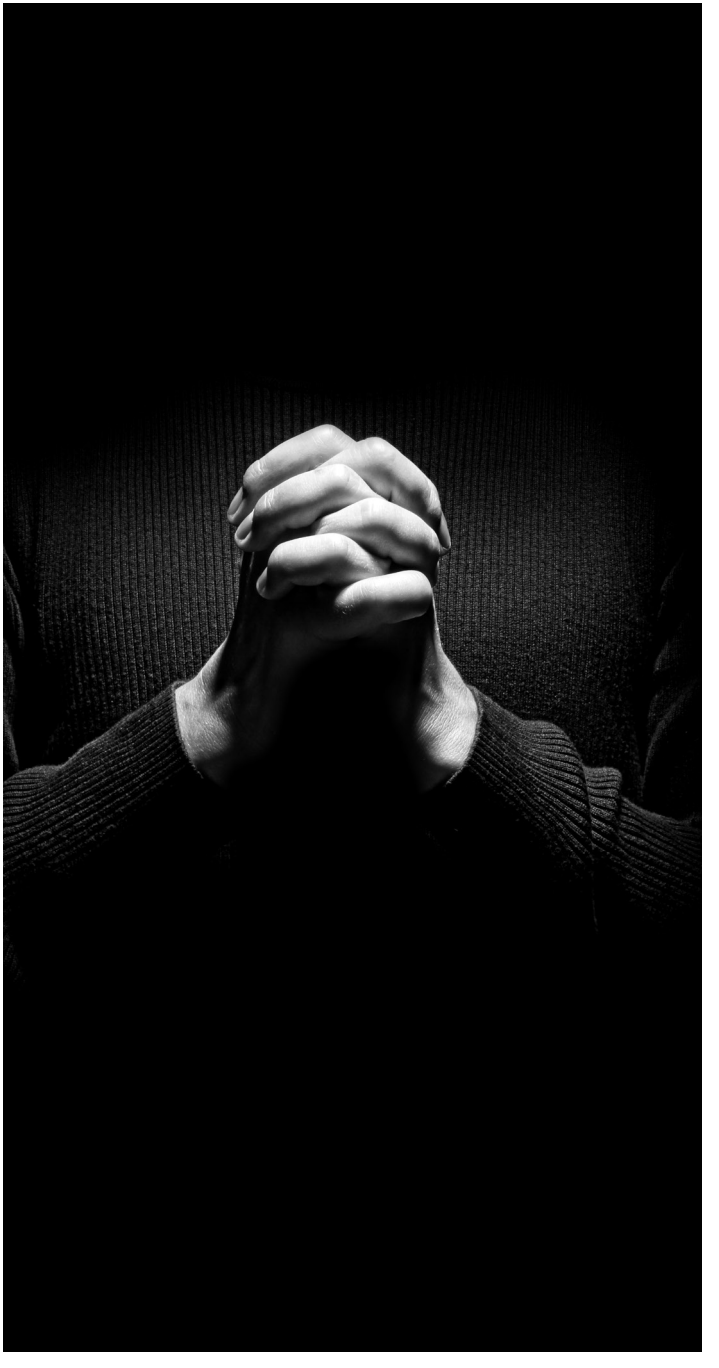
We do not know the details of how they reacted at that time, but we are given a hint in chapter 50. Someone please read chapter 50, verses 15-21. It looks as though the brothers were never really certain of Joseph's total forgiveness, doesn't it?

Why do you think Joseph wept in verse 17?

Allow answers.

Joseph's story is a great example for us that even really terrible things can be forgiven.

Another story can be read between the lines in John 4, the story of the woman at the well that we already looked at. Jesus offered the woman forgiveness, and do you remember what she did next? Let's look at John 4:28-30. Now, let's think for a minute. What kind of life did this woman have before this? What kind of relationship did she seem to have with the other townspeople? Didn't she get water in the middle of the day when it was hot, instead of in the morning with the other women? She seems to have been fairly isolated. Yet, when she learns good news, she rushes to share it. Now, the Bible doesn't say so, but don't you think it's reasonable to read between the lines that this woman was willing to offer forgiveness after it had been offered to her?



The whole town of Sychar was changed because of this woman. Who could have predicted that the "outcast" would change everything because of one conversation with a strange Man at the village well? It seems that many did forgive the woman for her past life and accept her forgiveness for being judgmental against her. Perhaps whole new friendships began.

It's also possible that some people did not give or accept forgiveness. In that case, it would have been up to the woman to remain in an attitude of repentance and live a new life in Jesus, empowered by the "living spring" of the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised her. Perhaps, over time others would see that she really had changed. Even if they did not; even if they never came to a point of reconciliation, she would need to continue to faithfully maintain an attitude of forgiveness. That's because there is a separate reason for being forgiving, besides showing mercy to the person who has sinned against you. It's good for you. Whether or not the other person ever repents, it is very damaging to us to walk around refusing to forgive someone. It darkens our own hearts, sometimes more than the original sin against us did. We sometimes obsess over it, thinking all the time of the harm that was done to us. Sometimes we imagine ways we can get even. Sometimes we do try to get even. Now we've sinned just as much as the other person did. How does that help?

We have to remember that forgiving is not excusing.

People who think they can't forgive usually think they are being asked to just let something go, to excuse it as if it didn't matter. It did matter! If it didn't matter, it's a normal human mistake and doesn't require forgiveness. But when something is a sin, when there is no excuse for it, still, our refusing to forgive doesn't hurt the other person as much as it hurts us. Someone said that refusing to forgive is like drinking poison and hoping that the other person will die. What do you think that means?

Allow discussion.

God has committed the work of reconciliation to us. That means He's depending on us to do for others what He did for us. Think about this: how much harder is it for Him to cleanse someone else of their unrighteousness if you are persisting in labeling that person with their sin?

A STORY FROM OUR TIME

Finally, let's consider a story from our own time. The details of this story have been changed to protect privacy, but it is true; in fact, there are many stories just like this going on all the time, everywhere.

> ***A young woman, we'll call her Leah, was married, with two small children. She knew that her husband, Zak, was not truly happy, but she believed it was because he had not completely committed himself to God. She did not know he was unhappy with the marriage itself. She prayed constantly and did everything she could to be the perfect wife and mother, hoping that somehow her husband would come to God, and to her.***

As time went on, Zak became more and more angry. At first, he only shouted and swore.

Leah forgave him.

Then he began getting violent, breaking their possessions and damaging the house.

Leah forgave him and prayed harder.

Then he started to hit her. It was at this point that an older woman Leah knew took her aside at church. Leah was trying to laugh, blaming her bruise on a fall, but the other woman, Mrs. Kina, didn't smile. "Leah, why don't you bring the children and come home with me to dinner. Let's talk and pray together."

That afternoon, with the two children asleep, Mrs. Kina succeeded in breaking through Leah's barriers and getting at the truth. "You can't keep living like this," she told Leah.

"But I know that God sees marriage as sacred, and wants me to forgive," Leah protested.

"Yes, forgive. You are making excuses for him. It's not the same thing," Mrs. Kina told her. "You are also keeping Zak from facing any consequences for his actions. God loves Zak and wants to change him. How can He do that if you keep Zak from ever truly realizing what he is doing to you and the children?"

"He never hits the children," said Leah quickly.

"He harms the children by harming you," said Mrs. Kina firmly. "Worst of all, he's harming himself. If you truly love him, you have to let him face his sin, praying hard that God will be able to get hold of him. I will help you. Pastor will help you."

It was the hardest thing Leah had ever had to do, telling Zak she loved him too much to allow him to go on hurting her, their children, and their family. "You have to get help," she told him, weeping. "I will pray every day for you to come back, the healed and loving man I know you can be."

Zak was furious. He accused Leah of not loving him, of not being a Christian, of destroying their marriage. He insisted he had never done anything a husband shouldn't do. He shouted and swore and threatened, but Leah's pastor and his wife, Mrs. Kina, and members of both Zak's and Leah's family were all there. They took him away. They would have helped him find housing and counseling, but Zak disappeared.

Heartbroken, Leah struggled to live in an attitude of forgiveness, even though she didn't know what the end would be. Would he turn to God? Would he come back? Would he ever accept her forgiveness?

What do you think? Could you forgive in this situation?

Even if the other person never came back, never accepted your offered forgiveness, never even admitted they'd done anything wrong, could you still hold your heart's arms open in the first step of the embrace of reconciliation?

Allow a few minutes of discussion of the tangle of feelings caused by this kind of brokenness.

Discuss how those feelings do and don't affect forgiveness.

Discuss that there could be consequences even if something is forgiven, and how hard it is to maintain balance, to hold the loved one in hope of reconciliation, yet not stop growing, move on with one's own life in the meantime and leave results to God.

Leah chooses to live in an attitude of forgiveness. As time passes, she still doesn't know what the outcome will be. She (and her children) can tell you that there are lifelong consequences to this kind of abuse of relationships, and that holding forgiveness is not easy. She could tell you that it doesn't necessarily erase the hurt or anger. But she would tell you most of all that God is faithful, and always there for us no matter how human beings treat us. She still hopes for a restored marriage. But if that doesn't happen, she hopes that maybe, just maybe, they will meet in heaven and be able to fully reconcile. If not, she trusts Jesus. No matter what.

ACTIVITY

Pass out writing supplies.

Consider whether you need to forgive someone or need to ask forgiveness of someone.

Say: *We are going to write letters, but we might or might not send or give these letters to the person they are for. Often a letter is the best way to ask or offer forgiveness, but it is sometimes better to do it in person. If you can't talk to the person, or even if the person has died and you are only seeking to forgive for your own sake, a letter can help you think through the situation and what you want to say.*

Write your letter and put in all that you feel. Then reread it and decide if some of the things you have written should be left unsaid.

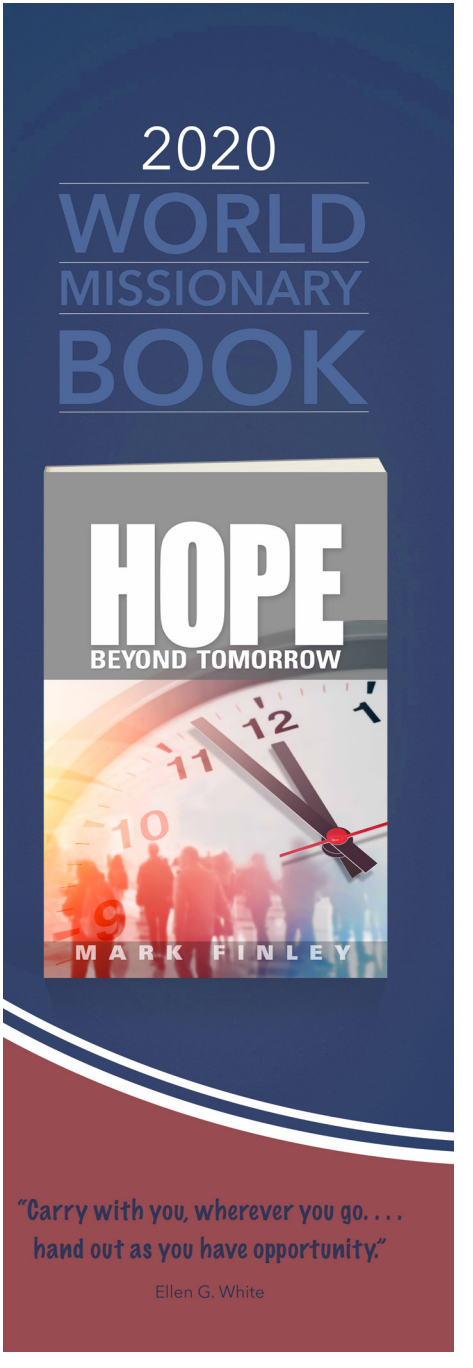
Pray about whether to give this letter to the person, or whether to destroy it and talk to the person face-to-face. If there is someone in the room now to whom you need to offer the open arms of forgiveness, you may talk to him or her now.

SPECIAL ACTIVITY

Continue on your project. Give deep thought to brokenness and its ongoing consequences. Ask God if there is some way you can help bring healing to someone.

CLOSING

Close with your theme song and with prayer for a forgiving spirit. Ask God to help you see others with new eyes, seeing that all of us need forgiveness and mercy all the time. ●



LESSON 5

SENIOR YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER 2020

AMBASSADORS OF RECONCILIATION

Introduction for Leaders
Our theme passage in 2 Corinthians 5 says that God has committed to us this ministry of reconciliation—first to God and then to others. Tonight, we will concentrate on verses 20-21. We will spend some time in stories of people who did accept God's forgiveness and whose lives changed completely because of it.

The contemporary story comes from *https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/crime/2019/04/03/tennessee-execution-victim-daughter-seeks-mercy-death-row-inmate-donnie-edward-johnson/3345860002/*, with updates *https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2019/04/17/tennessee-execution-donnie-edward-johnson-plea-death-row-gov-bill-lee/3484775002/ and https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/crime/2019/05/01/tennessee-execution-donnie-johnson-interview/3590419002/*. It was also reported in Adventist Today Magazine at www.atoday.org.

For tonight's activity, you will need paper or card stock and crayons, markers, and other art supplies.

Music
Find songs your youth know or would like to learn, that focus on bearing God's love and mercy to a hurting world. If you have been blessed with a personal theme song, be sure to use it every night.

INTRODUCTION FOR YOUTH

We have talked a lot about forgiveness and what it is and what it is not. (What is it not? They should call out that it is not excusing.) We have seen what happened when Jesus held out His arms in an attitude of forgiveness to the whole world and died to put the universe back together in the selfless love that God made it from. We even saw Him forgive the soldiers who killed Him—and to this day, Jesus stands ready to forgive the most horrible sinner who turns to Him.

We have seen the beginning of the embrace of reconciliation. And we have seen what happens when people do not accept the offered forgiveness. Tonight, we will learn what happens when people, even some really bad people, do accept Jesus' forgiveness. We'll see what kinds of consequences still happen, and how their lives, and the lives of those around them, change.

Let's begin with a Bible story. The first part of this story is only hinted at in the Bible. There are only two verses that mention it.

Will someone please find and read Mark 16:1, and someone else find Luke 8:2 and read that.

That's it! Two verses, both pretty much the same, say that Jesus had cast seven devils out of Mary Magdalene. How much do you know about Mary Magdalene? *Allow answers.*

We don't know the details of Mary's early life. Apparently, she left her home and her sister and brother and lived a sinful life in Magdala, but Mrs. White tells us in *The Desire of Ages, (p. 566)* that one of the self-righteous Pharisees was the one who first led her into sin. At some point, Mary came home, and somehow the most important moment of her life happened—she met Jesus. Let's listen to Mrs. White's description of that scene. *[The following is from DA 568.]*

> *"Mary had been looked upon as a great sinner, but Christ knew the circumstances that had shaped her life. He might have extinguished every spark of hope in her soul, but He did not. It was He who had lifted her from despair and ruin. Seven times she had heard His rebuke of the demons that controlled her heart and mind. She had heard His strong cries to the Father in her behalf...in His strength she had overcome."*

After that time, Mary became one of Jesus' most faithful disciples. All she wanted was to spend time with Him and learn to live and love as He lived and loved. Here's one way that happened.

Turn in your Bibles to Luke 10:38-42. One or several may read this story.

Was what Martha doing important? Somebody must see to the care of guests, right? No doubt Mary usually helped. But this time she thought it was more important to sit and learn at Jesus' feet than to spend "that time" making sure the house and the food were perfect.

There's another story in John 11. This is a long and very important story, and we won't spend a lot of time on it tonight. But scan the chapter and tell me what story this is.

Allow enough discussion to cover the basics of Lazarus' resurrection four days after death.

So, when we come to the next chapter, John 12, Mary has enormous reasons to be grateful to Jesus. We will compare two versions of this story.

I need some people to look up John 12, and some to look up Luke 7.

Each of these stories contains details the other lacks, so if we put them together, we'll get a more complete picture of what happened. I'll ask some questions, and those of you in John will be able to answer some, and those in Luke will be able to answer others. The main bones of the story are the same in each. Use this section as a discussion.

1. Where was this dinner?
2. Who were there?
3. What did Mary do?
4. Who complained about it?

Mrs. White tells us more about this scene. She says that Simon is the very one who originally led Mary into sin. Jesus knows that, and He could report it to everyone there, but He doesn't. He has mercy, just as He always does, and tells a story. What do you think He hoped would happen? Do you think it did? The story doesn't say, does it?

Who else complained, and why?
Did he accept Jesus' forgiveness and mercy?

The two versions end with two different sayings of Jesus. Let's look at John's first. What does Jesus say?

What do you think it means?

How do you think it made Mary feel?

Now we will look at Luke's ending. What does Jesus say? How do you think this made Mary feel? Think about it—2,000 years have passed, and sure enough, we are still telling this story about Mary! Wouldn't you like to be the one to tell Mary that when you meet her in heaven?

Have someone read Luke 7:43-47 The Message (MSG)

Simon answered, "I suppose the one who was forgiven the most."

"That's right," said Jesus. Then turning to the woman, but speaking to Simon, he said, "Do you see this woman? I came to your home; you provided no water for my feet, but she rained tears on my feet and dried them with her hair. You gave me no greeting, but from the time I arrived she hasn't quit kissing my feet. You provided nothing for freshening up, but she has soothed my feet with perfume. Impressive, isn't it? She was forgiven many, many sins, and so she is very, very grateful. If the forgiveness is minimal, the gratitude is minimal."

For our study of forgiveness and reconciliation, the most important verse is Luke 7:47. Let's read it together.

If you ever feel that you have sinned too much remember this verse. This is what Jesus says to you. And when we are struggling to forgive another who has sinned much, let's remember this. If we forgive, and especially if the person accepts that forgiveness, they may come to love us even more than they did before they sinned against us.

A STORY FROM OUR TIME

Now we are going to look at a story from our own time. This story is not only true, but all its details are in it, because it's a public story.

In Tennessee, in the United States, a man named Donnie Edward Johnson murdered his wife in 1984. He was tried, convicted, and sentenced to death, but lived on death row for years as his lawyers appealed his case. Over the years in prison, Mr. Johnson made different choices. He says he was raised a Christian but had no interest until, in jail in 1985, after hearing another inmate preach, he gave his life to Christ for the first time. In 1990, two other inmates, who were Seventh-day Adventists, "opened up the Bible to me in ways I had never thought possible," he explains now.

Do you see what's happened here? Other sinners who knew about and had accepted God's grace and forgiveness offered that to Mr. Johnson, and he accepted. God opened His arms to him, and he closed the embrace, reconciling with God.

God wasn't through with His miracles. Mr. Johnson became an elder in Riverside Chapel Seventh-day Adventist church in Nashville, Tennessee! Not every church would accept a man who had once been in prison as an elder, let alone one who was still in prison and still on death row! But this one did. Mr. Johnson began preaching to other inmates and started a radio program called "What the Bible Says." He wanted to share the grace and

forgiveness he had found. According to the church in Nashville, other prisoners became Christians and joined the church after they got out.
But Mr. Johnson couldn't get out himself, because he was sentenced to die for his crime. His death date was set for May 16, 2019.

Then came an extraordinary development. Cynthia Vaughn, daughter of the woman Mr. Johnson murdered, had once condemned him. Now, she said she had forgiven him, and she came forward to ask the governor of Tennessee not to let him die. Here is a quote from Mr. Johnson's lawyers, as given in a newspaper called The Tennessean:

"Cynthia asks for the privilege of meeting you in person, so she can share her experience of Christian forgiveness," the application [to the governor] read. "Cynthia's plea for mercy is exceptional. We know of only one other case in the history of the state of Tennessee in which the child of the ultimate victim has begged the governor for mercy for the murderer."

Do you think you could forgive someone who murdered your parent? What if he hadn't changed? Allow a few moments of discussion.

In a later update of the story from the same paper, more details came out. Mr. Johnson's first execution date was set in 2006, but it was delayed. Then Mr. Johnson reached out to Ms. Vaughn. It took her six years to come visit him in 2012, so, though we can't know her heart, we can assume that was really hard for her, and we can imagine why! It would be hard for you, too, wouldn't it?

Here, from the Tennessean, is her recall of that visit:

> *"After I was finished telling him about all the years of pain and agony he had caused, I sat down and heard a voice. The voice told me, 'That's it, let it go...The next thing that came out of my mouth changed my life forever.*
>
> *"I looked at him, told him I couldn't keep hating him because it was doing nothing but killing me instead of him, and then I said, 'I forgive you.'"*

There are two important points we should note here.

1. First, Ms. Vaughn stated clearly, to the person who had hurt her, what his sin had caused her. Sometimes, as Christians, rather than being reluctant to forgive, we rush to forgiveness too quickly. It is necessary for both the sinner and the one sinned against, to clearly recognize the size of the debt. It may be big or small—in this case it's very big—but it's always necessary to face it clearly.

2. The second important point is when Ms. Vaughn says her act of forgiveness changed her life forever. Of course, it changed Mr. Johnson's also. But forgiving changes the forgiver more.

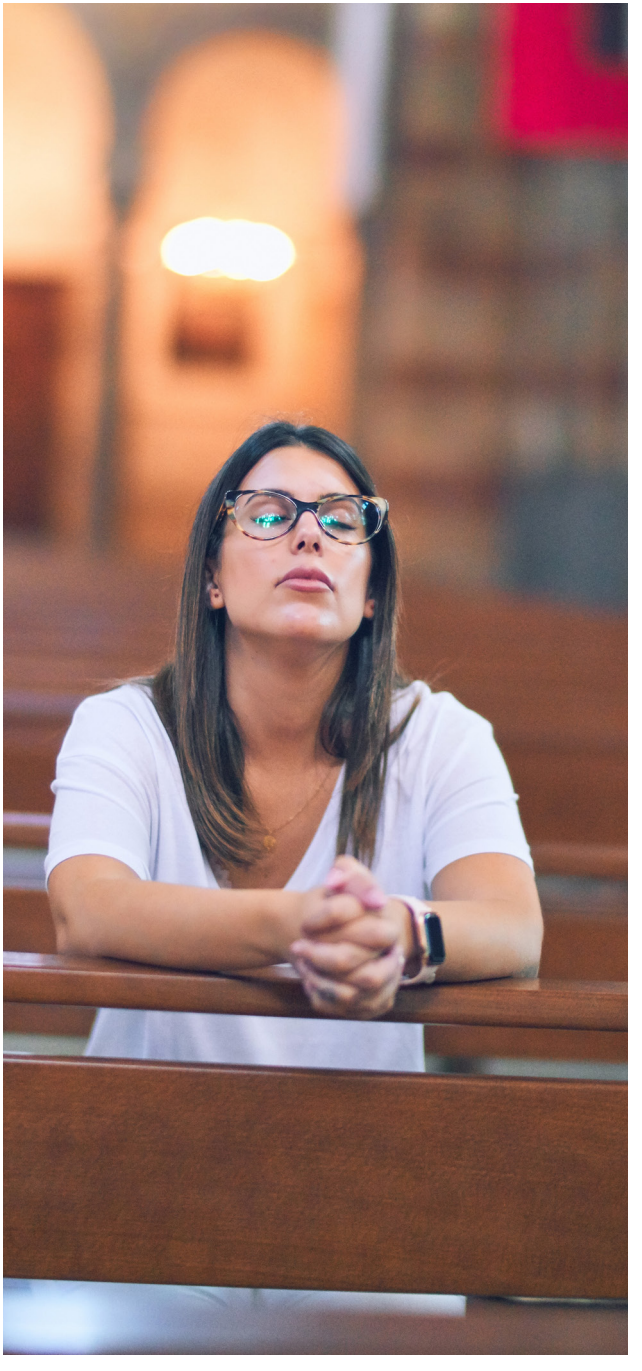
In this case, Mr. Johnson was already sorry. He said he had asked God to forgive him, and he believed God had done so. He had spent years passing on that forgiveness to others in the prison where he found himself. But sometimes the embrace of forgiveness needs a human touch to feel real. In the most recent update at this writing, Mr. Johnson described that meeting with his step-daughter as "the most humbling experience in my

life," and his current relationship with her as "one of the richest blessings a father could hope for. Something I carry with joy in my heart, each and every day."

As it turned out, the governor did not grant mercy and Mr. Johnson was executed on May 16, 2019. But as he faced death, he was able to say he was at peace with whatever God will is, and if his work is done, he is content.

Let's read our theme passage. Tonight, we will look at the last two verses in the chapter: verses 20 and 21. Ambassadors stand for their countries. They have messages from their home countries to the ones where they are posted. We are ambassadors of heaven, our home country. We live here, in land controlled by an enemy, but not for much longer! Soon Jesus will come. In the meantime, the message entrusted to us is right here in verse 20: "We beg you," we can say to all we know, "be reconciled to God."

And we can begin to show how beautiful life in a universe of love is, by offering forgiveness and grace, even (or maybe especially) to those who, like Mr. Johnson, has to face the consequences of their sins.



ACTIVITY

Make and decorate buttons or name badges that say, "Ambassador of Reconciliation." You could make extras to hand out at church, too, sharing with others what you are learning in this Week of Prayer.

SPECIAL ACTIVITY

Continue with your project. It should be half done by now.

CLOSING

Close with your theme song and with prayer, especially for all those who are in the most need of forgiveness because they have done terrible things. Ask God to show each one how they may be of help and how they can all be ambassadors of reconciliation.

LESSON 6

SENIOR YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER 2020

TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES

Introduction for Leaders
If forgiving is decidedly not about excusing or condoning, then how do we, as Christians, balance a clear and loving forgiveness with an equally clear and loving determination to help the erring person do better next time? Tonight, we will consider the differences between "punishment," "consequences," and "discipline," and what restorative justice looks like. We will focus on the last verse of our theme passage, which was introduced last night: 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Music
Find songs your youth know or would like to learn, that focus on restoration, especially to covenant relationship. If you have been blessed with a personal theme song, be sure to use it every night.

Introduction for Youth

Our Week of Prayer is halfway over already!

What have we learned about forgiveness and restoration so far?

Allow some answers and be sure to reiterate that forgiving is not excusing.

Well, if forgiving is not excusing, then what happens when someone is forgiven but still faces the consequences of his or her action?

How do we keep a forgiving spirit but also expect the person to make restitution for their sins?

Let's begin by considering some words. I am going to say them [or you could write them on a board] and you tell me what you think they mean. Then we'll look at them again at the end of the evening.

PUNISHMENT.

CONSEQUENCES.

DISCIPLINE.

Allow a few moments for answers, but don't spend any time on it yet.

It is common for these terms to be confused. A parent may say they are going to "discipline us" when what they mean is that they are going to punish us. Some families have set lists of "consequences" for different actions—a week without a phone for misusing it or being grounded for a certain amount of time. Some use physical punishment.

The bottom line is that we want justice. This word in English is from the very same root as the straight lines of a square. If the words on a printed page are even all along both edges, we say we have "justified margins."

This paragraph is an example of justified margins. You can also show an example from a book—almost any book will do. If you have an example of non-justified margins, compare the two. (All the other sentences in this book are non-justified margins.)

We use terms like "living a straight life," or "walking a straight path" to mean doing the right thing. In fact, "righteous" and "right angle" have the same root, too.

So, justice is having things straight. Even. Fair.

The problem with this is, we can end up thinking we can pay for our own sins. If we steal something, we give it back. If we break something, we repair or replace it. As we have discussed before, these things may make up for the physical loss itself, but they don't make up for the hurt to someone's heart. They don't make our sins go away. Once a thing is done, there is no going back and undoing that. Have you ever said words you wish you could pull right back into your mouth the minute they come out? Everybody has.

This is where punishment comes in. We somehow have the idea that being punished can pay for our sin. So, for example, someone steals something. She has to give it back; that heals the loss. Then she has to be punished somehow, and that's supposed to heal the hurt to the other person. People who go through a jail term are said to have "paid their debt to society." But what has actually been paid? In your experience, does being punished heal something in you? Does seeing someone else punished for what they did to you make you feel healed?

Well, then, how about consequences? In its simplest sense, a consequence is what happens when you do anything. If you throw a ball up, it will come back down. If you throw it toward a glass window, the

window will break. If you fall hard enough, you will get hurt.

Our parents know that some of our actions can lead to very serious consequences—things like drug use, joining gangs, or stealing a car for a joy ride can actually kill you! They don't want that to happen, so they may create smaller consequences. Perhaps you're grounded, or even reported to the police. Parents would rather see you in jail than dead, though either will break their hearts.

All of these actions have one major goal. What is it? They should be able to see that the goal is not so much to make someone hurt because of what they did, but to make them not do it again.

"Discipline" is a whole different subject, even though we often use it in these contexts. "To discipline" simply means "to make a disciple of." Punishment will not do this. Even consequences, while they may play a part, will not make a disciple. What do you think would make you want to be a disciple or follower of someone?

Allow answers.

You want to be a disciple because you love someone, right? Or at least, in the beginning, you admire them.

Jesus' first disciples may have followed Him in part because they were curious and drawn to Him. They wanted to learn more. Everything He did with them, day by day, was discipline. He taught them, lived with them, worked with them, laughed with them. He corrected them when they were wrong. Over time, they began to love Him dearly. Yet, they still made mistakes, sometimes serious ones.

Think about this: When Peter denied Jesus three times, did Jesus punish him? Were there consequences? ***Allow answers.*** The main consequence was his despair, his weeping and guilt, and his loss of certainty that Jesus still loved him, wasn't it? He felt so guilty and unworthy! What did Jesus do?

There are two things.

Let's look at **Mark 16:7** first. ***Have someone read.*** This is interesting. Peter is a disciple. Just the words "tell my disciples" should have included Peter. Why did Jesus mention him particularly?

Allow answers.

Jesus wanted Peter to be sure He did still love him.

Now let's look at **John 21:15-17.** We read this before. What does Jesus do here? How many times did Peter deny Jesus? How many times does Jesus ask him if he loves Him? How do you think Peter felt?

Jesus' goal was not to hurt Peter as Peter had hurt Him. Jesus knew Peter had hurt his own soul more than he hurt Jesus. He wanted to restore Peter to wholeness, because He knew that was the only way Peter would make a better choice next time.

Thank God for forgiveness! His forgiveness heals the hurt. Then we can see more clearly what to do to make the action right, or as right as it can be. In this case, Peter's sin involved words, and his consequence involved words. That healed the instance of sin. But from then on, he was to "feed the lambs," encouraging those of God's children who would fall as Peter had. In this way, the consequences were lifelong.

OUR STORY FOR TONIGHT

Maria and Lupe were best friends—they had been since they were small girls. They knew each other so well that they knew each other's weaknesses as well. Lupe tended to be impulsive, acting first and regretting later. She ate too much, especially of the wrong foods, and was constantly battling extra weight, and worse, other health problems such as moodiness and energy fluctuations. She knew perfectly well that she felt much better when she ate food that was good for her, but she had trouble controlling herself and her desires.

Maria, on the other hand, talked too much. She knew that being talkative in itself was not wrong—it was just a personality factor. But sometimes her mouth ran away with her and she said things she regretted.

On several occasions, Lupe's impulsiveness had gotten them both into trouble. Usually, Maria's fast talking could get them out of it again, but then they would have an argument and yell at each other. Maria would tell Lupe she was childish (or even call her a name like "idiot" or "stupid.") Lupe would cry and say she was sorry and wouldn't do it again. Maybe they wouldn't talk for a few days.

But they always forgave each other in the end and tried to do better. For a while.

Maria had another weakness that she hadn't recognized yet. She tended to think of Lupe as the one with a problem. She didn't mean to look down on her friend, but she did. And sometimes, especially when she was really irritated, she talked about Lupe behind her back. One day, there was an important test coming up in school and the two girls had met to study. Lupe started goofing off and throwing popcorn instead. Maria scolded her. "We have snacks to give us energy so we can study! Stop being such a baby!"

Lupe giggled and threw more popcorn. Maria got mad and threw some back. Lupe threw some other snacks, and Maria began to forget her annoyance and get silly, too. Before long they were in a food fight. Then Lupe's mother came in.

Suffice it to say the two ended up cleaning the room instead of studying. Maria stayed up late to cram, but Lupe didn't. Lupe failed the test, and Maria got the lowest grade she had ever gotten.

She was furious. The fact that she knew she was to blame, too, only made her angrier. She was standing in the hallway of the school, her test paper in her hand, angrily telling another friend about it. "Lupe's such an idiot! The whole thing was her fault! We were supposed to be studying, and instead she has to act like a six-year-old! She has no sense of discipline! I mean, look at her! She's fat, lazy, and sloppy. I don't even know why I have her as a friend!"

Maria turned to stomp away... and saw Lupe standing there, her mouth open, her face pale, and her eyes full of tears.

Part of Maria immediately wanted to apologize. But she was still angry, and she hadn't yet admitted to herself that she was just as angry at herself as at her friend. She glared at Lupe and said, "I mean it. I don't want to be your friend anymore!"

And she left.

Lupe was heartbroken. She felt as if the situation really was all her fault. Worse, she felt that everything that had ever gone wrong in their relationship was all her fault. Maria was probably right to break their friendship.

She went home and cried herself to sleep.

Who is in the wrong here? For what?
What can Maria or Lupe do now?

Allow a few moments of discussion.

For three weeks, Maria and Lupe avoided each other. Both of them were getting unhappier by the day. Maria had now begun to admit that she was also in the wrong. But she couldn't bring herself to make the first move.

Lupe was afraid to talk to Maria, but she was getting more and more depressed. Finally, one day, she decided to write a letter. She admitted her fault and promised to try to be a better friend. She said she knew she didn't deserve forgiveness, but begged Maria to forgive her anyway, and be friends again. It took her a week of carrying the letter around before she had the courage to put it in Maria's desk for her to find.

Then she waited.

Maria wasn't even going to open the letter at first. But she sat on her bed that night holding it,

and finally she opened it. Maybe Lupe had seen the error of her ways.

Reading the letter was a shock to her. For the first time she recognized that Lupe's real, underlying problem had to do with low self-esteem—and that Maria had made that problem worse. She knew enough about forgiveness to know that you can't "deserve" it. If you deserve it, it's not forgiveness. She had a momentary picture of what their friendship would be like if she accepted this letter at face value—Lupe walking on eggshells all the time hoping to please her friend.

For the first time, Maria cried. She cried hard. Then she knelt down and asked God to forgive her for judging and harming her friend with careless cruelty. Then she went to Lupe's house and asked her forgiveness for all the same things.

The friendship began to grow strong again. It took time. Lupe was still nervous that she wasn't good enough, and that if she made a mistake, Maria might do something cruel again. And Maria was watching her tongue so much that their conversations were sometimes awkward.

We'll learn more about their story tomorrow night.

What do you think so far?

Have you been in a situation like this?

What did you do?

Let's read the last verse of our theme passage: 2 Corinthians 5:21. Why do you think Paul added this verse? What does it have to do with being ambassadors of reconciliation?

Discuss. ***Guide youth to see that every sin in the world, even Maria's betrayal of Lupe's friendship, was already faced by Jesus on the cross.*** His goal is not to punish, but to restore us to love.

ACTIVITY

Reconciliation involves balance; keeping things straight and even. We are going to do a team activity that shows us how two people can work together to maintain balance. Divide into pairs of people about the same size. Now, each pair sit on the floor, back to back. Link your arms together, elbow to elbow. Try to stand up without touching the floor with their hands. Allow time.

It's hard, isn't it! Can the successful pairs give any advice to those who are still trying?

Let's talk about what we can learn from this. How did you have to work together? How does this relate to relationships? Have you and a friend ever done something that nearly broke your friendship? How did you resolve it? Were you able to restore your friendship?
Let those who wish, share stories.

SPECIAL ACTIVITY

You should be coming near completion on your project.

CLOSING

Close with your song and with prayer for restoration. Ask God to show us all how to work to restore relationships in the world, rather than being focused on punishment and "paying" for sin.

LESSON 7

SENIOR YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER 2020

THE HARDEST PERSON TO FORGIVE

Introduction for Leaders

We have learned about all the steps for forgiving and trying to reconcile with people who have sinned against us, but sometimes the hardest person to forgive is ourselves. Tonight, we will consider self-forgiveness and its implications for our faith.

For the activity, you will need writing materials and, if you are in a situation where it's possible, you will need a safe place to burn paper and some matches or other fire starter.

Extra resource:

If you have students you think may need help feeling forgiven and accepted by God, pages 50-52 of *Steps to Christ* are especially helpful. (Click here to access the PDF)

Music

Find songs your youth know or would like to learn, that focus on personal relationship with God, and on trust. If you have been blessed with a personal theme song, be sure to use it every night.

INTRODUCTION FOR YOUTH

Remind me again—what are the steps in our embrace of reconciliation?

They should be able to list open arms offering forgiveness, (whether the other accepts or not), the closing of the hug when two people do agree, and reconciliation, which sometimes includes some consequences.

Before we discuss the final step, which is opening our arms and walking away as changed people with even stronger relationships, we need to talk about one more thing. Have you ever thought there is one person who is sometimes harder to forgive than anyone else? For some of us, forgiving ourselves is harder than forgiving anyone else. Why do you think that is? ***Allow answers.***

It's often another side to the same old difficulty—confusing forgiveness with excusing. We may think that if we let go of our guilt and accept forgiveness too quickly or easily, it means we aren't sorry enough. We may even think we haven't paid enough for our sin. But who paid for our sins? That was Jesus, right? If we then try to pay for our sins, too, isn't that like saying Jesus' sacrifice wasn't enough?

Let's look at a very familiar verse: **1 John 1:9.** ***Have someone read or recite it.*** Is this a promise? Does it say God might be willing to forgive? No! It says He does! It even says God is "just" (KJV) to forgive us! That means God thinks it's the fair, right thing to do! And if we don't accept that forgiveness and walk in new light, we're calling God a liar! That would be a huge mistake.

Tonight, we will look at the first verse in our theme passage: 2 Corinthians 5:17. ***Have someone read it.*** What does it mean to be "in Christ"? Is there anything we have to do or say? Can we create that newness in ourselves? What if we try really hard?

Allow discussion, and emphasize that only Jesus creates that new life, and all we need to do is accept it and begin the lifelong process of learning to live and walk in that new life every day.

Once we're new creations in Christ, does that mean we'll never sin again? Allow answers. It does mean we won't mean to. We'll be doing the best we can to live freely in Jesus' love, to see ourselves as He sees us (worth His own life!) and to see others that same way, too, no matter how they act. But sometimes we'll still do wrong. When we do, we confess again, to God and to whomever we hurt, we make what restitution we can, and we determine to make better choices next time.

OUR STORY FOR TONIGHT

Let's look again at the story of Joseph and his brothers. **Turn to Genesis 44:30-33.** This is the part of the story where Joseph hid his silver cup in Benjamin's grain sack and now, he has said he'll keep Benjamin as his slave but let the other brothers go home. This is what Joseph and Benjamin's older brother, Judah, says. ***Have someone read.***

How do you think Judah feels right now? ***Allow discussion and help them realize he's remembering his sin in allowing Joseph to be sold into slavery and then lying to their father about it, all these years.***

According to Genesis 37:26, it was Judah's idea to sell Joseph. Do you think he, or any of the brothers, have forgiven

themselves for their great sin, not only against their brother, but against their father? ***Allow answers.*** At this point, we are only guessing what Judah is feeling. The Bible doesn't say one way or another. But now let's go back to the end of the story, which we read a couple of days ago. **Turn to Genesis 50 and quietly skim over verses 15-20.** At this point, some years have passed. All Isaac's children and grandchildren have been living peacefully in Goshen, in Egypt, for a long time. Yet, does it look to you as if the brothers have yet forgiven themselves? They express fear that Joseph has not truly forgiven them but was only pretending while his father was alive. But it seems that perhaps they haven't forgiven themselves, either.

It would be hard, we must admit, to forgive yourself for doing something quite that wicked. Their original intention was to kill him. That would have been worse! But Reuben saved him and intended to rescue him and send him back to his father alive. Still, he was involved in the whole sad story, and in the lie to his father that nearly killed him with grief. It's likely that part of the reason they couldn't trust Joseph's forgiveness was that they had not forgiven themselves. We hope they did after this scene when Isaac died.

Let's consider the issue of self-forgiveness in the context of our contemporary story from last night. Remember Maria and Lupe? Maria betrayed her friendship with Lupe, talking very cruelly about her to another person, and then even telling Lupe she didn't want to be friends anymore. The friendship, which had been a very strong one and was important to both girls, was broken. Once they forgave each other and tried again, they began to rebuild their relationship, but it took time and effort.

There were two main reasons for this. One was the time it takes for trust to rebuild. Lupe was still afraid that Maria was judging her and thinking less of her, or worse yet, talking critically about her to other people.

But the other reason is that they both still felt guilty. Lupe knew her irresponsibility had often caused trouble for the both of them. Now, she was so afraid of being "stupid" and making Maria mad at her again that she tried to suppress her natural, God-given exuberance. She tried to be responsible all the time, which is great, but she was afraid to have any fun at all. She was always "walking on pins and needles".

Maria, however, had more to feel guilty about. She, too, had her faults. Her careless tongue had gotten her in trouble before, too. But this time, she had sinned badly, and hurt one of the people who meant the most to her. She could still remember the sharpness of her own voice as she talked angrily to another friend about Lupe. She could still remember the shock and pain on Lupe's face, and she kept thinking, If only I had apologized right that minute! It was bad, but if I'd run right to Lupe and said, "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean it!" I don't think it would have been so terrible or lasted so long. Instead, she had directly broken off the friendship, and left Lupe standing there with tears running down her face.

Now, she tried too hard to be kind all the time that the normal joking between friends was gone. They both walked on eggshells around each other, and privately, they both wondered if the true sisterhood they had known before would ever recover.

One of the times that Maria was reliving her sin, she realized she had to apologize to the other friend as well. She looked her up and shamefacedly said, "Remember when I was so mean about Lupe that day?"

It had been weeks, but the other friend, whose name was Rose, nodded. "I remember."

Maria hung her head. Rose probably hated her! "I've apologized to Lupe, and she's forgiven me and I'm trying to be a better friend. I realized I need to apologize to you, too. I won't do it anymore, ever again."

"I forgive you," said Rose. Then she put her hand on Maria's shoulder until Maria looked up. "Seriously. I forgive you. Don't beat yourself up."

Maria felt her eyes fill with tears. "I do! I hate myself! I keep thinking of how her face looked!"

"I thought you said she forgave you."

"She did. She's a saint!"

Rose laughed a little. "I think she's neither a saint nor the

person you painted her to be that day. She's your friend, and a child of God. You've asked God to forgive you, too, right?"

"Yes, but..."

"But what?"
"I still feel so bad. I believe God forgives us when we ask Him to, but...if I still feel so ashamed, I can't help wondering if maybe I didn't truly repent."

"Are you sure you're not trying to pay for your own sin by feeling bad enough for long enough?" asked Rose.

Maria was startled. "I don't think so...but...maybe... Thanks, Rose, I have to go talk to Lupe again!"
That afternoon when the two friends were together, Maria told Lupe what Rose had said.
"I think maybe I am trying to somehow 'feel bad enough' to pay you back, or something!"

"But, Maria, you know Jesus died for all our sins!"

"I know, but it seems like we're not really healed, you and I, we go around being so careful. You're never goofy anymore, and I love it when you're goofy!"

"You do?"

"Yes, and I'm so sorry I ever made you think I didn't!"

"Well, I love it when you're a chatterbox, too."

"You do?"

"Yeah, I think we need to forgive each other and forgive ourselves! I think we need to let each other be our true selves, and instead of getting all mad at each other when we sometimes cross the line, I think we could help each other. You could help me not be too goofy, especially when we need to settle down and do things like schoolwork."

"I agree," said Maria. "And you could help me to stop chattering if I start gossiping or remind me to calm down and count to ten if I'm upset about something."

"And we could pray together. I bet that would help," added Lupe.

"Lupe, you're so wise!" said Maria.

"Me?! Wise?!"

"Yes, you. Let's pray. In fact, let's make a pact to pray every day. You know, the truth is, we can help each other, but only Jesus can change us."

SAY TO THE AUDIENCE:

What do you think about Maria and Lupe's solution?

What would you tell them if they were your friends?

Do you ever have trouble forgiving yourself?

Has it occurred to you that if you don't accept God's forgiveness, you're calling Him a liar? And has it also occurred to you that if you claim to accept His forgiveness but won't forgive yourself, you're acting as if you're holier than He is?

That's pretty shocking! Our activity tonight is meant to help us break through some of those barriers we set up for ourselves.

ACTIVITY

Pass out writing materials. Tonight, let's write a different kind of letter. I want each of you to write a letter to yourself. Confess any sins you are still worrying about, both to yourself and to God.

Note if there is someone else you need to talk to. Write down all you want God to cleanse from your life. Then *[if it is safe for you to do so]* we are going to burn up those letters.

As you watch your letters go up in smoke, think of your sins going up in smoke, too. Ask God to live in you through His Holy Spirit and to help you make any restitution you may need to, and to live a new life in His peace, knowing you are loved and forgiven, and you can forgive yourself, too.

SPECIAL ACTIVITY

Tonight, as you nearly complete your project, think in particular about your own "broken places," and what beautiful thing God is making of your life.

CLOSING

Close with your song, and with prayers for complete forgiveness and also complete acceptance of God's forgiveness.

LESSON 8

SENIOR YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER 2020

NEW LIFE

Introduction for Leaders

There is one last, sometimes overlooked, part of a hug—letting go and walking on. In the case of our embrace of reconciliation, this means that both participants will walk on as new people. They were changed as a result of the sin and its harm, and now they are changed as a result of forgiveness and its healing. They may find that God has given them greater compassion. Tonight, we will examine the ends and results of all stories from this week. We will conclude by spending some time on our complete theme passage, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. There will be much less speaking time from the front; you will spend most of your time in open discussion.

You could bring any paintings or other visual aids you had for the whole week and use them when appropriate. You will need art supplies for the activity.
If possible, make buttons or badges that say Ambassadors of Reconciliation, or use the ones the youth have made earlier, in the final ceremony.

Music

Find songs your youth know or would like to learn, that focus on total restoration and new life. If you have been blessed with a personal theme song, be sure to use it every night.

INTRODUCTION FOR YOUTH

Believe it or not, this is our last night! It's gone by quickly, hasn't it?

We have all learned a lot about forgiveness and reconciliation. We have learned that forgiving is not—***Allow them to answer "excusing."***

We've considered complete reconciliation as an embrace—what are those parts again?

If they don't list letting go and walking away at the end, remind them.

Last of all, you have to let go of a hug and walk away, right? Even regular, physical hugs don't last forever. You might be in the arms of someone you love very much, perhaps a parent or grandparent, for instance, and you snuggle up and perhaps even say, "I wish we could stay this way forever!" But you don't really want to! Life would be pretty difficult trying to walk around and do your daily actions while hugging someone!

In the case of the embrace of reconciliation, the act of letting go and walking on is very important. Both people have been hurt by the original wrongdoing, whatever it was. Then both people were helped and healed, or began to heal, when forgiveness was offered and accepted. They have rebuilt or are rebuilding their relationship. So, they actually walk away from this event changed; new

people, a little different than they were before. They may both have greater compassion on others who have sinned and been sinned against.

Tonight, we will do our program a little differently. Instead of a new story, we are going to discuss ends and possible results from all the stories we've heard this week. I'm going to ask some questions about each story, and we will try to answer them together. In some cases, we may not know the answers, but we can figure out how we think we would feel and act and change in similar circumstances. This will help us as we go out from our Week of Prayer, newly committed to being Ambassadors of Reconciliation.

THE ENDS OF THE STORIES

We began this week by learning about the decision the Godhead made far, far, back before the beginning of time, that They would work to reconcile the world if someone sinned. The Son would come and live and die as a human to close the breach. When God created our own world, it didn't take very long at all for Adam and Eve to choose to act in a way that showed distrust of God, which broke the Law of Love on which God had built space and time.

Do you remember how God opened His arms to them to offer forgiveness? (Walking in garden looking for them.)

How did God explain how their forgiveness would come? (Look in Genesis 3:15 for help.)

How did they respond?

How do we know?

How did their lives change—both as a result of their sin and as a result of accepting God's forgiveness and promised Deliverer?

Our next story was about Jesus coming to live and die for us. How did He open His arms to the whole world? ***Do you remember our picture? Show it now if you have it.***

Whom in particular did He forgive and ask God's forgiveness for?

In that same night and on the following night, we compared and contrasted Judas' and Peter's betrayals of Jesus' love.

How did Judas betray Jesus?

How did Peter betray Jesus?

How did Jesus offer forgiveness and reconciliation to both?

When Judas did not accept, how did his life change? (He killed himself.)

Don't forget, because God loves us, our choices even change His life! How do you think God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit felt when Judas killed himself?

When Peter accepted Jesus' forgiveness, how did his life change?

We also looked at the story of the woman at the well. How did Jesus offer her forgiveness and reconciliation?

How did her life change?

How did the whole town change?

Do you think the woman also offered forgiveness to others who had been unkind to her before?

Explain your answer.

We studied the forgiveness Joseph offered his brothers for their cruelty to him. We learned that for that family, the hug of reconciliation was apparently never closed completely—even after their father died years later, the brother still feared that Joseph might get revenge on them.

Do you remember how Joseph reacted to their fear? (He cried.)

We don't know if they finally accepted his forgiveness completely at that point.

Name some ways their lives would change if they did, or if they didn't.

Our first contemporary story was of Leah, who had to let her husband go, praying desperately that he would give in and let God change him. Although it was painful and very difficult, Leah learned to live in an attitude of forgiveness, not knowing if she would ever be able to offer it to her husband. How do you think that changed her?

In what ways might their lives change if her husband ever accepts forgiveness and closes the embrace of reconciliation?

Mary Magdalene gave us a beautiful picture of the changes that result in a life that fully accepts forgiveness and reconciliation.

How did her life change? How did she show it?

Do you think Simon or others at the table might have learned more about forgiveness because of Mary's story?

Just think of the millions of people who have heard that story in the 2,000 years since then! When we get to Heaven wouldn't you like to meet some of the people whose lives were changed by her story?

Another contemporary story was of Mr. Johnson, the man in prison for murder, and his step-daughter, who eventually chose to forgive him. How were those two lives changed, first by the sin, then by forgiveness?

We also learned about Maria and Lupe, two friends whose lives were torn apart by the sin of one of them.

How were their lives changed by the sin?

Who else was affected?

What happened when forgiveness was offered and accepted? How did their lives change?

From Maria and Lupe, we learned about the importance of forgiving ourselves, too.

Whom are we calling a liar if we continue to carry around guilt for something we have done?

Whose lives are we harming?

When we fully accept God's forgiveness and are reconciled to Him, then how do our lives change?

If there is anyone here who has a short story of how your life has changed because of forgiveness, you may share it

now. Be sure you don't share private details that belong to someone else.

Let's read our whole theme passage, 2 Corinthians 5:1-21. Have someone read one verse, then stop to discuss. Do this with each verse until you reach the end.

I want to be an Ambassador of Reconciliation. Don't you?

If we do, someday we will stand on the Sea of Glass, and meet people we never even knew, whose lives may have been changed because we chose to live for God and live in His love. Here is a beautiful scene we will see there. Ellen White saw it in vision, and recorded it in *The Great Controversy, pp. 647-8.*

> *"As the ransomed ones are welcomed to the City of God, there rings out upon the air an exultant cry of adoration. The two Adams are about to meet. The Son of God is standing with outstretched arms to receive the father of our race—the being whom He created, who sinned against his Maker, and for whose sin the marks of the crucifixion are borne upon the Savior's form. As Adam discerns the prints of the cruel nails, he does not fall upon the bosom of his Lord, but in humiliation cast himself at His feet, crying: "Worthy, worthy is the Lamb that was slain!" Tenderly the Saviour lifts him up and bids him look once more upon the Eden home from which he has so long been exiled.*
>
> *"After his expulsion from Eden, Adam's life on earth was filled with sorrow. Every dying leaf, every victim of sacrifice, every blight upon the fair face of nature, every stain upon man's purity, was a fresh reminder of his sin. Terrible was the agony of remorse as he beheld iniquity abounding, and, in answer to his warnings, met the reproaches cast upon himself as the cause of sin. With patient humility he bore, for nearly a thousand years, the penalty of transgression. Faithfully did he repent of his sin and trust in the merits of the promised Saviour, and he died in the hope of a resurrection. The Son of God redeemed man's failure and fall; and now, through the work of the atonement, Adam is reinstated in his first dominion."*

What a glorious thing to watch! For our activity tonight, you are invited to ***draw a picture of someone you would like to reconcile with in heaven. Or you could draw Adam and Eve meeting Jesus. Allow time depending on how long and involved your discussion became.***

FINAL SPECIAL ACTIVITY

If you are not quite done, finish your project tonight. Talk about it, and about ways God brings beauty out of brokenness in our lives and communities. Plan a time to present your completed work of art, and where to hang it. Perhaps some would like to write something to go with it and explain its meaning.

CLOSING

Before your prayer tonight, ask for those who want to commit to living in love, in reconciliation with God, and to be Ambassadors of Reconciliation to rise. If you have buttons or badges for them, hand them out now. You may make as much of a ceremony of this as you like.

End with prayers of gratitude and with your theme song.

TRANSLATION GUIDELINES

To meet the needs of our youth, youth leaders, and those needing to use our resources, we are offering opportunities to translate from English into other languages. Below are some guidelines to help you produce culturally appropriate translations.

1. Be objective.
2. Please be faithful and accurate to the source text.
3. Translate for meaning (rather than word-for-word), in a culturally sensitive way. Translation should preserve the content and meaning of the original text, with cultural and linguistic adaptations as needed, so that the translated text sounds natural and is easy for the intended readers to understand and use.
4. Do not do literal, word-for-word translation; this can be confusing or misleading. Consider the differences in linguistic structure and complex connections between culture and language.
5. Be culturally sensitive. Cultural adaptation may be needed where necessary.
6. Reproduce the precise contextual meaning of the text and message at all times without omission or distortion. Do not soften, strengthen or alter the messages being conveyed.
7. Do not alter, change, add, or omit texts. Only alter a text with the consent of the GC Youth Ministries Department.
8. All pronouns used for God or Jesus should be capitalized. (E.g. “God Himself is the author and finisher of our faith. He is the beginning, He is the ending.)
9. Do not add to what is written or said, nor provide unsolicited explanation, comments, or make recommendations.
10. Do not show bias towards the intended readers of the translated document.
11. Do not do literal (word-for-word) translation of Bible verses. Use a Bible translation (version) that is closest to the one used in the original source document, and make sure to cite (or reference) it.
12. Do not do literal (word-for-word) translation of Spirit of Prophecy quotations. Take the quote directly from the translated Spirit of Prophecy books referenced in the original document. When citing translated work, please remember to change the page number to the one in the book (in the language you are translating to).

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