



FORGIVENESS

Greenville UU Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina
Covenant Group Session Plan
Revised by Betsy Beach, August 2023

Welcome, Chalice Lighting: Here we are, together in this space. By our love and by our covenant, we make this a holy place. We light the chalice of Unitarian Universalism in honor of the light that lives in each of us, the light that shines among us, and the light we bring into the world

Personal Check In: Share something from your life since we last met and how you are feeling now.

Opening Reading

When we harbor negative emotions toward others or toward ourselves, or when we intentionally create pain for others, we poison our own physical and spiritual systems. By far the strongest poison to the human spirit is the inability to forgive oneself or another person. It disables a person's emotional resources. The challenge is to refine our capacity to love others as well as ourselves and to develop the power of forgiveness.

~ Caroline Myss, American Author

Forgiveness does not mean that we excuse evil acts perpetuated against us. Forgiveness does not mean that we can't or shouldn't defend ourselves. Forgiveness does not mean we condone destructive behavior. Forgiveness does not mean we reconcile ourselves with the perpetrator. Forgiveness means we take stock of what has happened, we grieve our losses, and we deliberately make the world a better place by not repaying violence for violence [retaliating].

~Fred Luskin, PH.D., Director of the Stanford University Forgiveness Project

Questions to prompt and guide discussion:

1. What does it mean to you to forgive someone?
2. What personal experience have you had with forgiveness?
3. Do you think that some things are unforgivable? What are your thoughts on this?
4. Is it more challenging to forgive yourself or someone else?

Readings – see below

Sharing - This is a time to speak without interruption and for deep listening. Deep listening means no interrupting, no fixing, no saving, no advising, and no setting each other straight. Please share one or more responses to the session questions or the readings.

(This is usually a good time to take a brief break)

Open Discussion - This is a time to respond to something another person said about the topic or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared their thoughts on this topic. Continue to practice deep listening.

Closing reading:

It's one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself, to forgive. Forgive everybody. For everything.

~Maya Angelou

Announcements/Plans

Personal Check Out: As we close this meeting, how are you feeling now?

Extinguish the Chalice - *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

Readings:

Listen. Slide the weight from your shoulders and move forward. You are afraid you might forget, but you never will. You will forgive and remember.

~Barbara Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible*

There is a simple practice we can do to cultivate forgiveness. First we acknowledge what we feel- shame, revenge, embarrassment, remorse. Then we forgive ourselves for being human. Then, in the spirit of not wallowing in the pain, we let go and make a fresh start. We don't have to carry the burden with us anymore. We will discover forgiveness as a natural expression of the open heart, an expression of our basic goodness. This potential is inherent in every moment. Each moment is an opportunity to make a fresh start.

~Pema Chodron, Buddhist Nun

Forgiveness is giving up the hope that the past could have been any different, but we cannot move forward if we're still holding on to the pain of that past and wishing it was something else.

~Oprah Winfrey

People are often unreasonable, illogical and self-centered; forgive them anyway.

~Mother Theresa

You can clutch the past so tightly to your chest that it leaves your arms too full to embrace the present.

~Jan Glidewell, journalist

As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew that if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison.

~Nelson Mandela

Forgiveness is about empowering yourself rather than empowering your past.

~T.D. Jakes, non-denominational pastor

I do not forget any good deed done to me and I do not carry a grudge for a bad one.

-Victor Frankl, psychiatrist, writer

Further Reading / References:

Dr. Fred Luskin, author of *Forgive for Good*, Nine Steps to Forgiveness.

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/nine_steps_to_forgiveness