



## Introduction

Many schools follow a programme of key values throughout the school year. These values can be an important framework for helping to define and validate the work of the school 'beyond the curriculum'. Each value can be used as the theme for collective worship, the focus for classroom reflection and the subject matter for main hall or quiet corner displays.

The Bible has so much to offer in this area of positive personal, relational and community values, and its timeless wisdom can help all schools pass on to the next generation the qualities of life that are most valuable and which, as Christians, we believe are not only God-given but also can be God-energised in our lives.

## Preparation

What follows is a series of ideas linked to the value of '**Forgiveness**'.

It includes: key themes to explore, a key Bible verse to use, key concepts to unpack, ideas for displays and reflective corners, as well as Bible story links with further connections to material on the Barnabas websites.

## Development

### 1. Key themes to explore:

- Saying sorry and being repentant
- Showing remorse and making amends
- Forgiving and forgetting
- Letting someone off - is that fair?
- Remaking a broken relationship/friendship
- Barriers to forgiving another
- The cost of forgiveness
- Is there a limit to forgiveness?
- Forgiveness and justice
- The fruit of forgiveness

### 2. Key Bible verses

The experience of forgiveness is at the heart of the Christian gospel. It is a forgiveness won by Christ's work on the cross which Christians believe is where God's love and justice meet. The need for forgiveness is universal, because every one in some way shares in the guilt of messing up their own lives, the lives of others or the generous gift of this world to us by God. We need to feel pardoned and there is a longing to start again with a clean sheet. The experience of being forgiven through the mysterious work of the cross is the motivation to love and change that energises



Christians to live differently and better. God promises the gift of his Holy Spirit to help them do just that.

Jesus says in the Lord's Prayer:

'Forgive us for doing wrong, as we forgive others' (Matthew 6:12, CEV).

The Jews celebrate a great day of forgiveness, the Day of Atonement, usually in September.

'You must celebrate this day each year- it is the Great Day of Forgiveness for all the sins of the people of Israel. Moses did exactly as the Lord had commanded' (Leviticus 16:34).

'On the tenth day of the seventh month, which is also the Great Day of Forgiveness, trumpets are to be blown everywhere in the land' (Leviticus 25:9).

David asks God to forgive him:

'After David had everyone counted, he felt guilty and told the Lord, "What I did was stupid and terribly wrong. Lord, please **forgive** me"' (2 Samuel 24:10).

Psalm 19:12: 'None of us know our faults. Forgive me when I sin without knowing it.'

Psalm 65:3: 'Our terrible sins get us down, but you forgive us.'

Psalm 130:4: 'But you forgive us, and so we will worship you.'

Part of Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the new temple reads:

'I am your servant, and the people of Israel belong to you. So whenever any of us look toward this temple and pray, answer from your home in heaven and forgive our sins' (1 Kings 8:30).

and

'Listen from your home in heaven and forgive them. The people of Israel are your servants, so teach them to live right' (v. 36).

Isaiah felt overwhelmed by guilt and failure in the presence of God but then experienced forgiveness which changed the direction of his life - see Isaiah 6. See an outline on his life [here](#).

The prophets foresaw a day when God would forgive everyone as part of a new covenant:

'No longer will they have to teach one another to obey me. I, the Lord, promise that all of them will obey me, ordinary people and rulers alike. I will forgive their sins and forget the evil things they have done'(Jeremiah 31:34).

'I will rescue a few people from Israel and Judah. I will forgive them so completely that their sin and



guilt will disappear, never to be found' (Jeremiah 50:20).

'Joshua, I have placed in front of you a stone with seven sides. I will engrave something on that stone, and in a single day I will forgive this guilty country' (Zechariah 3:9).

Forgiveness – the giving and receiving of forgiveness – is at the heart of the Lord's Prayer and is highlighted by Jesus at the end by an additional comment:

'If you forgive others for the wrongs they do to you, your Father in heaven will forgive you. But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins' (Matthew 6:14-15).

Sometimes, being forgiven is at the root of a physical healing, as with the paralysed man through the roof:

'Some people soon brought to him a crippled man lying on a mat. When Jesus saw how much faith they had, he said to the crippled man, "My friend, don't worry! Your sins are forgiven"' (Matthew 9:2).

In Matthew 18 comes the question from Peter about how often we can go on forgiving, and Jesus tells a story to illustrate what he means:

'How many times should I forgive someone who does something wrong to me? Is seven times enough?' (Matthew 18:21).

Forgiving others is vital for our own spiritual life:

'Whenever you stand up to pray, you must forgive what others have done to you. Then your Father in heaven will forgive your sins' (Mark 11:25).

Jesus forgave the soldiers from the cross:

'Jesus said, "Father, forgive these people! They don't know what they're doing." While the crowd stood there watching Jesus, the soldiers gambled for his clothes' (Luke 23:34).

Jesus commissioned his followers to pass on forgiveness:

'If you forgive anyone's sins, they will be forgiven' (John 20:23).

The offer of forgiveness is at the heart of the Christian gospel:

'Every one of the prophets has said that all who have faith in Jesus will have their sins forgiven in his name' (Acts 10:43).

'What we mean is that God was in Christ, offering peace and forgiveness to the people of this world' (2 Corinthians 5:19).



'But if we confess our sins to God, he can always be trusted to forgive us and take our sins away' (1 John 1:9).

### 3. Words about forgiveness

There is no love without forgiveness, and there is no forgiveness without love.  
Bryant H McGill

Always forgive your enemies - nothing annoys them so much.  
Oscar Wilde

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.  
Lewis B. Smedes

The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.  
Mahatma Ghandi

Love is an act of endless forgiveness, a tender look which becomes a habit.  
Peter Ustinov

Forgiveness is the fragrance that the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it.  
Mark Twain

Forgiveness is the oil of relationships.  
Josh McDowell

I can forgive, but I cannot forget, is only another way of saying, I will not forgive. Forgiveness ought to be like a cancelled note - torn in two, and burned up, so that it never can be shown against one.  
Henry Ward Beecher

Forgiveness does not change the past, but it does enlarge the future.  
Paul Boese

Let us forgive each other - only then will we live in peace.  
Leo Tolstoy

Without forgiveness, there's no future.  
Desmond Tutu

A daisy is the flower associated with forgiveness.

### 4. Key concepts to unpack

- Forgiveness is the healing of wounds caused by another. It is our choice to learn to let go of a past wrong and it is our choice no longer to allow ourselves to be hurt by it.
- To be forgiven is to experience a release... as if a burden has rolled away. The story of

Christian at the cross from *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan illustrates this well. Use a modern retelling such as that by Geraldine McCaughrean.

- Play a game with a spinner that has various opening lines for a sentence about forgiveness. As it lands on one of these, ask the child who span it to complete the sentence:

*I find it hard to say sorry when...; It's difficult to say sorry if...; When you say sorry, it helps if... ; When someone says sorry to you, it doesn't help if...; When someone says sorry, it helps if you....*

- Friendship is for... giving. Discuss!
- How can we prove that we are truly sorry or someone really means it when they say sorry to us?
- What is a 'peace offering' in the context of saying sorry?
- When people do truly forgive each other, we say reconciliation has taken place. Look up this word and explore how individuals, cities and nations have experienced reconciliation. The story of Coventry and Dresden and the Reconciliation Cross (cross of nails) is part of [A-Cross the World](#) from Barnabas.

#### 5. **Idea for a hall display or a reflective corner in a classroom**

- Include pictures of children from one class, acting out a series of freeze-frames where a conflict is resolved by someone willing to say sorry
- Include a daisy chain (see above)
- Include a key Bible verse with the Bible open at the right place and also some quotes about forgiveness
- Include newspaper articles or stories from history about reconciliation
- Include drawings from one class of their ideas of what forgiveness looks like
- Include ideas from a class for turning fists into high fives
- Include a cross and a chalice
- Include a broken metal chain symbolising release or a padlock undone
- Include a special prayer on the theme (perhaps by a child)

Reflective questions could include:

- *When did I last say sorry?*
- *Whom do I need to forgive?*
- *Why is it hard to forgive?*
- *What does it feel like to be forgiven?*
- *How do I know I am forgiven?*
- *How many times must I forgive someone?*

#### 6. **Bible story links and classroom activity ideas**

The following ideas can be used to further explore the theme of forgiveness:

- [The Prodigal Son](#)



- There is also a reflective version of the story of the Prodigal Son on the Ideas Hub website [here](#).
- Another story to explore is the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector at prayer, both seeking forgiveness from God but with contrasting attitudes from Luke 18:9-14. Peter's story is marked by failure and forgiveness. There is a reflective version of this story on the Idea Hub website [here](#)

## 7. Further ideas for discussion and development of the theme

Key Reflective Question:

### **When did you last say sorry?**

Discussion starters:

*It takes two to untangle* - what's your secret for getting on with other people? Do you have a special way of dealing with anger or unwillingness to forgive others?

*In a sorry state* - why is 'sorry' so often the hardest word? Why do we often say it but not mean it?

*Don't get even, get better* - Jesus taught his followers to love their enemies. Is this just pie in the sky?

*Life is for- giving* - is it really possible to forgive and forget?

### **Activities**

Can you create a piece of dramatic piece of art work which turns the five letters of ANGER into the five letters of SORRY? Create some interesting letter shapes that show the transitions from one letter into another and colour in the letters significantly.

Work together in twos to decide on five steps for getting back together with someone after you have fallen out with him or her. Now bring all the ideas together and decide on your top tips for turning fists into high fives!

### **Website links:**

### **Forgiveness assemblies:**

[Saying sorry - a prayer idea](#)