

Small Group Curriculum • Genesis 42–45 • Dreaming Wide Awake

THE BETTER WAY • WEEK 6

If we're honest, forgiveness is one of the hardest things God ever asks us to do. Whether it's forgiving someone who has deeply hurt us—or forgiving ourselves for something we wish we could undo—there's nothing easy about it.

Joseph's story reminds us that forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling. After years of betrayal and pain, he finally stands face-to-face with the brothers who sold him into slavery. He has the power to make them pay. And yet, instead of revenge, he chooses mercy.

That moment—when Joseph says, *“Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you”*—is one of the most stunning examples of God's grace working through a human heart. It's not because Joseph forgot what happened. It's because he saw that God was still writing a bigger story.

ICEBREAKER OPTIONS

Option #1 – If forgiveness had a *weight*, how heavy would it feel for you right now—light, medium, or heavy? What makes it feel that way?

Option #2 – Think about something you've carried with you for a long time—a hurt, regret, or memory. What helps you begin or could help you to let go of it, even a little?

INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness is a process that begins with honesty. It's okay to admit that you're struggling. It's okay to say, “God, I don't want to forgive them yet.” What matters is that we invite the Holy Spirit into that space.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same thing. Forgiveness is a one-person decision to release someone into God's hands. Reconciliation is when two people choose to rebuild trust together—and that's not always possible or wise.

But forgiveness is always possible. It's how we become more like Jesus, step by step, even when our emotions haven't caught up yet.

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

1. **Think of one example where you struggled to forgive—someone else or yourself?**
What made forgiveness feel difficult or complicated in that situation?
 2. **Read Genesis 45:4–5.**
What do you think helped Joseph see his brothers through God’s eyes instead of his own pain?
 3. **Sometimes we think forgiveness means pretending it didn’t hurt.**
When we hold on to hurt, what are we really holding on to—and what might we be afraid to let go of? How can we forgive someone who hasn’t acknowledged the pain they caused? How can we tell the difference between protecting ourselves from further hurt and hardening our hearts?
 4. **Let the Holy Spirit in to help and here are questions to ask when forgiveness feels impossible:**
 - Lord, what truth do You want me to see beneath my hurt?
 - Is there something in me You’re inviting to heal, not just forget?
 - How can I surrender control and trust You with justice or closure?
 - What would it mean to release this person (or myself) into Your care?
 - Am I resisting forgiveness because I’m afraid of being hurt again?
 - What might reconciliation look like—or not look like—in Your timing?
 - How can I remember that forgiveness doesn’t erase boundaries, but restores peace within me?
 5. **Read Genesis 50:19–20.**
How does Joseph’s statement—“*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good*”—challenge the way you see your own story?
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THE PRACTICE OF FORGIVENESS

Dr. Everett Worthington’s **R.E.A.C.H. model** gives us a practical way to live out forgiveness:

- **R – Recall** the hurt honestly.
- **E – Empathize** with the other person (or yourself).

- **A – Altruistic gift:** remember a time when *you* were forgiven.
- **C – Commit** to forgive, even when it's hard.
- **H – Hold on** to that decision when old feelings resurface.

Forgiveness isn't a one-time thing—it's something we practice again and again as the Holy Spirit works healing into our hearts.

RESPONSE & PRAYER

Let's take a quiet moment.

Who—or what—comes to mind when you think about forgiveness?

Maybe it's a person. Maybe it's yourself. Maybe it's a season of life you wish had gone differently.

Ask the Holy Spirit to sit with you in that space. To speak gently. To show you what release could look like.

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” — *Luke 23:34*

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” — *Ephesians 4:32*

Pray for courage to forgive, wisdom to know what reconciliation might look like (if at all), and trust that God will carry the weight of what you release.

DREAM JOURNAL PRAYER PROMPT

Write down one person, memory, or part of yourself that you sense God inviting you to forgive. Then pray:

“God, I give this to You. Help me to forgive as You forgive me. Heal the places that still ache. Teach me to walk in freedom.”

Let the Holy Spirit speak into that space—and remind you that forgiveness is not a sign of weakness, but of a heart growing strong in grace.