



The Adventure of Forgiveness

**A Guided Curriculum for Children Ages 6-8
within a Christian Context
(Grade 1 in the US, P3 in the UK)**

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The Adventure of Forgiveness: A Guided Curriculum for Children Aged 6-8

You are about to embark on a truly exciting adventure: you will help your students to forgive. We cannot think of a more worthwhile activity for them. Forgiving people who hurt us deeply can lift the weight of revenge that has been strapped to our backs for years. We have known people who have resented family members for 50 years. One man, whose father was very unkind to him when he was a child, had a recurrent dream for 22 years of his father chasing after him. He knew what he was going to dream about upon retiring nightly! Once he learned to forgive his father, that dream left. He inherited a sense of peace.

Forgiveness is like that. It has a way of cutting through our anger, disappointment, and resentment to give all involved persons a fresh start. As you forgive, you are set free from the prison of resentment. As you offer forgiveness to another, he or she has the chance to begin anew with you, trying to be more civil, more respectful, and more kind. Those around you benefit because you are less likely to carry your anger into other situations. You are less likely to displace your anger onto those who don't deserve such treatment.

Forgiveness is full of surprises. With about twenty-eight years of forgiveness research experience between us, we have seen remarkable improvements in the emotional health and well-being of children, adolescents, young and middle-aged adults, and the elderly as they learned to forgive. We have seen lives transformed.

Forgiveness, of course, has a long history, dating back to the oldest preserved record, which we find in the Hebrew text of Genesis. In that story, which has appeared both in modern day film and on Broadway, Joseph forgives his brother and half-brothers for selling him into slavery in Egypt. Some of the important themes in that story are as follows:

1. Joseph forgave unconditionally. He did not await repentance or an apology from his brothers. The same unconditional forgiveness is seen in another ancient story, that of the Prodigal Son in the Christian New Testament.
2. Joseph's forgiveness was not easy. He went back and forth from anger to mercy, to anger again. Forgiveness can take time and it certainly makes room for some initial anger toward the person who was (or people who were) unjust.
3. Joseph's forgiveness was filled with love. He did not just accept what happened or simply cast aside a gnawing anger. He wept and embraced his brothers, showing them lavish mercy. Again, this same theme resounds in the story of the Prodigal Son.
4. Joseph's forgiveness was life-giving for the ones forgiven. His forgiving was a gift that benefited all.

Forgiveness can be defined this way: When you are unjustly hurt by another person, you forgive when you struggle to give up the resentment (to which you are actually entitled because you were unfairly treated) and you strive to offer the offending one compassion, benevolence, and love (knowing that yours is an act of mercy and therefore not necessarily deserved by the person).

Forgiveness has three paradoxes embedded in it:

1. A forgiver gives up resentment even though the world might tell him or her to cling to the resentment. Why cast off the resentment? Common sense might say, “Be strong,” “Show your anger,” or “Don’t let the person get away with this!” A forgiver gives up resentment nonetheless.
2. A forgiver seems to be doing all of the giving and the offender all of the taking. After all, that person hurt you, so why should you give the gift of compassion, benevolence, and love? Is it not the offender’s turn to give to you, not the other way around? A forgiver gives these gifts nonetheless.
3. A forgiver, who reaches out to the other person with concern and care, often finds that he or she (the forgiver), is the one who is emotionally healed.

As you learn more about forgiveness, you will see that it is not always what it seems to be. Forgiveness is not something weak; instead, it is strong. Giving a gift to one who was unfair is a lavish act of love and mercy. Forgiveness does not make us a doormat, to be walked on by others. When we forgive, we can and should stand up for our rights.

Forgiveness is not the same as condoning or excusing. When we forgive, we do not find an excuse for another person’s actions. Instead, we label the other person’s actions as wrong. Forgiveness does not equal forgetting. We have observed many people forgive, and we can say that we have never—not once—seen anyone who forgets the offense. Yes, people may remember in new ways, but they do not develop a curious moral amnesia upon forgiving.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are not one and the same. When a person forgives, he or she unilaterally offers an end to resentment and acts with compassion and love. The other person might spurn this gift, but the gift-giver is the one who decides whether or not to give it. When two or more people reconcile, they come together again in mutual trust, since to reconcile is to trust the other person again. To forgive is to offer love, but not necessarily to trust the other person unless he or she resolves 1) not to offend in the same way again (within reason); 2) to repent; and 3) to offer recompense. One can forgive and then not reconcile if the other remains in his or her hurtful ways.

As you work with children on forgiveness, please keep in mind some basic issues to guard the children's rights and safety. Consider four ideas below:

1. Forgiveness is a choice of the forgiver. Teachers, parents, or anyone else should not demand that a child forgive someone. If a child does not want to forgive, we must respect that decision. This is what we mean when we say that forgiveness is a choice:

1. All people are free to choose or to reject forgiveness. Society, groups, or individuals must not force a person to engage in forgiveness. The person must willingly and freely choose the good of forgiveness. We realize that at times such a choice is painfully difficult and that the person needs some time to more clearly make such a choice.
2. When a person chooses forgiveness, that choice has to be a gift given freely from the heart. It should not be given because of external rewards, expectations, or pressure from others.

This is what we do **not** mean when we say that forgiveness is a choice:

- We do not mean by "choice" that this is some kind of superficial decision such as, "Should I have peas or carrots tonight?" This decision is superficial primarily because in the big picture, it almost doesn't matter which vegetable you choose. Because forgiveness is a moral virtue, it matters greatly whether we choose it or not.
- When we use the word "choice", we do not mean that we will leave the moral virtue of forgiveness entirely behind if today we are so angry that we refuse to forgive our neighbor for an injustice against you." In other words, it is not that we are choosing to leave forgiveness behind with our neighbor for all time with regard to this particular injustice. We may choose to come back to this issue when we are not so angry.
- When we use the word choose, we do not mean that the one who is considering forgiveness is exclusively deciding between 2 or more virtues. For example, we do not mean that if a person decides to seek justice against one's neighbor for this offense, then forgiveness can be put on the shelf. Forgiveness is not a dichotomous virtue in that the person is choosing one and only one virtue and if forgiveness is not the choice, then forgiveness is put far away in the closet.
- When we use the word choose, we are not suggesting that a choice against forgiveness is the only moral good and that forgiveness itself, once rejected, has somehow mysteriously lost its moral quality. Let us explain: some people do not realize that forgiveness is a moral virtue, but instead consider it to be some kind of morally-neutral behavior, which it is not. Every choice that involves a rejection of a moral virtue must be pondered carefully because all moral virtues are concerned with the good in this life. Whenever a moral virtue is rejected in a particular situation, such as rejecting patience, rejecting fairness, or rejecting forgiveness, the choice involves rejecting something that is morally good. Let us clarify further: If the person rejects forgiveness, but then has a different response of moral goodness, this in no way makes the person's behavior immoral. At the

same time, it may be a challenge for the person to realize that he or she, in rejecting an appropriate moral response, such as forgiveness, might mean that he or she is not living according to his or her best self.

- ✦ Finally, we come to a big picture issue. If a person chooses to reject forgiveness toward one's neighbor for any and all injustices by that neighbor and continues to choose against forgiveness for any injustice from any person, this itself could present a considerable moral dilemma for the person. To reject any moral virtue under all circumstances is to reject goodness.

2. Forgiveness does not mean that a child automatically enters into a relationship with a bully or anyone who is a danger to the child. Please remember that forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same thing.

3. Please avoid putting pressure on the class as children learn to forgive. Forgiveness is not like other subjects (e.g., math, science, etc.) where children get good grades for performing better than others. We should avoid making forgiveness into a competition. Try to get the children to enjoy this, again keeping in mind that it is their choice.

4. Even if a child does not want to forgive someone, you should decide whether or not it is appropriate for the child at least to learn about forgiveness. Understanding forgiveness is not the same as practicing it. A skeptic might say that this tactic is just a subtle way of getting a child to practice it. We disagree. When handled sensitively, you can encourage the child to listen and learn without the pressure to perform acts of forgiveness.

The Curriculum

We divided this forgiveness curriculum into three separate but related parts. In the first part (lessons 1-7), rather than concentrating on forgiveness per se, the children will be focusing on five of **the major ingredients involved in forgiving another person**: the ideas of inherent worth, moral love, kindness, respect, and generosity. These are explained below.

Inherent worth. This is the important idea that all people have deep worth and this is because they are people, members of the human family. This deep worth cannot be earned nor taken away. It is an essential part of each person. Within the context of forgiveness, it is akin to the idea that we are to love the offender, but dislike the offense. As children learn that all people have deep worth (even following injustice), they will be laying an important foundation for forgiving.

Moral Love. When we morally love someone, we love him or her unconditionally, despite his or her flaws. Certainly, someone who morally loves another can ask fairness of him or her. Yet, the one who morally loves has the other person's best interest at heart. Moral love is not a selfish or self-centered love. It has that lavish notion of love that Joseph showed to his brothers. Moral love underlies true forgiveness.

Kindness. When people are kind, they tend to be warm-hearted, concerned about the other person, and humane. People who practice kindness are laying the foundation for forgiving. Some people talk about the “change of heart” that occurs when someone forgives. The stony heart becomes the softened heart.

Respect. When someone shows respect, he or she regards the other person highly. Some people think that respect must be earned. We believe, following the great philosopher Immanuel Kant, that people possess intrinsic value to such a degree that we should respect all persons. We respect not because of what people *do*, but rather because of who they *are*. As children practice respecting all people, they make forgiveness easier in the future.

Generosity. To be generous is to give abundantly. It is a gift-giving that surprises and delights the recipient. If children can learn to be generous, they will be in a better position to understand what it means to give a gift of forgiveness to someone who hurts them.

To repeat, our intention in the first seven lessons is not to have the children understand or practice forgiveness, but instead to understand five of the important aspects of forgiveness.

The second part of this curriculum (lessons 8-12) is intended once again to introduce the above five ideas in the specific context of forgiveness. We are not asking children at this point to forgive anyone. Instead, we are asking them to *understand* inherent worth, kindness, moral love, respect and generosity all within the context of forgiveness. We do this through stories that illustrate these ideas.

Finally, in the third part of the curriculum (lessons 13-17), we ask the children to think about someone who has treated them unfairly. We then have them try to forgive that person by exercising the idea of inherent worth and the virtues of moral love, kindness, respect, and generosity toward that person. Part three is the practical component of the curriculum. The first two parts set the stage for actual forgiving.

Forgiveness encompasses more than the practice of inherent worth and the exercise of the virtues of moral love, kindness, respect, and generosity, but since this curriculum is based on the principles of developmental psychology, we wanted to start small, teach some of the basics, and keep it somewhat simple. We save the complexity and subtlety for later grades.

A word on our choice of curricular materials is in order. Our intent here is to make the exploration of forgiveness interesting and fun. One does not learn to play football by being thrust into highly competitive, serious situations too early. At first, it is sufficient for the children to run out onto the field on a warm afternoon, kick the ball around, and not yet worry about all the rules and regulations. It is the same with forgiveness. Its introduction should be somewhat light, free from lots of rules, and fun.

To that end, we have chosen many books and stories by Dr. Seuss, a true genius of children’s literature. As you read his stories you will be struck by his playfulness, his rhythmic use of the English language, and his fun. Yet, he has a serious side as he tells children about inherent worth, moral love, kindness, respect and generosity. The children might get so absorbed

with Dr. Seuss' fanciful creatures that they miss the underlying moral message. Our curriculum is intended to let those messages shine. If the children can begin to understand the five basics (inherent worth, moral love, kindness, respect, and generosity), if the children can begin to understand how those five basics are part of forgiveness, and if the children can practice forgiveness using these five basics, you as the teacher will have laid the foundation for a lifetime of forgiving. You will have done something very important for your children.

Book and VHS/DVD List

Horton Hears a Who by Dr. Seuss

The Sneetches and Other Stories by Dr. Seuss

Horton Hatches the Egg by Dr. Seuss

Yertle the Turtle by Dr. Seuss

My Many Colored Days by Dr. Seuss

The Butter Battle Book by Dr. Seuss

The Tears of the Dragon by Hirosuke Hamada

Pumpkin Soup by Helen Cooper

DVD

The Grinch Who Stole Christmas/Horton Hears a Who by Dr. Seuss

IMPORTANT: Please note that all of the above materials have been professionally summarized by a retired journalist. These summaries will accompany the guides so that you do not have to purchase books or films to teach the material.

Part One

**Learning About Inherent Worth, Moral Love, Kindness,
Respect, and Generosity Prior to Forgiveness**

Lesson One: A Person Is a Person, Part One

Main Ideas

This is the first of three lessons in part one that will teach about the concept of inherent worth. As the students learn about inherent worth, they will be provided with an important foundation that will help them as they learn to forgive in later lessons.

What does it mean to say that all people have inherent worth? It means that *all people* are of great value (deep worth). They are ends in-and-of themselves. The deep worth of all people is not based on appearance, possessions, behavior, position in life, place of residence, or other such external differences. These differences certainly contribute to our unique personalities and lifestyles, but they do not determine value. A focus on differences may cause us to miss the fact that all people have deep worth.

How do we get inherent worth (deep worth)? It cannot be earned nor can it be taken away. All people have inherent worth (deep personal value) simply because they are people.

People are not on this earth to be used, manipulated, or disrespected. We are to treat each person as he or she is—a person of deep worth.

Lessons one through seven will provide a solid “forgiveness foundation” that will help the students as they learn to forgive in the later lessons.

General Objectives

The students will:

- ✚ Learn that *all people* have deep worth. A person is a person.
- ✚ Learn that *all people* are ends in-and-of themselves.
- ✚ Learn that inherent worth is not based on personal differences like appearance, possessions, behavior, position in life, place of residence, and so forth.
- ✚ Learn that inherent worth cannot be earned nor can it be taken away.
- ✚ Learn that all people have inherent worth simply because they are people.
- ✚ Learn that we are to treat all people as they are—people of great worth.

Behavioral Objectives

The students will:

- ✚ Listen to a story written by Dr. Seuss entitled *Horton Hears a Who*.
- ✚ Participate in a class discussion.
- ✚ Participate in the “A Person is a Person” activity.

Materials

Horton Hears a Who, written by Dr. Seuss
Chalk board and chalk

Procedures

The following procedures are to serve as guidelines for the teacher. Please feel free to make adjustments and/or improvements to the procedures, discussion questions, or activities if it will help you more effectively meet the needs of your students. To maintain the integrity of the curriculum, please make certain that the objectives of the lesson are met.

1. Introduce the forgiveness education curriculum. Tell the students, “Today you are being given a special opportunity to begin a journey that will teach you about *forgiveness*. When we forgive, we begin to see that a person who caused us an unfair hurt has *deep worth*. We begin to soften our hearts toward that person so that we are no longer angry with him or her for the unfairness. As we first begin our journey of *forgiveness*, we will not talk about forgiveness itself, but will learn about some of the things that can help a person to forgive. For example, in the first three lessons, we will talk about the importance of *seeing the worth* in all people. Then we will discuss *love* followed by a discussion of *kindness, respect and generosity*. After that, we will begin to talk about *forgiveness* itself. But, for now, let us turn to today’s lesson where we will talk about *seeing the worth in all people*.”
2. Introduce the lesson by telling the students that they will be listening to a story written by Dr. Seuss. Dr. Seuss was a popular children’s author in the United States who cared very much about children. He understood that the happiest children are those who can treat themselves and others well. Dr. Seuss wrote many books that are fun to read and that

teach us how to treat people well. We will be reading several of his books and watching one of his videos over the course of this year.

3. Introduce the book written by Dr. Seuss entitled *Horton Hears a Who*. You may want to orient the children to the primary lesson of this book by telling the students, “Listen for the words, ‘a person is a person, no matter how small.’ As you listen to the story, think about what Dr. Seuss may have meant by these words.” It may be beneficial to have the students sit on the floor around you as you read.
4. Conduct the class discussion. The questions can be found in the Discussion section.
5. Have the students participate in the “A Person is a Person” activity. See the Activity section for further instructions.
6. Conclude by summarizing the main points of the lesson.
 - What does it mean to say that all people have inherent worth? *It means that all people are of great value (deep worth). They are ends in-and-of themselves. This worth is not based on appearance, possessions, behavior, position in life, place of residence, or other such external differences. A focus on differences may cause us to miss the fact that all people have deep worth.*
 - How do we get inherent worth (deep worth)? *It cannot be earned nor can it be taken away. All people have inherent worth (deep personal value) simply because they are people.*
 - It is important that we treat all people as people of great worth.

Discussion Questions

1. What happened in today's story?
2. Throughout the story, Horton kept saying, "A person is a person, no matter how small." What do you think he meant? *A person is a person, no matter what he or she looks like, what he or she does in life, and so forth. People have deep worth because they are people.*
3. Did Horton seem to know the "Whos" before he heard them shouting out? Why do you think this?
4. Did Horton treat the "Whos" as people of deep worth? In what ways?
5. How could Horton have known that they were people of deep worth if he didn't know them? *He understood that all people have deep worth regardless of what they look like, where they live, what they can do, and so forth.*
6. Did it seem to matter to Horton that the "Whos" were very small? How do you know?
7. If size does not matter, what else **does not matter** when deciding whether a person has deep worth?

Activity

The teacher may decide whether or not to include an activity in the lesson.

A Person is a Person No Matter...

Objective

The students will list some of the factors that make “a person a person.” They will learn that all people have deep worth. They will learn that this deep worth is not based on physical appearance, possessions, career, or other external features. They will learn that people are ends in-and-of themselves and should be treated as people of deep worth.

Instructions

The teacher will write “A person is a person no matter...” on the board. As a class, the students will make a list of the things that do not matter when thinking about a person’s deep worth. The teacher may want to classify the various answers. For example, some children may focus on a person’s **possessions** (*money, house, and toys*); some children may focus on **physical features** (*height, weight, appearance*); some children may focus on **physical strength** (*health, athletic ability*); and some children may focus on one’s **role in society** (*fireman, business person, janitor*). If the students miss some of the categories, you may want to ask specific questions to help them gain a full understanding of the main ideas of the lesson. For example, if a person is very good looking, does he or she have deeper worth than someone who is not good looking? Why? Why not? If a person is a very healthy person, does he or she have deeper worth than someone who is sick or in a wheelchair? Why? Why not? If a person has lots of money, does he or she have deeper worth than someone who is very poor? Why? Why not? If someone is a mayor of a city, does he or she have deeper worth than a person who cleans things? Why? Why not? If someone is a star football player, does he or she have deeper worth than someone who cannot play the game? Why? Why not?

In a Christian Context

This section is for those teachers seeking ideas about inherent worth within their own Christian religious tradition. We present some general ideas followed by some specific scriptures. Teachers should feel free to use these sections as they wish.

General Ideas

All people are children of God. God sees that with regard to each one of us, “a person is a person.” God loves all people regardless of how they look, what they do in life, what they can or cannot do, the possessions they have, or their level of health. God does not show favoritism. All are precious and of great value in God’s sight.

Scripture

The following references may be used for thought and/or discussion to support the main ideas of the lesson.

Romans 8:16-18: The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Romans 2:11: God does not show favoritism.

Matthew 23:8: For you have only one Master and you are all brothers.

Sample Lesson

In today’s lesson, you learned through the story of *Horton Hears a Who* that “a person is a person” no matter how small. A person’s worth or value does not come from being powerful (position in life), wealthy (what they own, where they live), healthy, and so forth. Do you remember learning what it is that gives a person his or her worth? The Bible also teaches that all people are of value and that all people have deep worth. For example, in Romans 8:16-18 we are taught that “we are God’s children...heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.” What do you think that means? Romans 2:11 teaches us that God does not show favoritism. Do you think that God loves the people who live in mansions more? Does he pay more attention to the prayers of people who are powerful and wealthy? Why? Why not? Matthew 23:8 says, “...you are all brothers.” What does this mean? As you can see, God teaches us that a person is a person! He reminds us through His word that all people have worth and that He loves all people regardless of where they live, what they do for a living, how much they own, or what they look like.

Evaluation of the Students

- Did the students listen to a story written by Dr. Seuss entitled *Horton Hears a Who*?
- Did the students participate in a class discussion?
- Did the students participate in the “A Person is a Person” activity?
- Did the students learn that *all people* have deep worth?
- Did the students learn that *all people* are ends in-and-of themselves?
- Did the students learn that inherent worth is not based on personal differences like appearance, possessions, behavior, position in life, place of residence, and so forth?
- Did the student learn that inherent worth cannot be earned nor can it be taken away?
- Did the students learn that all people have inherent worth (deep personal value) simply because they are people?
- Did the students learn that we are to treat all people as people of great worth?

EVALUATION OF LESSON ONE

Please indicate the date that this lesson was taught: _____

The following discussion questions and/or activities were especially meaningful because:

I would change the following activities and/or discussion questions because:

The students responded well to the following ideas, discussion questions, and activities:

The students did not respond well to the following ideas, discussion questions, and activities:

General Comments:
