

Session 26

You Can't Run Away From Yourself

The objectives of this session are:

- to examine the idea of forgiveness and why it is important
- to consider how refusing to forgive someone can limit our own lives
- to embrace the concept that we are responsible for our feelings and should be honest and open when examining them
- to consider the idea of second chances and how to be aware of when they happen
- to look at how service or helping others can make our life better, too.

Materials and supplies you will need:

- the DVD of the movie, *Ghost Town*
- DVD player and TV monitor
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- one copy of the forgiveness quotes and scissors
- pencils
- small squares of paper for the Forgiveness and Release exercise
- Copies of the Forgiveness Assessment exercise for each participant
- a small fire-safe pot, a candle and matches

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- watch the movie in its entirety (even if you have seen it before)
- If you will not be watching the whole film, use the DVD menu to cue up scene #8 which opens with Bertram and Gwen in the elevator
- Cut apart the forgiveness quotes and arrange them on the table before the group arrives

Session Outline

Entering Activity: Forgiveness Assessment (5 min)

Premiere: Watching the selected excerpt of *Ghost Town* and discussion (45 min)

Rising Action: Forgiveness and Release exercise (10 min.)

Plot Point: Helping Others, Help Yourself (5 min)

Wrap Up: Popcorn activity and Closing Words. (5 min)

Entering Activity

Light the chalice (or invite someone to do so) and share with the group: reading # 461, "We Must Be Saved," by Reinhold Niebuhr from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Spread the forgiveness quotes out on the table so that the participants can see them as they enter. Ask if anyone has heard any of these quotes before. Hand out copies of the "Forgiveness Assessment" exercise and pencils. Invite participants to fill it out. Let them know that they will not need to share their responses with anyone if they choose not to because this exercise is primarily for their own insight.

Once all the participants have had some time to complete the Forgiveness Assessment, ask for some reflection on the experience but remind the group that anyone always has the right to pass during times of sharing. Was it difficult to answer the questions honestly? How does holding on to the past keep us from moving forward? How does our anger and unwillingness to forgive

cut us off from other people or new opportunities for friendship? Where does forgiveness start? (You must forgive yourself before you can forgive others.)

Premiere

Watching Ghost Town

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from *Ghost Town*. Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the video yourself by saying something to the effect of the following:

Dr. Bertram Pincus is a dentist whose people skills leave much to be desired. A bad break-up has left him surly, selfish and morose. When he goes into the hospital for a minor surgical procedure, something goes terribly wrong. Dr. Pincus dies unexpectedly, but when he is miraculously revived after seven minutes, he wakes up to discover that he now has the annoying ability to see ghosts. Even worse, they all want something from him, particularly Frank Herlihy who was hit by a bus while trying to arrange the purchase of a "love nest" for his mistress. Frank pesters Bertram into breaking up the impending marriage of his widow Gwen to a human rights attorney named Richard. Coincidentally, Gwen lives in the same building as Dr. Pincus and has had numerous unpleasant encounters with him. Bertram agrees to help until he discovers that Frank is only acting out of frustration and his need to control his wife's life. But Bertram discovers something else, too. He discovers that he has fallen for Gwen. He tells Frank that the deal is off, which prompts Frank to send a whole legion of ghosts his way, all asking for Bertram's help. Eventually, Bertram decides to help the ghosts and discovers that once their earthly issues are resolved they can move

on. He discovers that he is ready to move on as well and tells Gwen his feelings for her. Begin the video and watch scenes #8 (Gwen & Bertram in the elevator) through #12 (the end) Stop the video when the credits begin to roll. Consider the following questions: By asking Bertram to break up Gwen's engagement, is Frank acting out of love for Gwen? (Or is he just feeling jealous and/or guilty for betraying her trust?) In the elevator, Gwen tells Bertram that "you just get the one life. We can't live someone else's just because it's more dramatic – what happens matters, maybe only to us, but it matters." What do you think of this statement? After Gwen's dog knocks her over when she's giving him a bath, she looks at the ring on the counter and says, "It's too late." What do you think she means by this. (Is it too late to acknowledge her feelings for Bertram or to continue her engagement to Richard?) In the park, Frank deliberately gives Bertram the wrong answer when Gwen asks for proof that he is in contact with Frank's ghost. Why did Frank do this? How has Frank changed toward Gwen? Why did Bertram ask his partner to prescribe painkillers? (He wants to escape his feelings.) Why do you think his partner refused?

Rising Action

Forgiveness and Release

Invite all of the participants to silently consider the moments in their life when they might have wronged someone or done something which they now regret. How have those experiences affected their lives? Do they live with the guilt of their actions? How does this guilt play out in the scheme of their lives?

Encourage the participants to consider one such incident in their life and seek forgiveness for their actions. Hand out the paper and pencils and invite the group to write a letter or draw a picture to seek

forgiveness for their actions. While the participants are writing, place the fire-safe pot outside of the room, light the candle and put it inside the pot. After everyone has written or drawn their piece, invite participants to come forward one at a time and light the paper on fire, dropping it into the fire-safe pot. As the paper burns, invite the participants to wave the smoke toward “the universe” sending the message of forgiveness out into the air and the world.

Plot Point

Helping Others, Help Yourself

Once Bertram starts helping the ghosts resolve their problems, he begins to resolve his own. Is this his second chance at life? As Unitarian Universalists, our 6th principle states that we affirm and promote “the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all.” How can forgiveness help us to live up to this principle? How does harboring anger and resentment cause us to act in ways that violate any of other principles? (By acting in ways that are hurtful and mean toward those who wronged us we are violating the 1st principle.) Invite the participants to share an experience where they helped another person. (Perhaps they joined in a service project here at church or at school.) How did they feel after this experience? Did this experience change the way they felt about themselves? Can they think of a time when they gave someone who wronged them in the past a second chance to be their friend? Was this a positive experience? Even if the second chance had a negative outcome, how did the act of forgiveness feel to them?

Wrap Up

Second Chance Popcorn.

Invite the participants to gather in a circle to engage in an activity known as

“Popcorn.” For this activity, a person pops up (either a hand or full body as they are able or choose to do) and says aloud a short statement (one sentence or less) about a time when they got a second chance.

After the first “popper” has finished his or her statement, then everyone who agrees with this statement should also “pop” up (a hand or body as desired). One of the people already “popped” can then choose to share something of their own to which the rest of the group can then “pop.” This “popping” can continue as long as time allows.

Closing Words.

Invite a participant to extinguish the chalice and read #637, “A Litany of Atonement” by Robert Eller-Isaacs from *Singing the Living Tradition*. You or other participants may also take turns saying these closing words:

“To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.”

-- Lewis B. Smedes (1921-2002)
Christian Author, Ethicist and theologian

“People find it far easier to forgive others for being wrong than for being right.”

-- Joanne Kathleen Rowling (b. 1965)
British Writer, Author of the Harry Potter series

“He who is devoid of the power to forgive, is devoid of the power to love.”

-- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968)
American Baptist Minister and Civil Rights leader



Taking It One Step Further:

If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional ideas to expand the experience:

More Discussion

When Bertram is alone in the park feeling sorry for himself, he tells the two ghosts, “We live alone, and then we die alone, and apparently we stay alone.” Do you think this is true? How much of Bertram’s misery is he causing for himself? Can we truly love or forgive anyone else if we don’t love or forgive ourselves first?

How symbolic is Frank’s nightmare? (That he’s lost and can’t find his way back home.) How does Frank get a second chance? Why do you think that Frank finally decided to tell Bertram his real nightmare?

How many of the people in the movie get a second chance besides Bertram? Can you name some of them?

More Activities

Listen to the song “Bohemian Rhapsody” by Queen in which a repentant person asks for forgiveness. Do you think the singer would be repentful without the threat of death? Why or why not?

Pair up participants and encourage them to sit back to back. Then invite them to share something they would like to seek forgiveness for. (it does not need to be from the person they are communicating with). After one person is finished, the other person takes a turn, listening without speaking, responding or answering.

Part of our church aspiration asks us to let “service be our prayer.” Have the group plan a service project together, like serving food at a soup kitchen or mission, or volunteer to read to the elderly or vision-

impaired. Then meet and debrief the experience. How did the experience of helping others feel?



Forgiveness Assessment

Circle the choice that best describes your reaction.

When someone wrongs me ...

1. I often think of ways to get “even.”

Usually Often Sometimes Rarely

2. I will replay the offense in my mind repeatedly.

Usually Often Sometimes Rarely

3. I think about the person in anger.

Usually Often Sometimes Rarely

4. I try to think about what made them do what they did.

Usually Often Sometimes Rarely

5. I shut them out of my life so they won't hurt me again.

Usually Often Sometimes Rarely

6. I take steps toward reconciliation.

Usually Often Sometimes Rarely

7. I offer them forgiveness.

Usually Often Sometimes Rarely

How many times for questions 1, 2, 3 and 5 did you circle usually or often? _____

How many times for questions 4, 6 and 7 did you circle usually or often? _____

Subtract the second line from the first line for your score: _____

To err is human, to
forgive – divine.

Forgive and forget.

Forgiveness is the
oil of relationships

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