



Wonderful
YOUTH

Five Biblical sessions created for Black History Month to empower young people between the ages of 13 and 16 to become
'The best that you can be'

Contents

The five studies in this resource may be used in any order.

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Even though there is a vast number of resources on the Christian market to aid young people reflect on their Christian faith few, if any, intentionally enable young people of colour to see their image reflected in the resources. Drawing from a wealth of material coupled with exercises and activities, *Wonderful Youth* aims to address this imbalance by particularly enabling young people of colour to read the Bible through their cultural and theological lenses.

Commissioned by the Baptist Union Racial Justice Group, *Wonderful Youth* has been written by contributors from Six Ways Baptist Church, Birmingham and John Bunyan Baptist Church, Oxford (both multicultural churches). Their aim is to equip young black and minority ethnic people to appreciate and love God's Word. Designed to be used during Black History Month in October 2018, *Wonderful Youth* also provides a window of opportunity for churches and youth groups to explore and celebrate some of the historical and current unique contributions from people of colour.

Introduction

A brief introduction to Ephesians 1:1-14

It is generally believed that Paul wrote this letter whilst in Rome. There is evidence he had visited Ephesus on more than one occasion (Acts 18:18-21, 19:2-7). The letter is more general than some; it is not necessarily only to the church in Ephesus. Maybe this makes us more able to receive it as aimed at ourselves too?

The section we are looking at (Ephesians 1:1-14) is part celebration of God's saving power, part prayer of praise and part teaching session.

Paul is keen to remind the readers and listeners that they are not just random individuals dealing with life on their own, but have experienced God's love and grace and have been given special gifts in order to equip them for the work that God has in store for them. The key thing here is that Paul wants the people to keep hold of the knowledge that they are saved, that God has saved them and is giving them all they need, just as the people of the Old Testament were reminded again and again what God had done in the past.

The sense of this passage, which in the original Greek is one long sentence, is along the lines of 'Let us praise God because...'

So, more specifically, Paul tells the people they are:-

Blessed from heaven and through Jesus (verse 3);

Chosen, picked out by God to do his thing. We are valued by God simply because we are, but he also has a purpose for us (verse 4);

Holy because God has set them apart, and part of his purpose is for us to keep ourselves 'clean' (verse 4);

Loved by God, because this is the force at the source of all these blessings and gifts (verse 4-5);

Forgiven through his grace, through the death of Christ on the cross (verse 7).

For the people originally addressed by Paul, and for us today, because of God's 'glorious grace' (verse 6), we can count ourselves as being blessed, chosen, holy, loved, forgiven. And importantly, in this instance our focus with all of these qualities is that they are from God. At this stage in the letter it is not yet about what we *do*, other than giving thanks and praise to the Creator. The focus is on the fact that we are blessed *by* God, chosen *by* God, made to be holy *by* God, loved and forgiven *by* God.

Blessed

'Blessed, chosen, holy, loved, forgiven'

Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for the spiritual blessings that Christ has brought us from heaven! - Ephesians 1:3 (NIV)

Aim

To enable the young people to gain a better understanding of what it means to be blessed by God, to explore the concept of blessing.

Lesson outcome

For our wonderful youth to be encouraged, comforted and inspired by the notion that they are blessed by God as all of God's goodness and the goodness of heaven are poured into us/our lives.

- » To know more fully that as believers we are blessed.
- » To count those blessings.
- » To better understand the meaning of what it is to be blessed by God.
- » To explore ways that we in turn can be a blessing to others and God.

Materials needed

- » A flipchart/board or iPad and printer
- » A cup, jug of water, and a tray to put them on
- » A4 card or paper
- » Pens and other art supplies
- » A pinata and stick eg using instructions from: www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Piñata
Or buy one from Wilko
<https://www.wilko.com/en-uk/donkey-pinata/p/0334318>
- » Wrapped sweets and words of blessing written on paper
- » A globe or map of the world - and blutack
- » Computer with internet access to show videos from YouTube
- » Projector and screen (if you have a large group)
- » Materials to make a blessing jar
- » Copy(ies) of the words of blessing in other languages
- » Copy(ies) of the prayers

Introduction

The word 'bless' is used, in various forms, a great deal in our language both in church and in wider society. What do we mean when we say we are blessed? How does this work? Here is an opportunity to help the young people towards a deeper understanding of what it is to be blessed by God, especially as young people.

Introductory activity

1 How was your week? (5 minutes)

Draw up a list together (maybe on a flipchart/board/ipad (and then print) of everything good that has happened to the group over the past seven days. Include the 'obvious' and the mundane (eg food, home etc) as well as things that have gone well.

Or

Do this exercise as a visual thing by pouring a small amount of drink into a cup each time you come up with something. Refer to Psalm 23:5 'my cup overflows'.

2 Talk together about (10 minutes)

Discuss where good things come from? Why do they happen? You might want to write the following or similar on A4 cards/paper for people to focus on.

- 1 Is it all just random/chance?
- 2 Do we make our own 'luck'?
- 3 Do good things come from God?

Or

If you and the group are comfortable with doing so, you could have three people holding 1, 2 and 3 as below and group members have to go to whichever they believe. Then encourage the young people to talk about why they have taken that position.

Prayers

A Prayer of thanks and confession

Thank you Lord for the good gifts you share with us:

The gift of being caring and kind to one another,
The gift of knowing you and that you are with us with your peace and protection.

Thank you for food we enjoy and things we have that others don't.

Thank you for our friends and families.

In Jesus' name, your dear son our Saviour,
may you continue to watch over us,
bless us and guide us in your wonderful ways.
Amen

Prayer of Confession

Loving God, I am sorry for all my wrong doing.
I am sorry for hurting others with my words and my actions.

I am sorry for times when I have lost my temper towards my loved ones and other people because of being impatient and not caring for others' needs. I am sorry for these things.

Loving Lord Jesus Christ who suffered and died for our sins.

By your mercy and grace forgive us of all our wrong doings.

Amen

Prayer for others

Dear God, I pray for my friends and family to receive your touch of love and power.

I pray that they may feel your assurance of presence in whatever they are going through in their life.

May the power of the Holy Spirit free them from all their worries, pain and sadness and may they feel the warmth of your peace and love right now.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

Activities

Paul says that we have been given spiritual blessings... how do we experience these?
Explore the notion of being blessed and how we respond to this

1 Blessing piñata (15 minutes)

Say something to be thankful for and whack it!
Before the session, fill the piñata with a selection of wrapped sweets and some folded pieces of paper with words of blessing on them. You might want some of these words to be in different languages to link with activity 2. Suspend the piñata as securely as you can and then get the young people, taking it in turns, to strike one blow at it with a stick. If some sweets fall they receive these (or can share these) as a blessing. Keep going until the whole piñata is emptied.

2 Many blessings in many languages (10 minutes)

Using the list of words of blessing provided, print these/write them out and spread them randomly on a table and get the group to pin them on a globe/map of the world, as to where these words for blessed or blessing come from.

Language	Ways to say 'blessing'
Albanian	bekim
Polish	blogoslawienstwo
German	segnen
Chinese Traditional	zhufu
Hausa	albarka
Yoruba	ibukun
Filipino	basbas
Malay	berkat
Turkish	nimet
Arabic	barika
Swahili	baraka
Zulu	isibusiso
Patois	bless up
Somali	barakada

3 Listen and talk (10 minutes)

Listen to/watch Daniel Caesar 'Blessed':

www.youtube.com/watch?v=uKmn7JPFra8

How do we react to feeling blessed even though we are a mess? 'And yes, I'm a mess but I'm blessed'

Or, similarly listen to these songs and discuss:

a Chance the Rapper - 'Blessings'

www.youtube.com/watch?v=KeqmbhyoFZQ

b Jason Gray - Remind Me Who I Am

www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSIVjjY8Ou8

Open the Word

Read and talk (10 minutes)

Take a look at Matthew 5:1-11 and what Jesus says about being blessed or 2 Corinthians 9:8 and what Paul says about how much God will bless us, when He will bless us, what with and what for.

Many sorts of blessings (10 minutes)

'Blessing' is a loaded word. In most cultures, generally it connotes material wealth, good health, status and power, happy family etc. And this is in keeping with much of the Old Testament understanding of what blessing is about (eg 1 Chronicles 4:9-10). But what Paul is talking about must surely be based on the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth and what he says about blessing (Matthew 5:1-11).

Get the group to compare and contrast – maybe draw up a list/write this up on a flip chart as the discussion develops.

If appropriate, discuss what is termed as 'prosperity gospel' propagated by some churches which have attracted large numbers of young people.

Bible blessings (10 minutes)

Blessings can be associated with protection and happiness. God's blessing protects and helps guide us. Use these Bible verses to remind you of the ultimate blessing of protection promised to us. You might wish to discuss them together.

Philippians 4:19 - And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory

James 1:17 - Every good and perfect gift is from above

Isaiah 41:10 - So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed for I am your God

Psalms 91 - a prayer about blessing and protection

Activities

1 Blessing jar (10 minutes)

Suggest that the young people might have a 'Blessing Jar' – encourage young people to add some money to it each time something good happens in the week(s) ahead. Give the money to BMS World Mission, Christian Aid, Tearfund or similar. Maybe you could have some jars and materials ready and could make one in the group whilst you discuss some of the aspects of blessing mentioned here in the session. Or at least have one ready for yourself as an example. Add some money to it during the session to emphasise what a blessing it is to be with the young people.

2 Create (15 minutes)

Get the young people to create a picture: How would you express 'blessing' in art?

3 Many blessings many cultures (15 minutes)

Get the group to look at and/or listen to/read these examples of prayers of blessing from different cultures. You might want to draw out or point out that all of these are about wanting as much of God's goodness to be with the person we are blessing.

An Irish Blessing

May the road rise to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rains fall soft upon your fields and,
Until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of his hand.

A Shinto Prayer

Although the people living across the ocean surrounding us,
I believe, are all our brothers and sisters,
why are there constant troubles in this world?
Why do winds and waves rise in the ocean surrounding us?
I only earnestly wish that the wind will soon puff away all the clouds
which are hanging over the tops of the mountains.

A Nigerian Prayer

May togetherness of this earth continue to guide us and may the divine bring peace and understanding to protect the world.

Activities (cont'd)

A Queio Apache Prayer

Looking behind, I am filled with gratitude.
Looking forward, I am filled with vision.
Looking upwards, I am filled with strength.
Looking within, I discover peace.

4 Write a blessing (10 minutes)

Get the young people to write their own blessing either as a group or as individuals.
Read them out to bless each other.
Maybe they could be used in Sunday worship?

Or

The young people could write a prayer of blessing for a place/situation or group of people that is in the news.

Close

- » Think about where good things in our lives come from.
- » What can we do with those good things, the blessings that we receive?
- » How can we be a blessing this week?

Wonderful Youth: Blessed

Many blessings in many languages

Group leader to copy this sheet onto paper or card and trim to give the individual words

bekim <i>Albanian</i>	blogoslawienstwo <i>Polish</i>
segen <i>German</i>	zhufu <i>Chinese traditional</i>
albarka <i>Hausa</i>	ibukun <i>Yoruba</i>
basbas <i>Filipino</i>	berkat <i>Malay</i>
nimet <i>Turkish</i>	barika <i>Arabic</i>
baraka <i>Swahili</i>	isibusiso <i>Zulu</i>
bless up <i>Patois</i>	barakada <i>Somali</i>

Chosen

'Blessed, chosen, holy, loved, forgiven'

Chosen before the foundations of the world to be holy and blameless Ephesians 1:4

Aim

To help young people to appreciate why God has chosen them.

Lesson outcome

- » To explore what it means to be chosen by God to serve him
- » To explore what it means to be chosen to serve others
- » To explore what it means to be chosen to serve creation
- » To help young people appreciate the amazing difference they can make to the lives of others and creation.

Materials needed

- » Bibles
- » Paper
- » Pens/colouring pencils

Introduction

Icebreaker activity - 5 minutes

Share the list of names below with the group. Discuss with them what they think God has chosen the people to do?

- » Mary the mother of Jesus
- » Nelson Mandela: He was a South African anti-apartheid revolutionary, political leader who served as president of South Africa from 1994 to 1999. He was the country's first black head of state.
- » Shami Chakrabarti: member of the House of Lords and Labour Party politician.

Open the Word

Chosen by God to serve God - 10 minutes

Discuss with the group how and why they think God chose the following characters? Feel free to answer the related questions.

Moses

You remember when God met Moses at the burning bush and called him and chose him to do a massive job? At first Moses thought God had made a big mistake. And that is because Moses thought he was very small in his own estimation. As a result, Moses made a number of excuses. One of them was: 'When I go down there, who shall I say sent me?' God replied: 'Say I have sent you.' Eventually God convinced Moses to go and Moses went to the Egyptians and challenged Pharaoh.

Questions:

- » What was the big job God called Moses to do? (Exodus 3)
- » Why do you think Moses was reluctant to follow God's leading?
- » God chose Moses to lead. Do you have any idea what you think God might be choosing you to do both now and in the future?

Hannah

Hannah was unable to have a child. She so wanted a son but God said 'no, not now'. So she begged God for a child. In return she promised to dedicate this young man to God's service. Her son was born and Hannah followed through on her promise. She took the child to Eli the priest and left him to be raised in the Temple.

» Open the Word (cont'd)

Questions:

- » What was the name of the son Hannah gave birth to?
- » Discuss why you think God might have chosen her son?



Martin Luther King

Moses and Hannah were not the only people chosen by God to serve God. There were, and remain, many others - including Martin Luther King. Despite being chosen by God to lead the Civil Rights Movement, this Baptist Minister had a challenging life. His grandma died. He was very close to her and because of her death he attempted suicide. And then there were the many hate letters. He was also attacked and nearly died. Martin was fortunate to recover from the knife attack. Martin was chosen by God to serve God and others. He did this by campaigning for equality for African Americans, women and poor people. Martin was eventually killed. This was mainly because of his growing influence. A lot of white Americans were getting scared. Martin had to be stopped.

Questions:

- » Discuss what you think Martin Luther King was chosen to do? (5 min)
- » What is your understanding of an 'activist'? What do they do?
- » Do you think that God has chosen you to be an activist – to help, support and speak with, and sometimes on behalf of, others?

Jesus



The only person to live to serve God perfectly was Jesus. Jesus was chosen by God to live and breathe with broken people, sinners, like you and me. There are so many stories in the New Testament to illustrate Jesus' commitment and love for people on the margins. As the Bible says: 'the poor you will always have with you.' Jesus had a way of mixing with the poor, making them feel important. Jesus was the best at inclusion. Find one story in the bible which illustrates Jesus' commitment to people on the margins. Use the story to discuss why you think God chose Jesus to care for the poor and needy?

Prayers

Prayers of Thanks - Chosen by God

Thank you God for choosing us. Thank you for all the love that you have lavished on us.

We confess that we often forget that you see us as incredibly important – as wonderful youth created in your image.

Help us God to see the potential you have for us and to live our lives to reach that potential.
Amen

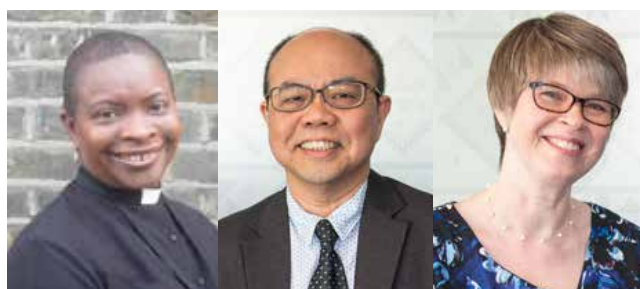
Open the Word

We are not only chosen to serve God but each other as well. This section will focus on being chosen to serve others.

Exercise (10 minutes)

God has chosen the following people to serve others:

- » **Rose Hudson-Wilkin** - first Black female Chaplain to the Queen
- » **Kang-San Tan** - General Director of BMS World Mission
- » **Lynn Green** - General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain



How would you serve others if you were the Chaplain to the Queen, General Director of BMS World Mission or the General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain?

Images:

Martin Luther King - www.pixabay.com
Jesus - Attila JANDI / Shutterstock.com

Open the Word (cont'd)

Examples of two people who served others

Sam Sharpe

Sam Sharpe was a Baptist deacon and enslaved person who played an important role in the 'Great Jamaican slave revolt'. He was one of the leaders of the group of enslaved people and leader of a sit-down strike against slavery. He was executed with more than 500 others. The revolt led by Sam Sharpe had a huge influence on the abolition of slavery and he is honoured as a national hero in Jamaica. His actions were clearly motivated by his faith and by his reading of scripture.

Malala Yousafzai

Malala Yousafzai is a Pakistani activist for female education and the youngest Nobel Prize laureate. She is a strong advocate of human rights, particularly among women and children. Her advocacy has grown into an international movement. She is now the most prominent citizen in Pakistan. While on a bus, after taking her exam, she was shot by a Taliban gunman in an assassination attempt in retaliation for her activism. She remained unconscious and was eventually moved to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, UK. The attempt on her life created an international outpouring which resulted in her becoming the most famous teenager in the world.

Questions (5 minutes)

- » What do Sam Sharpe and Malala Yousafzai have in common?
- » Do you think that they were both chosen to serve God and others? Explain how and why if you think they were?
- » In what ways do you think God is calling you to serve others?

Chosen to serve others (5 minutes)

In your groups, choose three biblical characters known to you and discuss how you think God chose them to serve others. Examples that come to mind are: Daniel, Amos, Joseph.

You really do not have to go into detail. This is a quick exercise which should take 5 minutes.

Prayer

Prayers of Intercession (5 minutes)

In your groups, pray for the following people who have been chosen by God to serve others:

David Lammy: MP for Tottenham

David has been an MP for many years and sometimes finds his job very challenging - particularly when he sees the increasing numbers of homeless people in Tottenham and feels he is unable to fix the problem.

Theresa May: Prime minister

We need to pray that she leads carefully and wisely. Pray that her advisers give her good advice and that she seeks, not just their advice but, God's wisdom too.

Donald Trump: President of USA

A potential force for good and prayers of intercession.

Kim Jong-un: President of North Korea

North and South Korea have been distant for many years. Now we can pray that the two nations will begin to speak and work together. Pray that Kim Jong-un will take the lead on this matter and reach out to the South Korean President so that peace will reign in South and North Korea.

Prayers of Intercession (5 minutes)

In your groups, designate one person to mime one of the following. After the group has guessed who is being mimed, quickly pray for the person as they serve others.

- » **Your pastor** – Who has been called to serve your church.
- » **Other individuals in your local church** – Pray for the deacons, elders, teachers, young people, children – pray that they will know they have been chosen to serve others.

Open the Word

Chosen to serve creation

As well as being chosen to serve God and others, we have also been chosen to serve creation.

Quick exercise (5 minutes)

- » In groups, define creation in a sentence. Encourage the young people to write their sentence down or just speak it out. Some may prefer to express their thoughts by drawing
- » Discuss why the young people think we have been chosen to serve creation.

Open the Word: (5 minutes)

Choose just one of these passages and talk about the lessons it teaches us about creation.

- » **Psalm 139:14** - For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful I know that full well.
- » **Romans 8:19** - For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.
- » **Genesis 1:26** - Then God said, "Let us make humans in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals and over all the creatures that move along the ground".

Activity

Prayer for creation (10 minutes)

By using one or some of the above passages, ask the young people to write a prayer - either on their own or with others - which expresses thanks to the creator God for his creation. Encourage the young people to pray their prayer in public and invite others to say 'Amen' to it.

Because we have been chosen to serve creation, ask the young people to add to the list of things that we can do to demonstrate our respect for it:

- » Water covers more than 70 percent of the Earth's surface but most of that is salt water. Fresh water is limited and today a third of the world's people lack access to clean drinking water. Use only as much water as you need. Don't waste water.
- » Eating locally grown food supports local farmers in your own community.
- » Conserve energy - walk, ride a bike and use public transportation more. Drive less. Not only is this good for our health, we will also save money. Also turn off lights and unplug appliances when they are not in use.

Is it possible to add one more solution to the list? Feel free to discuss what the young people suggest.

Exercise: (10 minutes)

In groups, do a quick sketch of the UK followed by a sketch of a less rich continent and then discuss within the group how best your church can practically support the country/continent you have sketched.

Your young people's suggestions of support do not have to be massive things. Encourage them to discuss their ideas with others and think about how they can be implemented.

Close

Ask your group to discuss with each other what they have learnt from this session and how they think they will begin to apply this learning at home, school and with friends.

Holy

'Blessed, chosen, holy, loved, forgiven'

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. Ephesians 1:4

Aim

To help young people to gain a better understanding of what holiness is and to better equip them to gain greater holiness.

Lesson outcome

- » For our wonderful youth to take seriously their calling to live lives that are good and honouring to God.
- » To explore what holiness means.
- » To look at different ways that holiness might be developed.
- » To equip our young people in living lives that are as good and godly as possible.

Materials needed

- » Copy of the 'Who is holy?' sheet of names of famous people, trimmed to give individual names/descriptions
- » Computer with internet access to show videos from YouTube
- » Projector and screen (if you have a large group)
- » Copy of *Run Baby Run* by Nicky Cruz or *The Cross and the Switchblade* by David Wilkerson
- » 'Spot the difference' sheets - lots are available online following a Google search, but check copyright restrictions before copying
- » Bibles
- » Happy families card game
- » Credit-card sized cards to create 'pledge cards'
- » Materials to make loom wristbands
- » A branch or large paper to make a tree shape
- » Paper to make leaf shapes
- » Scissors
- » Pens/pencils

Introduction

The word 'holy' might seem irrelevant or at best a bit of a joke to many people. But if Paul is saying that we must be 'holy and blameless' in the eyes of God, and if we take God at all seriously, we need to take this seriously too!

Introductory activity

1 Who is holy? (10 minutes)

Put the printed names of famous people in a random order on a table and, as a group, arrange the people in an order of holiness. Who is holiest? Why?

Discuss what other words might be used instead of 'holy'. Is there merit in the good things that people on the list say and do even if they do not claim to be Christian? Does this matter?

Use these questions as criteria to assess how 'holy' or not these people are:

- » What do they do? What don't they do?
- » What do they say or communicate?
- » How are they about relationships?
- » How are they about people different from them?
- » What do they do with their money, talent, time?

You might want to research some more biographical information on some of these people, in order to be able to highlight for the young people 'good'/'bad' things that they have said and done.

Introduction cont'd

2 Holy Mimes (5 minutes)

Get the group to do a brief mime for the others to guess. Give them 'holy' and 'non-holy' behaviours:

- » 'Holy' = praying, reading the Bible, going to church, being polite and respectful, encouraging others.
- » 'Unholy' = stealing, drinking, smoking, bullying/excluding others, gossiping.

3 Talk together about (5 minutes)

- » Ephesians 1:4b What does it mean to be holy today? How can we be set apart? Are we sacred to God? Can people around us see that we are different?
- » You might want to look at Colossians 3:1-15 (advice on how to live)
- » or Philippians 2:14-16 (shining like stars)
- » or 1 Peter 2:1-10 (a royal priesthood)
- » Luke 6:20-23 (behaviour and attitude that is blessed)
- » Micah 6:8

Prayers

A Prayer of thanks and confession

Holy God

What can we say? You are awesome and amazing and totally perfect.

We pray today that you would help us to reflect you and your perfect ways.

You have made us, fearfully and wonderfully, in your image.

Black, White, European, Asian, wherever we place our roots, no matter what we look like, we are made in your image. Help us to grow to be more like you.

In Jesus of Nazareth we have seen how you need us to be and we are sorry that too often we don't follow the ways that Jesus showed us. We are sorry that we fall out, we do stuff that is 'unholy', we do our selfish thing.

You have shown us a better way to be. Help us today to make a new start to follow Jesus' example and to look to people who are good influences, good voices in our lives.

Amen.

Prayers cont'd

A Prayer for others

Holy God, you have the power to enable your people to change. You can transform.

So, we pray for people who need to move with you:

- From darkness to light;
- From despair to hope;
- From hatred to love;
- From violence to peace;
- From hunger to plenty;
- From too much to enough;
- From bad ways to good;
- From lonely to loved;
- From no meaning to you;
- From confusion to clarity.

Loving God,

We pray for people in our lives who need the changes you bring. We pray even for people who have hurt us and done us wrong.

And we pray for people who need your transforming love:

- in war zones;
- in refugee camps;
- on traffickers' boats;
- in women's refuges;
- in big business rooms;
- in schools and colleges;
- on street corners;
- in police cells and prisons;
- in the public eye and in private places.

Good, bad, trying hard, not trying enough: help us all to leave behind what is not good and to move towards the holiness that you show us. We pray for a world where your wholesome way of peace and goodness is the norm.

Help us to understand that being holy is about every aspect of life, not just the bit we smarten up on a Sunday, not just about our personal stuff but about how we affect the whole world around us.

Help us to keep believing that change is always possible if we trust in you and your glorious love!

We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Open the Word

Paul says we have been selected to be set apart for God, to be as free from blame as we can be. This might seem far off from our experience and understanding but at its simplest it is about transformation in our behaviour and attitude. Here are some ideas on how to bring about this kind of change.

1 Watch a clip about transformation (10 mins)

Linvoy Primus: *My Story by Christians In Sport* on <https://www.thefuelcast.com/library>

or

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhV17LChVWM&sns=em>

Look at the story of transformation that Nicky Cruz experienced. Or use an extract from his book, *Run Baby Run* or David Wilkerson's *The Cross and the Switchblade*.

2 What would you do? (5 minutes)

Act out or describe two scenarios where there are choices that might be made to go the holy way and the unholy way: eg not getting a bus/train ticket or finding some money and keeping it.

3 Do a spot the difference puzzle (5 minutes)

Distribute the spot the difference puzzle sheets you have downloaded for the young people to complete.

4 Play 'Spot the Difference' (5 minutes)

One member leaves the group where they cannot see or hear the rest. Meanwhile the remainder of the group makes one change to one person's appearance (eg take out a hairclip; remove an earring; undo a shoelace; swap an item with someone else). The returning group member has to spot the difference that has occurred.

5 Me without you (10 minutes)

Listen to the track *Me without you* by Tobymac available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZu6kn__0o4

Talk about the difference it makes to follow Jesus.

Illustration: lenm | istockphoto.com

6 Holy Movements (10 minutes)

Being holy should be about our whole way of being: every area of our lives. This includes standing up against injustice and therefore standing up for what is right.



You might want to look at movements like Woke/Me Too which might be regarded as holy in terms of their activity and who they represent?

Discuss why God might regard these movements as holy? And perhaps the young people would also like to discuss what holy movements they would create and why? You might want to refer to the words from the prophet Isaiah 58:1-12 or from Micah 6:8? Or look at some news resources about these campaigns?

7 Filial Piety (10 minutes)

This is a powerful concept in many Asian cultures. It is derived from the teachings of Confucius. In essence it is about honouring your father and mother (see Exodus 20:12 - Ten Commandments).

Get the group to discuss how it might be helpful to have an awareness of this and consider how it might be understood as a way of 'being holy'. You might want to do this whilst playing the card game of Happy Families.

8 Unholy behaviour (10 minutes)

If you feel it appropriate with the group you have, look at what the Bible says about these issues raised by Paul:

Galatians 5:19-21 - 'Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God'. (ESV)

Focus on one or two of the behaviours raised by Paul. How do the group feel they can 'keep holy' concerning these?

Talk about how people might react if someone pointed out something about their conduct that is not good/wholesome/holy?

Activity

How are we going to behave in the week ahead and beyond? How holy can we be? You might want to combine some of these practical actions with some of the discussions above.

1 Pledge cards (10 minutes)

Make credit-card sized Pledge Cards with three numbered promises about positive changes in behaviour/attitude.

2 Wristbands (10 minutes)

Make loom wristbands using three different colours to represent different ways we will change our behaviour/attitude and to act as a reminder.

3 Holy tree (5 minutes)

Use a branch to make a tree, or cut out a shape of one to go on the wall where the group meets. Cut out and decorate leaves to hang on the branches. Encourage the group to write/draw on the leaves things they want to be more holy about.

4 Staying holy (5 minutes)

Talk about practical ways that people can be more/stay holy: praying, fasting, reading or listening to devotionals, listening to other people who are good and wise voices.

5 Choices (5 minutes)

Talk about choices in how we use social media to be holy or unholy. How does your Instagram/Snapchat/Twitter self look to people? Does it match up to the kind of person you know about through the Bible, the example of Jesus?

Close

It's easier to be holy at church, but what about 10am Monday morning or 8pm Tuesday? How will things go for us? What can we do to keep ourselves different, holy, to reflect God's love in us?

Wonderful Youth: Holy

Who is holy?

Group leader to copy this sheet onto paper or card and trim to give the individual names

Queen Elizabeth II	Ed Sheeran <i>singer-songwriter</i>	Romele Lukaku <i>Belgian and Man Utd footballer</i>
Barack Obama <i>ex-President of the USA</i>	Lenny Henry <i>actor, comedian, writer, Founder of Comic Relief</i>	Pope Francis <i>head of the Roman Catholic Church</i>
Robert Mugabe <i>ex-President of Zimbabwe</i>	Cyril Ramaphosa <i>President of South Africa</i>	Nadia Hussain <i>winner of Great British Bake Off</i>
Angelina Jolie <i>actor and human rights activist</i>	Ya Ya Toure <i>Man City footballer from Cote d'Ivoire</i>	Donald Trump <i>President of the USA</i>
Aung San Suu Kyi <i>'prime minister' of Myanmar/Burma</i>		

Loved

'Blessed, chosen, holy, loved, forgiven'

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. **He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will**, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace. *Ephesians 1: 2-7 (NRSV)*

Aim

To enable the young people to explore what it means to be loved by God, and how to show that love to people in the world.

Lesson outcome

For our wonderful youth to know the love of God, to develop a deep understanding that they are loved no matter what, and to see how we can make a difference in the world through God's love.

- » To know that God's love for us is constant
- » To understand the different ways God shows his love
- » To understand how feeling loved by God equips us to make changes in the world

Materials needed

- » Copy of opening prayer on paper or screen
- » Copy of 'Love in Different Languages' sheet
- » Clips of famous love songs
- » Bibles
- » Large paper - or a board for each small group
- » Pens/colouring pencils and/or pens
- » Small prize for the winning small group - love hearts or chocolates
- » Information about the persecuted church from agencies such as Open Doors (www.opendoorsuk.org), Christian Solidarity Worldwide (www.csw.org.uk) and Release International (releaseinternational.org)
- » Old newspapers/magazines, scissors and glue
- » Art materials
- » Images of Jesus from around the world - eg www.beliefnet.com/columnists/buzz/20-faces-of-jesus-from-around-the-world/?pid=760

Introduction

Love means different things to many people. For some, being loved means receiving affection, gifts, or someone's time. The dictionary definition of love is described as a 'strong feeling of affection'. In the New Testament, the term 'love' is used numerous times and, as the New Testament was originally written in Greek, that one word has a few different meanings. There is 'Phileo' a brotherly friendship love, 'Eros' a passionate love, 'Storge' a family love, and 'Agape' which is unselfish, unconditional, it is God's love for mankind.

In today's society it can be hard for people to accept that they are loved by God without having to do anything. People can think they have to earn God's love, and believe they can lose God's love by not doing enough good, or by doing something wrong. However God's love is unconditional - there is nothing we can do to make God love us more or less; God knew us and loved us before we were even created; he knew all the good and bad we would do in our life and still loved us.

In today's lesson the young people will learn more about God's love for us and how that was made perfect through his son Jesus Christ.

Prayers

Opening Prayer

Ask the young people to read the prayer below or say their own prayer

Thank you Lord for the Bible,
for the lessons that we can learn from studying it
and following your instructions.

We pray that today our hearts, ears and minds
are open to hear from you and to put your words
into practice in the coming week.

In Jesus' name,
Amen

Activity

Icebreaker (5-10 minutes)

Name one thing you are thankful for this week.
or

Play clips of famous love songs and get the
young people to guess who is singing.

Game (5-10 minutes)

Mix up the words on the 'Love in different
languages' sheet and see if the young people can
guess the correct word for each country.

The correct translations are as follows:

Spanish	Amor
Polish	Milosc
Bengali	Bhalabasa
Russian	Lyublyu
Japanese	Ai
Hindi	Mohabbat
German	Liebe
French	Amour
Italian	Amore
Turkish	Ask

Open the Word

Read Ephesians 1:4-5, Romans 8:31-39 and
John 3:16

Ask the group their thoughts on the readings.
What verses stick out to them?

Prayers

Prayer of thanksgiving

Lord God thank you for loving us. We give
thanks that you loved us before we even knew
you and your love for us is wider and deeper
than we can ever imagine. Thank you for daily
providing for us with food, water, shelter,
clothing, friends, and family; and thank you for
your Word that we can learn from and draw
closer to you.

In Jesus' name we give thanks.
Amen

Prayer of confession

*Give the group a moment to think of something
they are sorry for.*

Lord God we are sorry for all the things we do
wrong, for the bad thoughts we have, and the
times we chose not to do good. We say sorry for
all the things we know we have done wrong and
the actions we may have forgotten about.

Lord we ask for your forgiveness for every time
we have not shown love to others, when we
have been stingy with our love, or judged the
behaviour of others.

We ask for your help to show your love in prayer
and action in Jesus' name.

Amen

Prayer for others

*Ask the group to think of people who need to
feel God's love.*

Lord we pray for the people in our minds
who need to know your love. We ask for an
opportunity to show your love. We pray for our
family, friends and neighbours - for you to meet
all their needs by your grace and mercy.

Lord God we ask that you guide those who
are lost and struggling, give wisdom for those
in tough situations, and provide physical and
emotional healing to those in pain.

We pray for the world around us that people
may have their hearts and eyes open to the
truth of Jesus' love.

Amen

Open the Word

Ask the group to think of the last thing they did to show someone love, and the last thing someone did to show love to them.

Before sharing their memories, get the group to show this action without using words and get the rest of the group to guess the action.

Afterwards discuss what was loving about each behaviour.

Discussion (5 minutes)

Ask the group whether they still feel loved by a parent/caregiver when they have been told off? For example, told off when they didn't look when they crossed the road, stood too close to the fire, got into trouble for not completing school work.

Leader's notes: *God showed his love for us by allowing his son Jesus Christ to die for us, for daily providing for us, protecting us, guiding us, disciplining us. Make the point that because God loves us he sometimes has to discipline us. This may not feel good at the time but it is for our own good. Refer to Hebrews 12:8.*

Love Quotes (10 minutes)

This activity will help the young people to know where to find verses in the Bible.

In teams, get the young people to look up the verses and write them on a board. The first team to complete wins a prize (eg lovehearts, chocolate).

- » **Romans 13:8** - 'Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law'
- » **1 Corinthians 13:4-5** - 'Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs'

- » **1 Corinthians 16:14** - 'Do everything in love'
- » **1 John 4:16** - 'And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them'
- » **Ephesians 4:2** - 'Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love'
- » **1 Peter 4:8** - 'Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins'
- » **John 15:12** - 'My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you'
- » **1 Corinthians 13:13** - 'And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love'
- » **John 3:16** - 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life'
- » **John 15:13** - 'Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends'
- » **Romans 5:8** - 'But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us'
- » **Psalms 86:15** - 'But you, O Lord are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness'

How far would you go to show love? (10-15 minutes)

Ask the group what they know about the persecuted church. Use information gathered from Open Doors UK, Christian Solidarity Worldwide and Release International to give examples of people risking their life to share their faith, and live as a Christian. Make the point that people are motivated by love from God and the Great Commission.

Discussion points:

Is everyone loveable?

How do we show love to those who persecute us?

Activity

Heart Collage (15-20 minutes)

The young people make a heart collage using old newspapers/magazines with Bible love quotes, which can be displayed in church.

The following discussions can be held whilst they work on the collage:



1 Sam Sharpe, also known as Daddy Sharpe, was an enslaved Jamaican man who was the leader of the widespread 1832 rebellion in Jamaica. Sam Sharpe was a Baptist deacon and preacher

who, unlike many enslaved Africans, could read the Bible. His reading of the Bible helped him realise that God hated enslavement - a message he eagerly shared with other enslaved people. Because of the injustice Sharpe witnessed, he created a plan of passive resistance in 1831, in which the enslaved refused to work on Christmas Day 1831 unless they were paid for their work on the plantations. But they were not. The enslaved rebelled. On May 23, 1832, Sharpe was hanged. The words that immediately preceded his execution were: 'I would rather die on yonder gallows than live in slavery.'

- » How do you think Sam Sharpe would define love?
- » How did Sharpe demonstrate his love for enslaved people?
- » What lessons do we learn about God from this story?



2 Florence Nightingale was a celebrated English social reformer, and the founder of modern nursing. She came to prominence while serving as a nurse during the Crimean War where she tended to wounded soldiers. She has been dubbed 'The Lady of the Lamp,' making rounds to wounded soldiers at night.

- » How do you think Florence Nightingale would define love?
- » How did Florence demonstrate her love?
- » What lessons do we learn about God in this story?



3 Mary Seacole While many people give plenty of credit to Florence Nightingale for changing large swathes of medical care during the 19th century, Mary Seacole was another key contributor and radical reformer. It's safe to say that Mary Seacole is the unsung hero of 19th century nursing. Her father was Scottish and her mother Jamaican. She applied to join the same nursing group that Nightingale successfully applied to but was rejected on the grounds of her race. But this did not deter her. She borrowed money and made the 4,000 mile trek to Crimea in order to help the wounded and injured soldiers. Relying on her knowledge of Jamaican tropical and herbal remedies and medicine, she created boarding houses for the soldiers.

- » How did Mary Seacole express her love?
- » How easy do you find it to show love when people are standing in your way?
- » What do you think motivated Mary's love?



4 Mary Eliza Mahoney was the first African American woman to complete nursing training and become a registered nurse. Mahoney worked at the New England hospital for Women and Children before she was accepted to the hospital's nursing school at the age of 33. In the face of racism against black nurses, Mahoney advocated for the rights of all black nurses and went on to co-found the National Association of Coloured Graduate Nurses in 1908.

- » Is it possible to challenge racism with love?
- » What do you think God feels about racism?
- » How would you feel if you had to help someone who had done you a wrong, for example someone who was racist towards you, a school bully, or someone who did not help you when you needed them?

Image credits:

1 Sam Sharpe Project | www.samsharpeproject.org

2 GeorgiosArt | istockphoto.com

3 World History Archive / Alamy Stock Photo

4 Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division, The New York Public Library

Activity cont'd



5 Pandita Ramabai was an Indian Christian in the 19th century, originally from a Hindu background. She heard of the Christian faith whilst in Calcutta; however, she was resistant to

Christianity as she felt it would mean accepting European culture, but after a missionary explained the freedom in Christianity she fully accepted Christ and kept her Hindu eating and dressing traditions. After living in a culture where women were treated as second class citizens and the Caste system created a divide, Ramabai was already passionate about social justice.

Her faith in Jesus encouraged her to support outcast children, widows, orphans and destitute women, and to translate the Bible into Marathi. Ramabai's love and faith in Jesus was practical, and connects to James 2:14-26 - 'Faith without works is dead'.

- » Can we really love someone if this love isn't shown in a practical way?
- » How do we/can we show love to people are in need (homeless, hungry etc)?
- » How do you feel when you show love to someone but they don't thank you or show any appreciation?

The love of God (15-20 minutes)

Ask the group to draw a picture that reflects the love of God, either for you or somebody else. The image can be as abstract as you want it to be. The important thing is to reflect your understanding of the love of God in the picture you are drawing.

- » Ask the group if they found the exercise difficult or easy, and why?
- » What does your picture say about the love of God?

And / or

Images of Jesus

Look at images of Jesus from around the world.

- » Does the image of Jesus speak about the love of God?
- » Why does it? Why does it not?
- » Choose an image of Jesus that connects with you. Use this image to create some prayers of love and present them to the Jesus you have selected.

Songs:

The list of songs below talk about God's love for people, and shows that their worth is found in God through Jesus. These songs can be found online and played during the craft activities.

- » Jordan Feliz – Beloved
- » Nicole C Mullen – Hey Girl
- » Guvna B featuring Keisha Buchanan – His love
- » Jamie Grace featuring Morgan Harper Nichols – Daughter of the King

Discussion/Activity (5-10 minutes)

Leader notes: God's love for us is unconditional, and is directly related to his grace – refer to the book of Hosea and Romans 8. God knew all the bad we would do, and what would be done to us but God loves us even when he dislikes our behaviour.

Ask the group to think about the worst thing that they have ever done, someone from history who has done something to hurt others, and the last person who has said or done something to upset them.

Ask the group if they/the people are still loveable in the eyes of God

And / or

Download or draw a large picture of a smiling cartoon face, get the group to write/scribble/draw all over the picture until the face is covered (you could use art material). Ask each of the group to use one word to describe the image (eg messy, disgusting, ugly). When everyone has finished, make the point that things might happen to us that change the way the world looks at us but God always looks at us with love.

Close

Ask the group to close their eyes and imagine their happiest memory, and the person they care about the most. Leaders could play instrumental music to create a relaxing moment. Give the group a couple of minutes to think, then get them to open their eyes and, if they want, share how that felt. Then explain that God's love for people is a million times more than the positive feelings they just had.

Closing prayer

Give the group the option to write prayer requests. The leader will then pray for these, and topical situations in the news.

God we thank you that you loved us enough to send Jesus to die for us. We ask that each day you reveal to us how much you love us, and enable us to take every opportunity to show love to others. Help us to read your word and pray to you so we draw closer to you each day.
In Jesus' name,
Amen

Love in different languages

Group leader to copy this sheet onto paper or card and trim to give the individual words.

Spanish	Hindi	Amor	Mohabbat
Polish	German	Milosc	Liebe
Bengali	French	Bhalabasa	Amour
Russian	Italian	Lyublyu	Amore
Japanese	Turkish	Ai	Ask

Forgiven

'Blessed, chosen, holy, loved, forgiven'

Aim

To enable our wonderful youth to fully grasp God's all-embracing plan of forgiveness.

Lesson outcome

- » For our youths to recognise that they are accepted by God, no matter what they have experienced, have done or have been. Christ's loving sacrifice covers all wrongs and allows whoever will to come into full fellowship with him and the Father.
- » For teenagers to work through the oft-times difficult truth that there is also a need to forgive others and to create something positive out of our painful experiences.
- » To look at how Christ's sacrifice has made forgiveness accessible for all.
- » To explore the various areas of 'Forgiven': Being forgiven; forgiving oneself; forgiving others.
- » To look at how forgiveness can sometimes create something powerful from something painful.

Materials needed

- » Set of 'good/bad/neither' action cards in an envelope for each young person
- » Set of 'Good', 'Not good', 'Neither' signs for each young person
- » Copy of 'Forgiveness Proverb' sheet
- » Cross (Optional)
- » Posters with the words NO FORGIVENESS and JESUS' ACTION FORGIVES US
- » Collection of bin bags, handbags or clothes
- » Computer with internet access to show videos from YouTube (optional)
- » YouTube: Power of Forgiveness – Royston (Optional)
- » Copies of Maggy Barankitse / Mary Johnson sheets - one per pair or small group

Notes for leaders

Forgiveness - the truth that we are forgiven through Christ - is powerful; liberating and freeing us from guilt and pain. For many it is something long desired. However, for others the whole area of forgiveness, to truly feel forgiven, is often hampered by low self-esteem and a sense of worthlessness, or by simply reasoning that some acts are beyond forgiveness. Likewise, for others, because of the crime, the wrong done against them, forgiveness may be a step too far. Indeed, to feel forgiven, to forgive oneself and to forgive others is all too often a work in progress. Mindful of this we have tried to present the material sensitively. Everything is open to tweaking or changing. We hope that from this material our wonderful youth will understand and be able to articulate the fact that God is a God with arms outstretched who desires to forgive and to heal.

To reinforce the message of forgiveness and to make clear that, regardless of how long the process takes, forgiving others through the restorative power of Christ is possible, we have suggested the teacher write the words: 'JESUS' ACTION FORGIVES US' on a poster and hold it up at significant times throughout the session.

This lesson has been designed to allow for shorter or longer teaching sessions. For example, in the discussion on guilt in Part 2 'Forgiving Yourself', the Apostle Paul's feelings of guilt and the Bible exercise can all stand alone and brought to a positive conclusion for self-forgiveness. The teaching times can be set to desired time frames. Leaders' notes are provided throughout.

Introduction

God sent his Son to forgive us of all that can separate us from him. Today let's see what that truly means and how it is played out in our lives. Select one of the openers provided.

Opening Activity (5 minutes)

Game 1

- » Give each young person an envelope with 'good/bad/neither' action cards eg Rude to my parent/guardian; give a gift; kicked the cat; helped in the garden; burned the dinner; cooked the dinner; swore at the teacher; laid the table; sang to an audience; did my homework; hugged somebody; ate all the chocolate etc. Try to make up as many as possible.
- » Give each young person the words GOOD; NOT GOOD; NEITHER on separate cards to lay out in front of them.
- » Give the young people 45 seconds (or however long you chose) to put each action into one of the three categories.
- » When the time is up, check who has managed to categorise all the actions or those who have categorised most of them.
- » Flag up some or all the actions and ask them in which category they placed them. Some place-selection will lead to discussion and/or alternative placing.

Or

Game 2

- » Ask the youth to match each 'Forgiveness Proverb' to its correct country of origin. To save time these could be divided between teams.
- » Go through the answers with the teenagers:
 - » It is fitting for a great God to forgive great sinners (**Israel**)
 - » Forgiving the unrepentant is like drawing pictures on water (**Japan**)
 - » Forgiveness is more satisfying than revenge (**Saudi Arabia**)
 - » One can forgive a murder but not impoliteness (**China**)
 - » Women and fools never forgive (**China**)
 - » Where blood has been shed the tree of forgiveness cannot grow (**Brazil**)
 - » He who forgives a thief is a thief himself (**Spain**)
 - » The offender never forgives (**Russia**)
 - » Who forgives wins (**Africa**)
 - » If I die, I forgive you; If I recover, we shall see (**Spain**)
 - » If you offend, ask for pardon; if offended, forgive (**Ethiopia**)
 - » They forgive the wine, but they hang the bottle (**France**)
 - » You forgive everything of someone who doesn't forgive himself (**China**)
 - » God forgives sinners, otherwise his heaven would be empty (**Germany**)
 - » Be patient with your enemies and forgiving of your friends (**Afghanistan**)
 - » If there were no wrongdoings, there would be no forgiveness (**Egypt**)

Open the Word

Read Ephesians 1:1-15 (focusing on verses 7-8)

1 The Message of the Cross (10-12 minutes)

No forgiveness

Hold up a cross and ask your teenagers what it symbolised at the time of Jesus.

Teacher's note: The cross in Jesus' day was considered a thing of scorn. It was a cruel device designed for torture and humiliation.

It was a thing of shame, retribution, punishment and death; vengeful and unforgiving. The Romans used it as a warning to their subjects that mercy would not be shown to anyone who questioned Roman rule. Daily the vision of the cross struck fear into the hearts of those who gazed upon it. Many of those who challenged the power of Rome were crucified; nailed to the cross, often hanging for many days before death relieved them of their suffering.

Hold up the NO FORGIVENESS poster.

Open the Word cont'd

Forgiven

Hold up the cross again and ask your teenagers what it symbolises for Christians.

Teacher's Note: Jesus took on the shame, pain and guilt of the cross even though he was not guilty of any crime. He knew there was not one person on the earth who was not guilty of some wrongdoing. He knew that that wrong, that sin, separated us from our holy God, destroying any chance of a relationship with him. All humanity was guilty, for all have sinned and are deserving of death.

- » What were the words that showed us the heart of Christ on the Cross?
- » What did Christ's action do for you and me?

Teacher's Note: Christ desired for us to be forgiven of all our wrong and set free from the endless guilt and shame which so often accompanies the faults we make. His plan was to wipe the slate clean. To do this he took on all our sin and volunteered to die in our place.

Hold up the JESUS' ACTION FORGIVES US poster.

Nailed to the cross (1)

Ask the teenagers to take a brief moment to think of those areas in their lives where they are grateful for **God's lasting forgiveness**. Ask them to imagine themselves nailing these things onto the cross.

Prayer

Give the teenagers the opportunity to offer a prayer of thanksgiving or use the prayer below.

Thanksgiving

Almighty God, we thank you that there is nothing that will ever drive you away from us.
Thank you for the symbolic message of forgiveness in the cross
and for your willingness to wipe the slate clean.
Thank you for all that your death means for us
and for your unfailing love.
Amen

Open the Word

2 Forgiving Yourself (12-17 minutes)

Discuss what you think it means, 'To be burdened down with guilt.' (2 minutes)

List or brainstorm reasons for the Apostle Paul to feel guilt. (5 minutes)

Ask for a volunteer. As each area of guilt is called out, have the volunteer put on a piece of clothing, bag etc. These represent the feelings and burdens that come when one does not feel forgiven. Possible reasons for Paul to feel guilt:

- » Refuted and denounced the teachings of Christ
- » Denied Christ was the Son of God
- » Actively endorsed the persecution of the followers of Christ
- » Stood by, holding the cloaks of those who taunted and stoned Stephen (the first Christian martyr) to death
- » Made it his purpose thereafter to persecute the Christians

Ask the teens to call out a few more situations which could lead to a desire to be forgiven eg verbal abuse, theft, etc. Continue to place items of clothing/bags on the volunteer for every suggestion made.

If anybody should be burdened down with guilt, it should have been Paul. Yet, he writes, **'In him we have redemption through his blood, and forgiveness of sin.'** Ephesians 1:7.

Freedom from guilt (5-10 minutes)

Ask the teenagers to look at Ephesians 1:1-15 and call out, or write down, the words or phrases Paul uses in these verses which shows he believes his guilt is lifted (volunteer to stay at the front).
Eg v2 grace, peace; v3 blessed; v4 blameless

As they call out these words, ask individuals to take off the extra baggage covering the volunteer.

Explain that Christ's forgiveness means we don't have to beat ourselves up over past indiscretions and poor conduct. Because Christ forgives us, we can forgive ourselves.

NB Forgiving ourselves is important because guilt lays on us a sense of worthlessness and self-loathing.

Hold up the JESUS' ACTION FORGIVES US poster.

Open the Word cont'd

Nailed to the cross 2

Ask teenagers to take a moment to think of those areas where they struggle to forgive themselves. Ask them to imagine themselves laying these at the foot of the cross.

Prayer

Oh Lord,
There are things I have done that have left me
ashamed
These things I wish I could undo
I have said things I wish I could unsay
So often I hate what I do
You know my heart and how I feel
And you forgive me.
Help me to hold on to that truth
So that I can live in that reality
I AM FORGIVEN.
Amen

Open the Word

3 Forgiving Others (12-16 minutes)

Make sure the teenagers are seated. Ask them to stand and then sit back again if they could forgive the following situations:

- » Your best friend and business partner has wiped out your joint £10,000 bank account
- » Your brother/sister sold your mobile phone and laptop to fund a holiday
- » Someone has spread a vicious lie about you which has cost you your job
- » Your Asian friend has just suffered a vicious attack by a known racist thug
- » Your home has been burnt to the ground on religious grounds

Why is it important to forgive? (5 minutes)



Martin Luther King did not have an easy life. In fact, the hardships he endured were horrendous. He was beaten, pushed around, ridiculed, expelled from cities and incarcerated.

Open the Word cont'd

He received hate mail and threatening letters. The lives of his children and his wife were constantly under threat. But he chose to forgive his oppressors. Here is what King wrote: *'Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a constant attitude.'* (Martin Luther King)

Here is what the Apostle Paul wrote: ***'Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.'*** (Romans 12:21)

NB Forgiveness is ongoing.

2018 marks the 50th Anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King. Until the day he died he held on to forgiveness.

Mary Karen Read was a 19 year old Korean girl who moved to Virginia, USA. She was one of the 32 students and college staff gunned down on 16 April, 2007, in what is now called, 'The Virginia Tech Shooting.' Here's what she wrote: *'When deep injury is done to us we never recover until we forgive... Forgiveness does not change the past but it does enlarge the future.'*

(NB ***The Power of Forgiveness – Royston*** available on YouTube, is an excellent sketch produced as a result of Mary's diary entry - Information on Mary Karen Read can be used with or without viewing the sketch) (4:00 mins)

Discussion (3 minutes)

With reference to the sit/standing scenario, Martin Luther King's life and Mary Karen Read's journal entry, have the following discussion:

- » Is there anything that cannot or should not be forgiven? Why?
- » What do you think Mary Karen Read (and the young man in the sketch) is/are saying here?

Teacher's Notes: When we do not forgive we become vengeful, obsessed with pay back, embittered and twisted (see Optional Resources: Billy Johnson). Bitterness often leads to hate and hate often leads to evil. Evil thoughts are created in us to the point that it often dictates what we think, say and do. Evil corrupts the soul. Forgiveness seeks to reverse that. Forgiveness is important to the human well-being.

Open the Word cont'd

'We all get to the point where we realise human life would be totally impossible without forgiveness.' (Desmond Tutu: 'The Act Of Forgiveness')

Some use their painful experience to bring about change (10-15 minutes)

For some people their painful experience has been the driving force to help themselves and others find a better way, teach a truth, question an ideology, establish places of empowerment or liberate from various forms of oppression. This resolve to make love work and conquer within forgiveness, and often within pain, has resulted in lives being changed forever.

Teenager's Creative Contribution:

(See alternative activity in Optional Resources)

Activity

Forgiveness that makes a difference

Split the young people into two groups or into pairs. Hand each group an information sheet on either Maggy Barankitse or Mary Johnson and Oshea Israel.

Ask them to read through the remarkable story of the woman selected.

Ask both groups/pairs to come up with a caption or a piece of art for a newspaper to accompany the information given. The caption or the art work should sum up the lives and activities of these women.

Once finished one person can tell Maggy's or Mary's story to those who don't have the information. The corresponding art pieces can then be presented.

Open the Word

Conclusion (5 mins)

Forgiven: The concept of forgiveness was forged in the heart of God and demonstrated through the life and action of Christ. There are many sides to forgiveness. To be forgiven, to accept forgiveness and to give forgiveness – these positions do not sit well or comfortably with everybody. To give and receive forgiveness is not always easy. It may take an age for some people to get to the place where forgiveness is possible. Some may never want to get there; the pain too great or the transgression too horrendous. Yet, history is full of people who, primarily through the love and strength of Christ, have forgiven others of horrendous wrongs. So forgiveness is possible. For the Christian it is important to remember that even when we cannot understand why certain things have happened, when forgiving someone seems impossible, it is then that Christ asks us to share the load with him.

NB Forgiveness may not change the person who has been forgiven but it will change the one who forgives.

Nailed to the cross 3

Ask teenagers to take a moment to think on those areas in their lives where they would like God to stand with them, strengthen them, hold them and walk with them. Ask them to imagine themselves being hugged by Christ at the foot of the cross.

Prayer

God, the hurt we feel is often so strong
We cannot see the sunshine
We cannot see anything but unkindness and suffering.
Please hold us in our pain
brighten our path
lighten our hearts
Walk with us on our journey
Live through us and lead us to a place of peace.
Amen

Optional Resources

2 Forgiving Yourself

Watch 'The power of forgiveness – Sammy Rangel' – TEDxDanubia available on Youtube (21:36)

Watch 'Rediscovering hope through self-forgiveness – Billy Johnson' - TeDx Talks available on Youtube (9:43)

Billy Johnson stole drugs from a drug dealer. In an act of revenge, the drug dealer killed Billy's younger brother. Grieving and guilt ridden, Billy went to the drug dealer's home and shot him dead. Billy spent over 20 years in prison for murder. With two deaths on his conscience, guilt drove him to further acts of rage and violence whilst in prison... guilt was tormenting him.

'I was an empty shell buried in a coffin, alive... I'm slowly trying to put the pieces of my life back in place. At moments I still feel pain but my faith in God drives me every day. And being able to dig deep beyond the surface, to find his light of self-forgiveness is the most rewarding feeling you can feel.'

3 Forgiving Others

Watch 'The power of forgiveness - Royston' available on Youtube (4:02 minutes)

» What words would you use to describe the young man in this video?

This video was produced in response to the final journal entry of Mary Karen Read.

Desmond Tutu said, 'It's **so easy** for the victim to hold on to their victimhood.'

See also:

Watch 'Without forgiveness there is no future - Desmond Tutu' available on Youtube (4:16 minutes)

Watch 'Corrie Ten Boom: A message on forgiveness' available on Youtube (4:22 minutes)
Romans 5:5

Corrie Ten Boom's family were Dutch Christians who hid Jews in their homes from the Nazis in WWII. The family was put into a concentration camp as a result and Corrie's sister died in the camp before Corrie's very eyes. Years later, one of the Nazis who tortured them in the camp asked for her forgiveness.

'I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart but forgiveness is not an emotion... forgiveness is an act of the will and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart... 'Help' I prayed silently... and an incredible thing took place... this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being... 'I forgive you brother, I cried, with all of my heart...' Corrie Ten Boom

Forgiveness That Makes A Difference

Watch 'Maggie Barankitse: Love made me an inventor' available on Youtube (7.51 minutes)

This is an excellent piece on the act of forgiveness in action.

Watch 'African woman forgives criminals who murdered her family, visits one in prison' available on Youtube (2:45 minutes)

Watch 'The power of forgiveness CBS' available on Youtube (3:29 minutes)

Peace and Reconciliation

Nelson Mandela joined the struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa. As a lawyer he was intelligent and vocal so it wasn't long before he was arrested. He was sentenced to life in prison but after spending 27 years in isolation on Robben Island; deprived of his human rights, family and friends, he was released in 1990. On release he did not seek revenge and retribution but reconciliation. Mandela chose to forgive and do something with the power that choice gave him. He pledged to forgive and work with the oppressors of the evil regime in order to build a free and democratic South Africa.

Watch 'Forgiveness, in memory of Nelson Mandela 1918-2013' by Tim Grable available on Youtube (4.04 minutes)

Creative Contribution

Ask teenagers to listen to the song **Forgiven** - by David Crowder and Ed Cash.

Art Piece

Chose one from the following:

- » Draw a piece of art which expresses the truth of this song.
- » Put together a dance which expresses the truth of this song.
- » Produce an acrostic poem using the word 'Forgiven.'

Forgiveness Proverbs

Forgiveness Proverbs

See if you can match the following 'forgiveness proverbs' to the correct country.

- It is fitting for a great God to forgive great sinners
- Forgiving the unrepentant is like drawing pictures on water
- Forgiveness is more satisfying than revenge
- One can forgive a murder but not impoliteness
- Women and fools never forgive
- Where blood has been shed the tree of forgiveness cannot grow
- He who forgives a thief is a thief himself
- The offender never forgives
- Who forgives wins
- If I die, I forgive you; If I recover, we shall see
- If you offend, ask for pardon; if offended, forgive
- They forgive the wine, but they hang the bottle
- You forgive everything of someone who doesn't forgive himself
- God forgives sinners, otherwise his heaven would be empty
- Be patient with your enemies and forgiving of your friends
- If there were no wrongdoings, there would be no forgiveness

Afghanistan; Brazil; China; Egypt; Ethiopia; France;

Germany; Israel; Japan; Russia; Saudi Arabia; Spain

(you'll need to use some of these countries more than once!)

Forgiveness That Makes a Difference

Maggy Barankitse

Maggy Barankitse is known as 'The mother of ten thousand children.' In 1993 thousands were killed in Burundi in the ethnic cleansing between the Hutus and Tutsis. No one was spared, not even children. Maggy was stripped, tied up, beaten and made to watch as seventy-two people were murdered before her eyes - including her family. Many were mutilated. She watched as they beheaded her best friend and her friend's husband. Maggy survived. Afterwards she did something remarkable.

Maggy opened the 'Maison Shalom Centre' (Shalom' means peace) to look after the orphaned children of Burundi from both ethnic groups. Her work didn't stop there. She began to help former child soldiers and those children living with Aids. Maggy has since opened 130 more centres in Burundi. She has received international praise and numerous awards. She says the challenge of helping needy children is big but the human spirit is bigger and stronger. Maggy's whole message is about forgiveness. She forgave the criminal who burned her three aunts alive and she actually visited him in prison.

Her story is truly remarkable.

*'My vocation is
to distribute hope;
to give love.
It's our human vocation...'*

Maggy Barankitse

*The Mother
of Ten Thousand
Children*



One young girl Maggy adopted as an orphan child later got married. The man who killed the girl's parents was at the wedding. The girl went to him and said,

'Now I can forgive you forever because our mum (Maggy) taught us to stand up and fight in dignity, without violence.'

Photo: EFE News Agency / Alamy Stock Photo

Forgiveness That Makes a Difference

Mary Johnson

Mary Johnson thought her world had come to an end when 16 year old Oshea Israel killed her 16 year old son at a party. Oshea was given a 25 year sentence. For 10 years Mary could not forgive him.

However, that all changed one day when she felt the Lord ask her to set up a group for the mothers of murdered children and for the mothers of those children who have murdered. Although Mary was reluctant, God persisted until she finally agreed. However, Mary knew that for this project to truly work, and be the oasis she felt God wanted it to be, she first had to forgive the boy who killed her son.

Although it was very painful she reluctantly began visiting Oshea in prison. This went on for some time. Then one day an almost impossible challenge arose. Oshea asked her for a hug... Mary felt sick to her core; this was too much to give. Again, with mind, body and soul aching, Mary silently whispered, 'Ok Lord.' She got up, walked around the table and hugged her son's killer. Shaking uncontrollably and full of grief, Mary felt her legs start to buckle and she began to faint. Then something incredible happened. Oshea held on to her to protect her from the fall; cradling her in his arms, safe from harm.

In that moment love replaced the hate and resentment Mary had towards Oshea. In that instant Mary's love held on to Oshea and... 'The Forgiveness Project' was born.

When Oshea got out of prison, Mary found him a place to live - right next door to her. They are not just neighbours - Mary feels as if she has gained a son and Oshea regards Mary as his mother from God.


They are not just neighbours - Mary feels as if she has gained a son and Oshea regards Mary as his mother from God.

The
Forgiveness
Project



Photo: Mary Johnson and Oshea Israel - On Being

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/speakingoffaith/5739204007/in/photolist-9KcJTy-9K9Vpe-9Kdjwb-9K9YcB>
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