

**LESSON 2: LEARNING TO FORGIVE MYSELF**

This includes:

- 1. LEADER PREPARATION**
- 2. LESSON GUIDE**

**1. LEADER PREPARATION****LESSON OVERVIEW**

Christ's forgiveness is the path to freedom, but many of us get trapped in shame and guilt because we can't seem to forgive ourselves. We know that Jesus freely forgives us when we ask, but something keeps us from forgiving ourselves. To fully experience freedom we must accept Jesus' grace and, in turn, offer grace to ourselves. This lesson will help your students consider how they can learn to forgive themselves through belonging to Jesus.

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

- 1. WHAT:** We can fully experience freedom by embracing God's grace and learning to forgive ourselves.
- 2. WHY:** Many teenagers hold on to shame and guilt because they feel like they don't deserve forgiveness—a belief that can keep them from experiencing freedom in Christ.
- 3. HOW:** Your students will explore a passage from Romans that can help them consider how they see God and how they can learn to forgive themselves.

**PRIMARY SCRIPTURE**

Romans 8:1-17

**SECONDARY SCRIPTURE**

2 Corinthians 5:11-17

**TEACHING PREP**

**LEADER  
TIP**

**Use this short overview to prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your group, you'll want to absorb it as you prepare to lead.**

**Read Romans 8:1-17.**

Most of Paul's letters were written to churches that he had started, but this is an exception. Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome before he had even met them. He knew that it was essential for the church in Rome to understand the truth of Jesus' work because that city was the heart of the Roman Empire—and as we know now, the city also became a hub of Christianity.

This letter is filled with themes linked to forgiveness and salvation—including adoption, justification, life in the Spirit, and redemption. All of these topics help us understand the power of the gospel and the power of

the Cross. From slave to son, the gospel transforms lives. It is essential for followers of Jesus to walk in this new identity and freedom.

Much of our lesson focuses on the word *condemnation*—a legal term for guilt and punishment. Paul says there is NO condemnation for those who belong to Jesus—there is no guilt or shame or punishment. But he doesn't stop there—he elaborates on what it means to live with no guilt and shame, a lesson many of us need to learn.

## **THE BEFORE & AFTER [OPTIONAL]**

### **TEXTS OR TWEETS**

**Send one or both of these messages to your students prior to your meeting. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.**

- Do you think it's harder to forgive yourself or to forgive other people? Share your thoughts tonight!
- What does it mean to live without condemnation? Join us this week as we talk about this together.

### **PARENT EMAIL**

**Send this email to parents following the lesson to encourage them to continue the conversation at home. Feel free to edit and customize the email to fit your ministry needs.**

Dear parents,

We're continuing our series on shame and guilt—a study that we believe is powerful and can help our students on the journey to freedom.

Our second lesson explored the importance of forgiving ourselves, and was centered on what Paul wrote about forgiveness in Romans 8. We discussed the power of God's forgiveness and saw what that means in regards to forgiving ourselves. We encouraged our teenagers to walk in freedom by forgiving themselves for past sins and mistakes—an essential step in letting go of shame and guilt.

As you go throughout the week, help reinforce this teaching in your teenager's life by asking the following questions as you have the opportunity:

- Why might a follower of Jesus still feel shame and guilt over things in the past, even after receiving God's forgiveness?
- How is forgiving yourself different from receiving forgiveness from God? How are those two things similar?
- How can we help and encourage you to see that you are truly free and forgiven through Jesus?

Thanks for praying for our ministry. Have an amazing week!

**LESSON 2: LEARNING TO FORGIVE MYSELF****2. LESSON GUIDE****GETTING THINGS STARTED [OPTIONAL]****LEADER  
TIP**

Welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then lead students in this opening activity:

Ask students to each share a funny story about a time when they got in trouble as a kid. Depending on the dynamic of the group, it may be best if you lead the way by sharing a story from your childhood.

**ASK:**

- *Whose story was most surprising, and why?*
- *Why do these kinds of memories stay with us, years after they happened?*
- *Do any of you feel guilt about your stories? Why or why not?*

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** *It's fun to think of these times when we caused trouble or broke rules as a kid. Most of us had no problem laughing because we feel no shame or guilt about what we did. Yet many of us have a hard time forgiving ourselves for other moments from our past—even if we know Jesus has forgiven us. We know that Jesus freely forgives us when we ask, but something keeps us from forgiving ourselves. Today we'll discuss how we can learn to forgive ourselves through belonging to Jesus.*

**TEACHING POINTS****LEADER  
TIP**

Use the Teaching Points to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. Remember: All throughout these lessons, it's up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read Romans 8:1-17 together as a group. Consider dividing verses among your students so several people have a chance to read.

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** *Let's examine this passage and see what it reveals about the process of learning to forgive ourselves.*

## 1. WHEN YOU BELONG TO JESUS, YOU ARE FORGIVEN

### ASK:

- Some people say verse 1 is the most powerful verse in this passage. Do you agree or disagree, and why?
- What does it mean to be “condemned”?
- If you belong to Jesus, you face no condemnation—explain what Paul meant.
- How might a person facing no condemnation live differently from a person who’s condemned?
- Why might a follower of Jesus still feel shame and guilt over things in the past, even after receiving God’s forgiveness?

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Paul kicks off this passage with a big word: condemnation. This word is a legal term that you might hear a judge speak in a courtroom. It means that a person has been found guilty and deserves punishment. But Paul says that those who belong to Jesus don’t face condemnation. We aren’t guilty, and we no longer deserve punishment. We can experience freedom, yet sometimes we still feel shame and guilt because of things we’ve done. We can learn to forgive ourselves as we remember that Jesus died for us on the cross. When we belong to Jesus, everything changes—including the fact that we don’t have to feel shameful or guilty. Jesus has paid the penalty for our sins.

## 2. WHEN YOU BELONG TO JESUS, THE SPIRIT LEADS YOU

### ASK:

- Look at verse 4—how are the sinful nature and the Spirit different?
- Verse 5 says followers of Jesus are “controlled by the Holy Spirit.” Does that mean our brains turn off and we don’t have to make any choices for ourselves? Explain.
- Look at verse 6—how are guilt and shame opposites of “life and peace”?
- When do you find it easy to let the Holy Spirit guide you? When is it difficult?

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Belonging means that the Holy Spirit leads and guides us. This doesn’t happen overnight—it’s a process. You can determine if your thoughts are controlled by the Spirit or by your sinful nature based on where your decisions lead you. Do your actions take you to a place of shame, guilt, and condemnation, or do they take you to a place of life, peace, and freedom? When you are living wisely but still feel shame or guilt, you can stop and remind yourself that God lives in you and doesn’t condemn you—instead, God offers you forgiveness, freedom, and belonging through Jesus.

## 3. WHEN YOU BELONG TO JESUS, YOU ARE RIGHT WITH GOD

### ASK:

- Rephrase verse 9 in your own words.
- What does it mean to be right with God?
- If belonging means that you are right with God, how can that truth make it easier for you to forgive yourself?

- Look at verse 15—how is “a spirit that makes you fearful slaves” similar to the sense of shame and guilt we might feel?

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** *When we belong to Jesus, we are right with God. This is a huge mystery, and I am not sure any of us can fully grasp the power of this truth. Yet if Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection can make us right with God, how and why do we still hold on to our shame and guilt? Why do we find it difficult to forgive ourselves? In a way, when we don’t forgive ourselves, we minimize what Jesus did. When we belong to him, we are right before God—we no longer have to feel any guilt or shame. This is so powerful, and many of us simply need to start each day remembering this truth.*

### EXTRA DISCUSSION [OPTIONAL]

#### ASK:

- How is forgiving yourself different from receiving forgiveness from God? How are those two things similar?
- What are some benefits of learning to forgive yourself?
- What are some possible consequences of NOT forgiving yourself?
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-17. Summarize what this passage says happens to our lives when we experience Christ’s love.
- How can the truths in verses 16 and 17 make it easier for you to forgive yourself?
- Even if you still struggle with shame and guilt, what are some ways you know you’re a new creation in Christ?

### LIVING IT OUT

Ask students to form groups of two or three to discuss these questions.



#### ASK:

- What are your biggest obstacles or hurdles to forgiving yourself?
- What might life be like if you walked in full freedom from shame and guilt?
- Does your thinking need to change in order to forgive yourself? Explain.
- How can others help you to forgive yourself? How do you need Jesus’ help in all of this?

Bring everyone back together, and ask for volunteers to share answers to the previous questions, as time permits.

### SUMMARY



Provide a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) this lesson’s content, (2) the dialogue that took place today, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.

**FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]**

Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the Scripture below.

*“So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).*