

LESSON 1: ACCEPTING GOD'S FORGIVENESS

This includes:

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

1. LEADER PREPARATION**LESSON OVERVIEW**

Shame and guilt from sin can hold us back from experiencing the freedom that God has planned for us. Learning to let go of shame and guilt begins by admitting our need for forgiveness and finding grace from God. Our sin and disobedience come at a great cost to us. Sin leads to death; there is nothing hopeful in our sin. It is important for us to first understand our own great need for forgiveness. Only when we truly understand this need will we begin to grasp Jesus' great love and mercy.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- 1. WHAT:** We all need for forgiveness from God—forgiveness that weakens the power of shame and guilt in our lives.
- 2. WHY:** It is essential to understand that forgiveness is essential to freedom—but we also must remember the price paid for our forgiveness.
- 3. HOW:** Your students will reflect on their basic need of forgiveness and on God's grace, a truth that opens the door to greater freedom in their lives.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 2:1-10

SECONDARY SCRIPTURE

Galatians 5:16-21

TEACHING PREP

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.



**LEADER
TIP**

Read Ephesians 2:1-10.

The Apostle Paul wrote the book of Ephesians while sitting in a Roman prison cell, and many theologians believe that he intended for many churches to read this letter before it landed in Ephesus, which is located in modern-day Turkey. The letter is full of wisdom for not just the Christians in Ephesus but also for every follower of Jesus.

Here in Chapter 2, Paul explains the heart of the good news. He starts with the realities of our human nature and how this sinful path leads to death. He then spends the next portion of the chapter reflecting on God's amazing love that sets us free from the grip of sin. Paul reminds us that it is not about us but about God's goodness. Everything starts there. We cannot earn forgiveness, so we need to maintain a humble attitude about our right standing with God.

Shame and guilt keep us from experiencing all the freedoms and joys of being forgiven. While we must be willing to admit that we are sinners, Paul makes it clear that God's plan isn't to hold that against us or keep us there. Instead, God wants to lead us into new life. We need forgiveness—but true forgiveness moves us forward and doesn't keep us stuck in our sin. And we can only experience freedom when we have been forgiven.

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.

- Why are shame and guilt so powerful? Share your thoughts with the group when we meet this week.
- How long can you go without sinning? Come out tonight for great conversation.

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've launched a new three-week study on shame and guilt—an important topic to cover as we help our teenagers experience Christ's freedom.

Our first lesson focused on Ephesians 2:1-10 to help us understand the power of Christ's forgiveness. This week's conversation helped our students reflect on our sinful nature as humans, which leads to our need for grace, as well as Jesus' loving nature and the gift of forgiveness that he offers to us.

Here are some questions you might want to ask throughout the week, to keep the conversation flowing:

- What does it feel like to make a mistake but to receive forgiveness from another person?
- If God forced us to receive forgiveness instead of letting it be something we must choose to accept, what would that say about God—and about us?
- What obstacles can keep us from fully understanding the cost of our sin or the value of the forgiveness God offers through Jesus?

Have a blessed week!

LESSON 1: ACCEPTING GOD'S FORGIVENESS**2. LESSON GUIDE****GETTING THINGS STARTED [OPTIONAL]****LEADER
TIP**

Preview the following video for your group: youtube.com/watch?v=WXwQORTszBg (or find another video on the topic of God's forgiveness). You will need an Internet connection and a computer or tablet to display the video for your participants.

Welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then show the video clip. Then **ASK**:

- *Do you think this video offers an accurate picture of forgiveness? Why or why not?*
- *What does it feel like to make a mistake but to receive forgiveness from another person?*
- *What is required to receive forgiveness from another person?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *While this video is simple, it helps us appreciate the value of forgiveness. We are not pencils, and God is not a magic eraser. But all of us have made mistakes, and God does have the ability to forgive. Not only does God have the ability, he also wants us to receive his forgiveness. Today we're going to talk about why we need forgiveness from God, and we'll celebrate how he offers it to us through 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 Ephesians 2:1-10 together as a group. Consider dividing verses among your students so several people have a chance to read.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Let's jump in and see what we can learn from this passage about the amazing gift of God's forgiveness.*

1. OUR HUMAN NATURE DRAWS US TOWARD SIN**ASK:**

- *Think about the earliest sin you remember committing. What was it, and how old were you?*
- *How long can you go without sinning? Be honest!*

- Look at verse 2—what are the implications of Paul's description of the devil?
- Sin entered our world through a decision by Adam and Even in the Garden of Eden. Why is it important to remember that their decision was an act of rebellion?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Paul makes it clear that everyone—no matter how “good” we may appear to be—is prone to sin and disobedience. Our human nature is imperfect and in need of forgiveness. This problem started in the Garden of Eden and continues today. We can even see it in little children, who don't have to be taught to lie, right? Paul doesn't share this insight to shame us but to remind us of our need for forgiveness—our need for a restored, renewed relationship with God.

2. SIN LEADS TO HOPELESSNESS

ASK:

- When have you felt hopeless and powerless because of sin?
- How can sin become a trap that keeps you from experiencing true freedom?
- How do “the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature” lead to hopelessness?
- Look at verse 2—are there any similarities between a life of obedience to the devil and a life of obedience to Jesus? Explain.
- What does it mean to be “subject to God's anger,” as verse 3 says?
- If you hadn't read this whole passage but stopped at verse 3, how might you feel, and why?
- Why does sin produce feelings of shame and guilt?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Our sin and disobedience come at a great cost to us. Sin leads to death; there is nothing hopeful in our sin. Again, Paul isn't trying to shame us but instead wants us to see our own hopelessness without the good news of Jesus. It is important for us to first understand our own great need for forgiveness. Only when we truly understand this need will we begin to grasp Jesus' great love and mercy.

3. GOD LOVINGLY OFFERS FORGIVENESS

ASK:

- List all the words in this passage that describe God. Which word stands out to you most strongly, and why?
- Does Paul offer a simple or hard solution for us to experience God's grace? Explain.
- Once we have experienced God's grace, what does Paul say of our life and our future? Why is this so encouraging?
- Why is verse 9 such a profound and powerful verse?
- Look at verse 10—is Paul saying we are only God's masterpiece after we receive forgiveness through Jesus, or did God create all of us that way from the beginning? Explain your answer.
- If God forced us to receive forgiveness instead of letting it be something we must choose to accept or reject, what would that say about God—and about us?
- What are some similarities and differences between receiving forgiveness from God and receiving forgiveness from other people?

- *How does forgiveness weaken the destructive power of shame and guilt?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Our human nature leads us to sin and paves a road that leads to death, but God's very nature is love, kindness, and grace. God offers to save and rescue us from our nature and from our death—and provide us with new life and a hope-filled future. We can talk a lot about forgiveness but miss the power of it if we don't reflect on the cost of our sin. The good news is that no matter what we have done, God freely offers salvation through Jesus, who lived a perfect life, died to pay the penalty for our sins, and then came back to life again. We can go from hopeless to hope-filled by receiving God's great forgiveness.*

EXTRA DISCUSSION [OPTIONAL]

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



ASK:

- *Read Galatians 5:16-21. These verses speak to our sinful nature. How do all of the different actions or lifestyles in verses 19-21 draw us away from Jesus?*
- *How prevalent are these behaviors in our world today?*
- *What does it mean to not inherit the kingdom of God?*

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

LIVING IT OUT

ASK:

- *What obstacles can keep us from fully understanding the cost of our sin or the value of the forgiveness God offers through Jesus?*
- *What are ways you can remember and celebrate God's kindness, love, and grace this week?*
- *If you truly understand the gift God has given you, how might that be reflected in your life?*
- *If you've received God's gift of forgiveness through Jesus, how can you share that good news with someone else this week? If you haven't received that gift of forgiveness yet, what questions do you need answered, or how can we help you think about the reasons to make that decision?*
- *What do you want or need Jesus to do in your life this week?*

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.

*“But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!)”
(Ephesians 2:4-5).*