

THE HEALING POWER OF FORGIVENESS

LESSON

7

Purpose To help participants experience the peace that comes to those who forgive one another and to encourage participants to nurture a spirit of forgiveness in their homes.

Preparation

1. Review the principles under “Your Responsibilities as a Teacher” (pages ix–xi in this manual). Look for ways to apply these principles in your preparation to teach.
2. Read the lesson’s bold headings, which outline the doctrines and principles in the lesson. As part of your preparation, ponder these doctrines and principles throughout the week, seeking the guidance of the Spirit in deciding what you should emphasize to meet participants’ needs.
3. Remind participants to bring their copies of the *Marriage and Family Relations Participant’s Study Guide* to class. They will benefit from referring to it during the lesson.

Note: As you teach this lesson, be particularly sensitive to the circumstances of individual participants. If participants ask questions about seeking or extending forgiveness in serious family problems such as abuse or infidelity, gently encourage them to speak individually with the bishop.

**Suggested Lesson
Development**

A spirit of forgiveness between husband and wife helps bring peace and a feeling of trust and security.

Read the following story related by Elder Hugh W. Pinnock of the Seventy:

“A couple . . . married later in life; the wife had been married before, but it was the husband’s first marriage. After several months of marital bliss, a serious disagreement erupted that so hurt the husband emotionally that he could not function at his daily tasks.

“As he reeled from the impact of this confrontation, he stopped to analyze the problem and realized that at least a part of the problem had been his. He went to his bride and stammered awkwardly several times, ‘I’m sorry, Honey.’ The wife burst into tears, confessing that much of the problem was hers, and asked forgiveness. As they held each other, she confessed that in her experience those words of apology had not been used before, and she now knew that any of their future problems could be worked out. She felt secure because she knew they both could say, ‘I’m sorry’; ‘I forgive’” (“Making a Marriage Work,” *Ensign*, Sept. 1981, 36–37).

Contrast this story with President Gordon B. Hinckley’s description of an interview he had with a husband and wife who were experiencing difficulties in their marriage (page 26 in the *Marriage and Family Relations Participant’s Study Guide*):

“I recall listening at length to a couple who sat across the desk from me. There was bitterness between them. I know that at one time their love was deep and true. But each had developed a habit of speaking of the faults of the other. Unwilling to forgive the kind of mistakes we all make, and unwilling to forget them and live above them with forbearance, they had carped at one another until the love they once knew had been smothered. It had turned to ashes with the decree of a so-called ‘no-fault’ divorce. Now there is only loneliness and recrimination. I am satisfied that had there been even a small measure of repentance and forgiveness, they would still be together, enjoying the companionship that had so richly blessed their earlier years” (“Of You It Is Required to Forgive,” *Ensign*, June 1991, 4).

- What can we learn from these two examples?

Explain that this lesson is about the need to seek forgiveness and the importance of forgiving one another. Emphasize that a married couple can overcome many challenges in their relationship if they strive to have a spirit of forgiveness in their marriage. As they do so, they will learn the truth of President Gordon B. Hinckley’s promise to those who forgive one another: “There will come into your heart a peace otherwise unattainable” (*Ensign*, June 1991, 5).

Husbands and wives should seek each other’s forgiveness for their shortcomings and make sincere efforts to improve.

- Why is it important for husbands and wives to say “I’m sorry” and ask each other’s forgiveness for their shortcomings?
- Why is it sometimes difficult to ask for forgiveness? (Answers may include that selfishness and pride get in the way or that we sometimes blame others for our problems.)
- How can we find the strength to seek others’ forgiveness?

Emphasize that as we seek forgiveness, it is important to make sincere efforts to change and, as necessary, to repent of our sins. It is not enough to merely express sorrow for our actions; we need to work to be worthy of others’ forgiveness and also of the Lord’s forgiveness.

- What are the dangers of seeking forgiveness without making efforts to improve?

As you conclude this section of the lesson, consider sharing one or both of the following true stories:

After spending an evening out with his wife and a few friends, a man noticed that his wife was unusually quiet. He asked her if something was wrong, and she explained that she had felt embarrassed and hurt several times during the evening because he had told stories that were directed at her. At first, he defended his actions, saying that he was only kidding, that he had only wanted everyone to have a good time, and that she was overreacting. As they talked, however, he realized that he had truly hurt her feelings. He felt very sorry as he realized that his flippant attitude had embarrassed his wife many times. He apologized and promised not to embarrass her again. He kept his promise. From then on, he found ways to sincerely compliment her in the presence of others.

A husband and father who had become involved with pornography when he was a teenager had not stopped this practice. He was discouraged because he did not

know how he could change. Finally, he prayed diligently for help, humbled himself, and began to study the Savior's life and teachings. As he understood more about the blessings offered through the Atonement of the Savior, he realized that it was possible for him to change his behavior. He saw that his addiction was destroying himself and his marriage and family. His new understanding of the mission of Jesus Christ allowed him to make the needed changes and save his marriage.

Share the following statement, made by Elder Spencer W. Kimball while serving in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:

“To every forgiveness there is a condition. The plaster must be as wide as the sore. The fasting, the prayers, the humility must be equal to or greater than the sin. There must be a broken heart and a contrite spirit. There must be ‘sackcloth and ashes.’ There must be tears and genuine change of heart. There must be conviction of the sin, abandonment of the evil, confession of the error to properly constituted authorities of the Lord. There must be restitution and a confirmed, determined change of pace, direction and destination. Conditions must be controlled and companionship corrected or changed. There must be a washing of robes to get them white and there must be a new consecration and devotion to the living of all of the laws of God. In short, there must be an overcoming of self, of sin, and of the world” (*The Miracle of Forgiveness* [1969], 353).

Husbands and wives should seek to forgive one another.

Point out that in addition to seeking forgiveness for our sins and for mistakes we have made, we need to be forgiving. Sometimes we can become offended by little things people do, but the Lord has commanded us to forgive one another. Read Doctrine and Covenants 64:8–10 and Matthew 6:14–15 with participants.

- In what ways are marriages strengthened when husbands and wives willingly forgive one another?

President Gordon B. Hinckley counseled: “If there be any who nurture in their hearts the poisonous brew of enmity toward another, I plead with you to ask the Lord for strength to forgive. This expression of desire will be of the very substance of your repentance. It may not be easy, and it may not come quickly. But if you will seek it with sincerity and cultivate it, it *will* come. . . . There will come into your heart a peace otherwise unattainable” (*Ensign*, June 1991, 5; see also page 26 in the *Marriage and Family Relations Participant's Study Guide*).

- Why is it sometimes difficult to forgive? (Answers may include that people seek to protect themselves from being hurt in the future, that they think forgiving is the same as condoning hurtful actions, or that they find it difficult to forgive a person who expects forgiveness without making efforts to overcome offensive behavior.)
- What are the dangers of husbands and wives refusing to forgive?
- In what ways does forgiveness bless those who are being forgiven? How can forgiveness from others help a person change unwanted behavior?
- In what ways can a spirit of forgiveness bless the person who forgives?

Suggest that when we feel that we have been wronged by others, we should ask ourselves how the Savior would want us to respond. As President Howard W. Hunter, the 14th President of the Church, counseled: “We must think more of

holy things and act more like the Savior would expect his disciples to act. We should at every opportunity ask ourselves, ‘What would Jesus do?’ and then act more courageously upon the answer” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1994, 118; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 87).

Read the following counsel from President Joseph F. Smith, the sixth President of the Church:

“We all have our weaknesses and failings. Sometimes the husband sees a failing in his wife, and he upbraids her with it. Sometimes the wife feels that her husband has not done just the right thing, and she upbraids him. What good does it do? Is not forgiveness better? Is not charity better? Is not love better? Isn’t it better not to speak of faults, not to magnify weaknesses by iterating and reiterating them? Isn’t that better? and will not the union that has been cemented between you and the birth of children and by the bond of the new and everlasting covenant, be more secure when you forget to mention weaknesses and faults one of another? Is it not better to drop them and say nothing about them—bury them and speak only of the good that you know and feel, one for another, and thus bury each other’s faults and not magnify them; isn’t that better?” (“Sermon on Home Government,” *Millennial Star*, 25 Jan. 1912, 49–50).

Conclusion

Share the following statement by Elder Spencer W. Kimball:

“What relief! What comfort! What joy! Those laden with transgressions and sorrows and sin may be forgiven and cleansed and purified if they will return to their Lord, learn of him, and keep his commandments. And all of us needing to repent of day-to-day follies and weaknesses can likewise share in this miracle” (*The Miracle of Forgiveness*, 368).

As prompted by the Spirit, testify that when married couples are forgiving of one another’s shortcomings, they experience peace. They become more unified and more able to deal with the challenges of marriage and parenthood. Invite participants to nurture a spirit of forgiveness in their homes.

Refer to pages 25–27 in the *Marriage and Family Relations Participant’s Study Guide*. Encourage participants to review the doctrines and principles in this lesson by (1) following at least one of the suggestions in “Ideas for Application” and (2) reading the article “Of You It Is Required to Forgive,” by President Gordon B. Hinckley. Emphasize that married couples can receive great benefits from reading and discussing the articles in the study guide together.

Remind participants to bring their study guides to class for the next lesson.