



White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church

Grow Your Soul & Serve the World

www.wbuuc.org | 652.426.2369 | 328 Maple Street | Mahtomedi, MN 55115

Theme for October

Forgiveness – the practice of letting go

Each month, our church gathers around a monthly theme and practice to guide our congregational life: worship, small groups, religious education, justice, and classes. Use these readings for reflection around the dinner table, in your own prayer practice, alone or with others.

*If you are interested in a monthly theme Sharing Circle, contact:
Rev. Luke Stevens-Royer revluke@wbuuc.org or 651.426.2369x103*

QUESTIONS

When have you been forgiven, and how did it feel?
When have you forgiven another, and how did it feel?
When does it seem right *not* to forgive someone?
How has it felt to *not* be forgiven by another?
How can you practice forgiveness and letting go toward yourself?

QUOTATIONS

With each act of forgiveness, whether small or great, we move toward wholeness. Without forgiveness, we remain tethered to the person who harmed us... Until we can forgive the person who harmed us, they will hold the keys to our happiness, they will be our jailor.

- Desmond & Mpho Tutu

Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.

- Corrie ten Boom, author of *The Hiding Place*

Come, come, whoever you are. Wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving. It doesn't matter. Ours is not a caravan of despair. come, even if you have broken your vows a thousand times. Come, yet again , come , come.

- Rumi

Let go to hold on, I try to say to myself. Let go of arrogance, stubbornness, and grudges, to hold on to relationship, love, belonging. When I can forgive another within my own heart, whether they know it or not, my heart is released from the prison of grudges and learns how to fly again.

- Anonymous

POETRY & LYRICS

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about your despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting --
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.
- Mary Oliver

For remaining silent when a single voice would have made a difference, we forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For each time that our fears have made us rigid and inaccessible, we forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For each time that we have struck out in anger without just cause, we forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For each time that our greed has blinded us to the needs of others, we forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For the selfishness which sets us apart and alone, we forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For falling short of the admonitions of the spirit, we forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For losing sight of our unity, we forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

For those and for so many acts both evident and subtle which have fueled the illusion of separateness, we forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

- Robert Eller-Isaacs

READINGS & EXCERPTS

From For the Greater Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life
What Is Forgiveness?

Psychologists generally define forgiveness as a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness.

Just as important as defining what forgiveness is, though, is understanding what forgiveness is not. Experts who study or teach forgiveness make clear that when you forgive, you do not gloss over or deny the seriousness of an offense against you. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting, nor does it mean condoning or excusing offenses. Though forgiveness can help repair a damaged relationship, it doesn't obligate you to reconcile with the person who harmed you, or release them from legal accountability.

Instead, forgiveness brings the forgiver peace of mind and frees him or her from corrosive anger. While there is some debate over whether true forgiveness requires positive feelings toward the offender, experts agree that it at least involves letting go of deeply held negative feelings. In that way, it empowers you to recognize the pain you suffered without letting that pain define you, enabling you to heal and move on with your life.

Why Practice Forgiveness?

We often think of forgiveness as a kind, magnanimous act—an act of mercy or compassion extended to someone who wronged us. While that can be true, research over the past few decades has revealed enormous personal benefits to forgiveness as well. According to that research, here are some of the most compelling ways forgiveness is good for us, our relationships, and our communities.

Forgiveness makes us happier: Research suggests not only that happy people are more likely to forgive but that forgiving others can make people feel happy, especially when they forgive someone to whom they feel close.

Forgiveness improves our health: When we dwell on grudges, our blood pressure and heart rate spike—signs of stress which damage the body; when we forgive, our stress levels drop. Studies also suggest that holding grudges might compromise our immune system, making us less resistant to illness.

Forgiveness sustains relationships: When our friends inevitably hurt or disappoint us, holding a grudge makes us less likely to sacrifice or cooperate with them, which undermines feelings of trust and commitment, driving us further apart. Studies suggest that forgiveness can stop this downward spiral and repair our relationship before it dissolves.

Forgiveness is good for marriages (most of the time): Spouses who are more forgiving and less vindictive are better at resolving conflicts effectively in their marriage. A long-term study of newlyweds found that more forgiving spouses had stronger, more satisfying relationships. However, when more forgiving spouses were frequently mistreated by their husband or wife, they became less satisfied with their marriage.

Forgiveness boosts kindness and connectedness: People who feel forgiving don't only feel more positive toward someone who hurt them. They are also more likely to want to volunteer and donate money to charity, and they feel more connected to other people in general.

Forgiveness can help heal the wounds of war: A research-based forgiveness training program in Rwanda, for instance, was linked to reduced trauma and more positive attitudes between the Hutus and Tutsis there. A study of people who learned forgiveness skills in war-torn Sierra Leone found that they reported feeling less depressed, more grateful, more satisfied with life, and less stressed afterward.

Perhaps most famously, South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission is widely credited with encouraging forgiveness and reconciliation after the end of apartheid in that country. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the commission's chairman, has argued that forgiveness is the path to "true enduring peace."

Forgiveness Meditation for Children

Theme: Forgiveness of self and others

Give children a moment each time you ask them to picture someone new.

Read aloud the words you want children to say silently to themselves one phrase at a time, with pauses in between.

Picture yourself in your mind. As you breathe in and out, repeat these words silently to yourself:

I forgive myself for whatever I did, on purpose or by accident.

May I be happy, free of confusion, understand myself and the world.

May I help others to be happy, free of confusion, and full of understanding.

Now picture in your mind a person you love and want to forgive.

As you breathe in and out, repeat these words silently to yourself:

From my heart, I forgive you for whatever you did, on purpose or by accident.

May you be happy, free of confusion, and understand yourself and the world.

Please forgive me for whatever I did to you, on purpose or by accident.

May we open our hearts and minds to meet in love and understanding.

Try to feel the warmth of the healing between you.

Now picture in your mind someone you have hurt.

As you breathe in and out, repeat these words silently to yourself:

Please forgive me for whatever I did to you, on purpose or by accident.

May you be happy, free of confusion, and understand yourself and the world.

Please forgive me for whatever I did to you, on purpose or by accident.

May we open our hearts and minds to meet in love and understanding.

Try to feel the warmth of the healing between you.

Now picture in your mind a person you do not like very much.

As you breathe in and out, repeat these words silently to yourself:

Please forgive me for whatever I did to you, on purpose or by accident.

May you be happy, free of confusion, and understand yourself and the world.

Please forgive me for whatever I did to you, on purpose or by accident.

May we open our hearts and minds to meet in love and understanding.

Try to feel the warmth of the healing between you.