

JUSTICE FOR ALL

WEEK 4 (HYBRID)

BIG IDEA

Genesis 45:1-8, 50:15-20; Luke 6:27-38; Romans 12:17-21

Bible

Genesis 45:1-8, 50:15-20; Luke 6:27-38; Romans 12:17-21

WHAT?

ACTIVITY | Forgiveness Balloons

- Welcome to our final week of *Justice for All*, where we've been talking about doing what's right, even when other people don't.
- We've got some big things to talk about today, but before we get there, let's keep it simple: when you do something wrong, you should probably say, "I'm sorry." And when someone tells you they're sorry, you should probably say . . .
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this game, you'll need [balloons](#) in two different colors and maybe some permanent markers. Divide your group into two roughly equal teams. Give every person one balloon and split the colors up evenly by team. Have everyone inflate their balloons. If you'd like, you can also have them write something on their balloons they might have to ask forgiveness for. (Just keep your eyes open for inappropriate content.) When all the balloons are inflated, pass out one thumbtack to each person and have them toss their balloons into the center of the room. The goal is to pop all of the other team's balloons by sitting or stepping on them. Each time someone pops a balloon, they must yell, "I forgive you!" The first team to forgive all their opponent's grievances by popping all their balloons wins.*
- Of course, forgiveness isn't as simple as popping a balloon, but there are some similarities.
 - Just like it took some time to pop all of those balloons, forgiveness is a process too. It's a choice you have to make over and over, every day, until every balloon is gone and you're free of hurt.
 - The journey of forgiveness isn't always an orderly process. Sometimes you end up running around screaming. Sometimes you think you're done, but then you realize there are still more balloons to pop that you hadn't seen before.
 - But when do manage to forgive, forgiveness is the thing that finally lets all the air out of your anger and hurt.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.*
 - **What's the weirdest reason you've ever had to ask someone for forgiveness?**
 - * **Who is the most forgiving person you know? Why do you say that?**
 - **How would you define "forgiveness?"**

STORY | Talk about a time someone forgave you.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story from your own life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time when you were in the wrong. This could be a funny story or a vulnerable one. If you're sharing a more vulnerable story, talk about why their forgiveness mattered to you.*
- Can you think of anyone you're holding a grudge against right now? Or maybe someone you don't talk to anymore because a disagreement or hurt ruined the relationship? Look, sometimes it is the right call to part ways with someone when your relationship just isn't healthy. But if we ended relationships every time someone hurt us . . . well, we'd eventually end up all alone.
- But forgiveness is tricky. Everyone says you need to forgive, but no one tells you how to forgive or why you should.
 - So why should we forgive people when they've hurt us?
 - Why can't we take revenge instead?
 - What about when they've *really* hurt us?
 - And when we choose not to forgive, what might we be missing out on?

SO WHAT?

SCRIPTURE | Genesis 45:1-2

- For the last few weeks, we've been covering the story of Joseph. Most of the story so far has been pretty fast-paced. In Scripture, a lot happens in not-a-lot of chapters. But as we pick up Joseph's story for the last time, we've got a lot of ground to cover.
- Here's what's happened so far.
 - Joseph's dad Jacob caused a ton of issues in his family by playing favorites with Joseph.
 - Because of Jacob's favoritism (and the fact that Joseph had a tendency to brag) Joseph's brothers hated him.
 - One of the things Joseph bragged about was a dream he had. In the dream, God spoke to him through a vision and said Joseph would one day find himself in a position of authority, with everyone (including his own family members) bowing down to him.
 - This vision was the last straw for Joseph's brothers. They didn't kill him, but they did something just as hateful — they sold him into slavery.
 - While in slavery, Joseph hung onto his hope and his integrity and God blessed him for it.
 - Then Joseph was falsely accused of a crime and thrown into prison. But even in prison, Joseph's character and trust in God won him the trust of his prison guard.
- Let's pick up the story from there.
 - Joseph spent twelve whole years in jail. During that time, Pharaoh (ruler of Egypt) took notice of Joseph, released him from prison, and gave him a position of power in the

nation.

- A lot happened in that time that's really interesting, so read it sometime. But the point is Joseph went from being a slave to being second in command over all of Egypt.
- Joseph is now thirty years old, and has not seen or heard from his family in thirteen years — not since his brothers sold him into slavery.
- Joseph doesn't know it, but his brothers and father are still living nearby in a nearby country, and because of a famine, are starving to death. Their long-lost brother Joseph is not on their minds at all. As far as they know, he's dead.
- Joseph's brothers hear there's grain in Egypt, so they set out on a journey to go get some. But here's what they don't know: because Joseph is now the Governor of Egypt, he's in charge of handing out the food. If you're starving to death, the last person you want in charge of your food supply is someone you once tried to murder.
- When the brothers arrive to buy food, they stand before Joseph and don't even recognize him — but Joseph definitely recognizes them. As Joseph flashes back to the trauma his brothers once caused him, let's try to get a sense of how Joseph dealt with his past suddenly resurfacing.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Genesis 45:1-2.*
- Joseph was in pain — deep, deep pain. It makes sense, right? He sustained so much trauma at the hands of his brothers. He was hated, jumped, nearly murdered, abandoned, and then sold into slavery.
 - This kind of pain is not the kind of thing that suddenly goes away. It can't be "popped" with a simple "I forgive you." When you've been hurt as deeply as Joseph had been, it will always take time for healing to come.
 - This story will have a happy ending, but to really understand how miraculous that ending is going to be, you must understand how deep and traumatic Joseph's pain was.
- Joseph couldn't stand the pain any longer. He broke down and wept. He wept so loudly the Egyptians outside could hear him and word of this breakdown quickly carried to Pharaoh's palace.

SCRIPTURE | Genesis 45:3-8

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Genesis 45:3-8.*
- As Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers, we see him do something remarkable. After all the hurt and trauma he sustained . . .
 - Joseph reaches out in love to his family.
 - He forgives when he has every reason not to forgive. Rather than hanging onto bitterness, Joseph lets his pain resolve.
 - He sees God was working in and through him all along. He says, "It was God who brought me here, not you!" Because God had given him favor with the rulers of Egypt, Joseph was now in a position to help not just Egypt, but his own family too.
 - Rather than seeking vengeance, he vows to make sure his family is safe and well-fed. He even invites them to move to Egypt to be near him.
 - Then Joseph gives his brothers a chance to redeem themselves. When he asks his brothers to go home and come back with his baby brother and dad, Joseph knows they may not take him up on that offer — but he's letting them know he trusts them enough to let them go.

SCRIPTURE | Genesis 50:15-18

- Joseph's brothers honor Joseph's request and get his whole family to Egypt without a fight. The whole family live safely in Egypt for seventeen long years. But when their father Jacob dies, Joseph's brothers become terrified Joseph is going to come after them.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Genesis 50:15-18.*
- Did Jacob *really* give his sons that message for Joseph before he died, or were they just making up a story to protect themselves? Scripture doesn't say, but it doesn't really matter if they were still lying or not.
 - Joseph didn't forgive his brothers because they deserved it. He forgave them because he was tired of the brokenness.
 - Joseph wanted to see restoration, peace, and wholeness, so he decided to help create it through forgiveness.

SCRIPTURE | Genesis 50:19-20

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Genesis 50:19-20*
- Joseph closes this painful story by declaring he wasn't anyone's judge and that God would ultimately balance the scales of justice.

SCRIPTURE | Luke 6:27-38

- Long after Joseph lived, Jesus arrived on the scene with a vision of God's justice that would have been familiar to Joseph.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Luke 6:27-38.*
- Jesus' answer to being wronged is the reminder to love your enemies. Instead of hating them, pray for them. Instead of taking revenge, pray they turn from their wicked ways and receive God's forgiveness.
- Joseph spent a long time separated from his family because of the pain they caused him.
 - When they finally met again after lots of years (and lots of pain), he had a choice — to take revenge or give forgiveness.
 - Joseph knew forgiving his brothers wouldn't erase what they had done to him, but it would begin the healing process for him and his family too.
- Joseph's story is a beautiful example of God's justice. It's the kind of justice Jesus preached and modeled too. It's not justice punishes out of revenge. It's justice that seeks to **restore what was broken.**

NOW WHAT?

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.*

- * **When is it most difficult for you to forgive someone?**
- * **Do you think forgiveness is always necessary? Why or why not?**
- **If you were in Joseph's shoes, how would you have responded to your family?**
- **How is God's version of justice different from revenge?**

WHAT IS RESTORATIVE JUSTICE?

- When we first began this series, we talked about what justice is (and isn't). We said God's justice is not . . .
 - **PUNISHMENT:** It isn't just the thing that happens to people when they're caught doing something wrong.
 - **REVENGE:** It's not the same thing as getting revenge against someone who hurt us.
 - **A TREND:** It's not a term we can throw around only when it's convenient or interesting or trendy.
- God's justice is much more beautiful (and much more difficult) than the world's definition of justice. God's justice restores. It's about . . .
 - **REPENTANCE:** Justice calls the people who have done harm to change their ways, but it also gives them an opportunity to do so — just like Joseph did for his brothers.
 - **RECONCILIATION:** Because justice is about making wrong things right, our hope should always be for our relationships with each other to be healed and made whole. Joseph and his family reconciled, but that's not always possible. When we've hurt someone, we can't force them to want to be in a relationship with us again. And when someone refuses to stop hurting us, we can't continue to put ourselves in harm's way. It's okay if reconciliation isn't always possible.
 - **RESTORATION:** Even when a relationship can't be reconciled justice always seeks to see people healed. Joseph and his brothers had a lot of healing to do, but Joseph seemed to understand that restoration (like forgiveness) is sometimes a long process. God's vision of justice isn't about quickly moving on or ignoring the harm people cause. God's justice doesn't ignore the things that are broken. It works to heal them instead.
- If you need a more perfect picture of restorative justice than what Joseph's family can give us, look to Jesus. The gospel of Jesus is justice in action because . . .
 - **God invites us to repentance.** We've done harm to ourselves, others, and God, but we're invited to change.
 - **Jesus reconciles us to God.** We're so loved by our Creator that, instead of holding a grudge against us, Jesus lived, died, and rose again so we could enter into a loving, eternal, unbroken relationship with God.
 - **God gives us restoration.** The wages of sin is death, but Jesus offers us new life — not just in eternity, but here and now. Jesus came to restore everything that was broken.
- We can't take God out of the equation of justice. It's only through God that we can have a perspective that allows us to move past outrage and pain and into love and forgiveness.

RESPONSE | A Dream for Justice

- Remember that dream Joseph once had? The one he used to make his brothers jealous? Well, it turns out that dream come true, but not like Joseph expected it to.
 - God never gave Joseph that dream to make him feel superior to his brothers. God gave him his position of authority so he could rescue them.

- God's dream for Joseph wasn't one of power and control, but one of love and justice.
- So what dream do you think God might be giving you? How can you join God in restoring what is broken?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Invite students to the front to write a prayer for restoration on the board. Let them know they can pray for justice in their own lives, on behalf of a friend, or for a big injustice happening in the world.*
- Whether you see yourself as someone who needs to forgive or someone who needs to be forgiven, know you are loved and that justice is available to you — not justice that seeks revenge or punishment, but justice that restores.
 - God loved Joseph and God loved Joseph's brothers. God even loved Potiphar, Potiphar's wife, and everyone else who caused Joseph harm.
 - When we think justice is all about revenge, loving people we want to hate might not seem like justice at all. But God's justice isn't like the world's justice.
 - God's just justice is available for all of us, no matter how awful the situation, because **God's justice restores what is broken** — and that's us. Jesus came to bring justice for all.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.*
 - **Read Romans 12:17-21. Which part of this passage is most difficult for you to follow? Why?**
 - * **Is there a situation in your life right now that feels broken and needs to be restored? Tell us about it.**
 - **This week, which do you need to do: ask someone for forgiveness or take a step toward forgiving someone? How will you do that?**