

Experience: Giving Grace to Family Members

Overview

Confession is an everyday practice in our relationship with Jesus. And as family members who sin, and are sinned against, we have a daily need to offer grace and receive grace. This prayer experience gives kids a visual reminder of how Jesus sets us free from the weight of sin.

Guided by the words on the “Forgiveness” handout (attached), young people will spend some time thinking about the sins they need to confess to God (focusing on sins against family members). They will write each sin on a strip of heavy paper and use a stapler to make these into the links of a chain. They will use these chains to weigh down helium balloons, representing the way that sin holds us down. They will then listen to the words of Psalm 51, David’s prayer for forgiveness after he committed adultery with Bathsheba. Then the strings of the balloons will be cut so that the chains fall and the balloons are free to rise. The experience will finish with a time of praise to Jesus for his forgiveness.

Setup

Buy (or fill your own) a helium balloon for each participant. Tie them off somewhere so they don’t float away. Have the strips of paper or card stock, pens, and staplers in several places around the room, so it’s easy for teenagers to use them. Prior to this experience, you’ll need to experiment with the number of links needed to weigh down a balloon, and then let young people know how many “links” in their chain they’ll need to produce. Use heavy paper or card stock so that it’s fairly easy to weigh down the balloons.

The Encounter

Introduce the theme and give kids photocopies of the “Forgiveness” handout, explaining what will happen (remember to mention how many links there will need to be in each chain). Say something like...

Confession is a regular part of our everyday life with Jesus. Most of us don’t have any problem thinking of all the ways we have let Jesus or others (especially family members) down. But it can be difficult for us to receive God’s forgiveness. The words on the handout will tell you what you need to do. You’re going to write the things you want to confess—specifically focusing on your family members—on strips of heavy paper, staple them together to make a chain, and use them to weigh down these helium balloons. Each chain needs links, so you can join yours to someone else’s if you need to. Your confessions will be completely private—the links of the chain can be made with the writing on the inside.

Play music in the background as kids read their handouts, write on the cards, make chains, and attach them to the balloons. Have one or two people on hand to help if needed.

Once the balloons are weighed down, ask a teenager to read aloud Psalm 51:1-17—David’s cry for forgiveness. You could explain the context of this psalm first. Allow time for the words to sink in. Then walk around, cutting the strings of the balloons so they are free to rise. Every time you cut a string, say out loud: “Jesus, thank you for your

mercy and grace.” The idea is that someone other than ourselves must cut the chains of sin in our life—his name is Jesus.

Collect the chains from off the floor and put them in a black garbage bag. As you do, repeat this phrase out loud: “Jesus, because of your love for us, these sins are forgiven.” Then lead the whole group in thanking God for his power and desire to forgive. You could read Psalm 103:11-12 aloud to emphasize the power of God’s forgiveness: “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”

If anyone still needs to be assured of God’s forgiveness, suggest that he or she find someone to talk and pray with.

Supplies

Helium balloons with long strings attached (for all participants)

Photocopy of the “Forgiveness” handout for each participant

Strips of heavy paper or card stock (four or five for each participant)

Pens

Staplers

Scissors

Black garbage bag

Music player and background music

Bible

Scripture Focus

Psalms 51:1-17; 103:11-12

Hebrews 12:1

Forgiveness

“Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Hebrews 12:1).

Following this advice from Hebrews isn't always easy, is it?

Guilt can be like chewing gum on the sole of your running shoes—it's hard to get rid of, and it leaves a sticky reminder with every step that you take.

Our own thoughts can often accuse us, drowning out God's words of forgiveness...

“How can God love you when you've done that again?”

“If people only knew what you were really like...”

But Jesus died to forgive you, to set you free, to silence those thoughts.

Spend some time thinking about what you want to say sorry to God for,

Perhaps things you've said or thought...

Or things you've done...

Or things you should have done but didn't...

You don't need to dig around in your past—ask God to show you where you need forgiveness. Write it down on a strip of heavy paper. Take your time. However small, however long ago, however big your sin, God will forgive. Use one strip of paper for each thing you want to confess to God.

When you're ready, use the stapler to make your strip into the link of a chain. Join these to some others, and use them to weigh down a balloon.

Pray, asking God to forgive your sin.