

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE VIDEO

Journey Toward Forgiveness

From rage to reconciliation

By Sheri Hartzler

Background

Journey Toward Forgiveness was produced as a documentary for ABC-TV, by Mennonite Media for the National Council of Churches, and released to ABC stations through the Interfaith Broadcasting Commission's "Vision and Values" series.

How to use this study guide

The video is 58 minutes in length, divided into seven stories. If you want to use the questions in this study guide, we recommend stopping the tape after each story. Since this is a made-for-TV video, we were not able to put black screens between stories, but the stories are separated by a flute interlude and narrator so you will be able to tell when the next story begins. Remember, this is video, so you can stop the tape, and rewind to a part you missed or want to hear again.

Opening discussion

Why do you think the title refers to forgiveness as a process — a journey?

Discussion after watching video

Story 1: An Enemy Worse than Death

Wilma and Cliff Derksen

1. Wilma and Cliff made a deliberate choice to try to forgive. Why was this an important step for them?
2. Wilma says, "We're all serving life sentences for something." What did she mean by this? Do you agree? Give some examples of things we could be serving life sentences for.
3. What was the "enemy worse than death" that Wilma and Cliff faced?
4. What does it mean to try to forgive a faceless perpetrator—in this case a killer who's never been found?
5. Why was it important for Wilma to face her own feelings of desire for revenge?
6. Discuss the role of friends or family in the forgiveness process. How are they helpful? How are they hurtful?
7. What is an example in your life when one incident overshadowed all memories of a positive relationship? Would forgiveness have changed your outlook on that memory?

Story 2: Hospice Helps

Ortiz family

1. Ira Byock says that forgiveness is a sophisticated emotional strategy for caring for ourselves. Why is forgiveness a “sophisticated” strategy? How can forgiveness mean caring for ourselves?
2. How do people in your community deal with death? What have been your experiences with death?
3. Is it possible for forgiveness to become a selfish thing? What does this mean? How can you guard against this?
4. How does one make forgiveness genuine?
5. Why do you think the Ortiz family says they won't be able to forgive the driver of the car? Have you ever felt like you wouldn't be able to forgive someone?
6. Is it possible to be angry and still forgive or do you have to move past anger in order to forgive?
7. Have you ever asked for someone's forgiveness and they wouldn't forgive? What did that do to you?

Story 3: StoryKeepers: A Way to Heal

Susie Risho

1. How have you experienced storytelling to be a healing process?
2. Is storytelling ever harmful? If so, why and how?
3. As a listener, how can you respond in ways that are supportive when the story is full of pain?
4. What is the role of the larger community in responding to such stories?

Story 4: I'll Give You the Gettin'

Story by Walter Wangerin, Jr.

1. In this story, the dime provided the “gettin'” for Etta Mae in the school. How did the Lord's Prayer provide the “gettin'” for Mary Johnson?
2. During the funeral service, the pastor talks about the merciful God Elijah experienced, and the Jehovah God that Mary believed in. What is the difference between these two views and how does the way we view God affect the way we handle crisis situations?
3. Reflect on 2 Corinthians 12:9. “My grace is sufficient for you: my power is made perfect in weakness.” Who had the most power in this story? Strength? Weakness?
4. How do the emotions of anger, and feeling out of control, affect the way we deal with the death of loved ones?
5. What was the minister's role in Mary coming to terms with Elijah's death?

Story 5: Turning Hate into Hope

John Perkins

1. John talks about needing an inner reconciliation before moving on from anger and hatred. Why was this important for him?
2. John describes hatred as a weight. What other words describe hatred and anger when it involves the actions of another person? How have you experienced hatred as a weight?
3. How have you experienced God's people as agents of love?
4. The individuals that tortured John never asked for his forgiveness. What purpose does it serve for John to extend forgiveness if they are unrepentant of their acts? Why is it important to forgive,

even though the offenders are not seeking your forgiveness?

5. John says the saddest people he knows are those who are not able to forgive. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
6. What is the role of forgiveness in the face of injustice or racism?

Story 6: Forgive, But Remember

Lawrence Hart

1. What is the importance of symbols in memorials and in actions? What was the significance of Lawrence giving the blanket to a grandson of a member of the 7th Cavalry? To his receiving the Garryowen pin from this grandson?
2. Have you ever experienced a reconciliation? What symbols of reconciliation have you either given or received?
3. What role in reconciliation did the elder chiefs play for Lawrence?
4. Is it possible for a nation to seek forgiveness for past atrocities? What makes meaningful forgiveness?
5. Do you agree that it is possible to forgive, but also to remember? Why or why not?

Story 7: A Bigger Victim than Myself

Bud Welch

1. What do you think triggers the initial steps of a journey toward forgiveness? (In Bud's case, realizing that rage and revenge were the reason for McVeigh and Nichol's actions helped him decide to move beyond his own rage and revenge.)
2. Bud talks about being stuck on the day of the tragedy when his daughter was killed. What are

some ways we can begin moving toward resolution, rather than remaining "stuck"?

3. Why did Bud feel it was necessary to talk with Timothy McVeigh's father?
4. Why does Bud say that Bill McVeigh is a bigger victim of the Oklahoma City bombing than he is?
5. How can others be supportive when someone is going through the rage stage? How can you know when to intervene or when to let it run its course?
6. Is it right to forgive someone who has killed large numbers of people? At what point are there too many? Is it ever right not to forgive?
7. Why do we excuse ourselves for atrocities committed against Native Americans, but have more trouble excusing/forgiving McVeigh for his atrocities?

Closing discussion

1. What have you learned from these stories of forgiveness journeys that can be useful as you look at the events of September 11, 2001?
2. Is forgiveness ever possible when mass murder by terrorists has taken place? If so, how would that forgiveness be carried out by a nation?

Denominational partners for this documentary production include Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Missouri Synod Lutheran Church, United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church USA, United Church of Christ, Seventh Day Adventists, Church of the Brethren, The Mennonite Church and others.

Mennonite Media is a department of the mission agencies of the Mennonite Church.

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