

Forgiveness

A BETTER VERSION OF ME

Children, I am writing you, because your sins have been forgiven in the name of Christ.

1 John 2:12

2014 Bible Study

rainbowtrail.org



Rainbow Trail
LUTHERAN CAMP



We are grateful to the following writers of the 2014 Bible Study for Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp:

Day 1: The Crazy, Unconditional Love Of God

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Forgiven: A Better Version Of Me

INTRODUCTION:

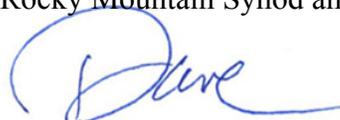
We all grew up hearing “forgive and forget.” I think this phrase was often used without even a thought of what was being said. Forgiveness can be one of the greatest forces in our lives – it can help reconcile relationships – between people, and between God and us; it can help us clean the slate and start fresh, and help us allow others to do the same. In our current world and culture, forgiveness is almost counter-culture. It is out of the tremendous love that God has for us, in spite of who we are, the God changes us and how we forgive in this world.

The days of this study walk us from an understanding of God’s unconditional love for us to how we can live forgiveness in the world in all circumstances:

1. **The Crazy, Unconditional Love Of God:** We have the opportunity to examine God’s incredible love for us and the ultimate gift of forgiveness that was given to us in Jesus Christ. Nothing can separate from the love God, and there is nothing we can do to make God love us more and nothing we can do to make God love us less.
2. **God Sees Me Clearly (In My Brokenness):** We are a broken people who live broken lives. Daily we sin. But our brokenness is overwhelmed by a God that sees past it and loves us even more. God is a God who sees broken people and continues to reach out to them.
3. **God Forgives Me Insanely:** It is God’s very nature to forgive. Forgiveness is not a once and for all deal but rather a daily, even hourly request. God’s forgiveness makes no sense; it is insane and radical but is ample and free. And this forgiveness is ours because of the amazing sacrifice of Jesus’ death on the cross.
4. **God’s Forgiveness Inspires Me:** As sinful humans, we are not naturally inclined to give or receive forgiveness. Yet, God’s actions in our lives invite us into a different way of life – compelling us to live in a different way. We can become a vehicle of life-changing forgiveness for others in our own lives.
5. **Now What? God Goes With Me!:** We are sent home to bring the love and forgiveness we have experienced here to the world. It will be hard to step back into the world and live this way – people may think we are crazy! But God does not send us alone. We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses who will love us and walk with us when things get tough. As forgiven people, we have the power to change the world around us, by giving gifts of love and forgiveness to others.

Morning Watch is an important part of each day at camp. We will begin each Morning Watch with a welcome, some scriptural reading, a current song, and then move to a half hour of God Time and reflection. We hope that this discipline of quiet time during the day is one that many will take home with them as they seek to grow in their relationship with God.

I am very excited about this study. This was a tougher study than we thought it would be. But I think it will help us all move beyond just “forgive and forget”; it moves us to being more Christ-like in all times and all circumstances. I hope this study will also help you to continue to grow in your own faith journey. Thank you for the opportunity to be partners with you as we serve the youth, adults, and families of the Rocky Mountain Synod and beyond.



Dave Jarvis,
Executive Director

Forgiven: A Better Version of Me
2014 RTLC Bible Study- Day 1
THE CRAZY, UNCONDITIONAL LOVE OF GOD

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

Welcome to a week of unconditional love. Welcome to a week of understanding the reality that God sees everything about us even those things we try to hide deep within. Welcome to a week of insane forgiveness that simply sounds too good to be true and is completely grounded in the gracious nature of our loving God. Welcome to a week where you will learn how you are empowered to be light in a very dark world, to forgive as you have been forgiven. Welcome to a week that allows you to ask the question: So what? That you are being sent out and set free by a God who simply seems too good to be true.

So, welcome to Day One. Welcome to the beginning of a journey that will challenge you to look at love, brutal honesty and forgiveness. We invite you to be ready to be surprised, to be uncomfortable, and to receive joy knowing that you are not alone.

This day we will focus on God's unconditional love; one that is not an abstract love that simply flows past you, but breathes new life into you.

From Jeremiah 31:3: *"I have loved you with an everlasting love therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you."*

God's love for me is unconditional! This unconditional love is for me not because I am good enough, skinny enough, strong enough, successful enough, rich enough, popular enough, beautiful enough, or smart enough to be accepted into God's loving arms.

I do not need to have the newest iPod, smart phone, or kindle to be on the cutting edge of God's love. I do not have to have a tattoo, piercing, skinny jeans or fitted T-shirts to be clothed in God's love. God's love first came to us as God created the world and saw "that it was good." With each day in the making of this world God spoke, God breathed, God formed and "it was good." God speaks, breathes, and forms that same acceptance to us naming us as children of a living God. Chosen for such a moment as this and living a life that will become a gateway for understanding for those we encounter.

It is important to note that God's love is a love that initiates; it is never a response. That is precisely what makes it unconditional. If God's love were conditional, then we would have to do something to earn or merit it. We would have to somehow calm God's anger toward sin and cleanse ourselves of that sin before God would be able to love us. But that is not the biblical message. The biblical message—the gospel—is that God, motivated by love, moved unconditionally to save God's people from their sin. This initiated love can also never be taken away from us as we read in Romans 8: 38-39:-

"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This unconditional love of God is also very personal for us. God does not love us because we are a part of some special group, club, or team. God has known us before we were even born, before we were even a thought in our biological parents' minds as we read in Psalm 139: 13-16

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

B. OBJECTIVES FOR THIS DAY OF THE STUDY

1. To distinguish between God’s unconditional love and the conditional love of the world.
2. To name that God loves us simply because we are a “beloved” child of God not simply because of our accomplishments or because we were born into the right family or community.
3. To review this unconditional love through the person of Jesus Christ as our great Cosmos God came to us as a tiny baby.
4. To gain an understanding that nothing we can do will separate us from the love of God.

C. MORNING WATCH

Welcome:

Welcome to this time for reflection on God’s love that flows through us to others.

Scripture:

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8: 38-39

Song:

“Remind Me Who I Am” Jason Gray (Would love to have the video!)

Questions For Morning Watch Booklet:

1. **Name the people who love you.**
2. **Who do you love?**
3. **When have you felt the unconditional love of God?**

Prayer:

Lover of all, you have shown us how to love each other through your Son, Jesus. Thank you for your gift of unconditional love. Let your love so fill our hearts that it spills over into all our relationships. Amen.

D. SCRIPTURE STUDY

So begins the Bible Studies for this week of Camp. There are many helpful things to think about as you enter this first day of study. It will be helpful to imagine what your campers are thinking about or experiencing.

1. For some this may be the first time they are away from home. Remember that although you may be ready to move out on your own and are counting the days to leaving the home of your origin, many of these campers are counting the hours until their parent or other family members pick them up again. Many may have tried to bite that bottom lip, held back those

tears, and said in their heads: “please do not leave me here!” Many of you as counselors love this camp so let’s help our campers to experience that same love.

2. Many of our campers may not be people who attend church or they may have attended at one time but no longer. Be aware of “churchy” language as many in our world have never stepped a foot into a church and only came to camp because their friends said it was “the coolest week ever!” Not all of us have attended a Lutheran college and many of us have not grown up in a Lutheran church.
3. This is the day that we establish our routine for Bible Study. Whatever happens today to set the tone may very well stay with us for the entire week. This can be good and this can be a challenge. It may be helpful to set some ground rules about allowing one person to talk at a time and to listen without making fun of what others in the group say or what they have experienced. It may be helpful to establish a “get to” perspective in participation, not a “have to” experience.
4. There will be much energy this day and there will be many nerves. Name the “weirdness” of coming together with people you do not know. Remember that attention spans are as long as the campers’ age and so movement during this time may be helpful.
5. Know that you are being tested right now. They are curious if you are like their teachers, like their Sunday School teachers and they want to know that this time will be worth their while. If you are excited about this Bible study, such energy will be contagious for the campers.
6. Keep in mind that having a small intimate circle may be better suited for a bible study that is considered safe and thus will create a space for open sharing. Keep in mind that playing with sticks, flowers, rocks or anything in the near vicinity does not mean that the campers are not paying attention to the conversation. For boys especially, fidgeting means processing! 😊

STUDY:

Welcome your campers and let them know you will begin each session with prayer. Invite them to think about leading the prayer during the next session.

Review names and begin with some sort of ice breaker. You can ask them to think of adjectives that begin with the first letter of their first name for associations or to name a favorite “something”. This will be especially important on Day One and will allow them to get to know each other with each passing day. Pay attention to see if the campers are referring to each other by name. Often they try to get by with “what she/he said.”

Say the following:

For the world being accepted and being loved only happens if you are special. If you are the top of your class academically, if you are first chair in your orchestra, if you make the winning goal, point, or run for your team, and if you have over 1000 Facebook friends with multiple twitter accounts *then* you are someone special. Then you are “So Loved” by those around you. Such shallow labels are continuously being redefined in our world. What makes you special today will change with the next posting or tweet.

Let’s contrast what the world says with these temporary states of being and the ever faithful God who loves us unconditionally. Let’s read about the things that God delights in through three different stories in Luke 15.

Ask one of your campers to read (hopefully from their Bibles):

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

Luke 15:1-7

15 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵ When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his

friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.'⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Let's talk about what we just read:

1. Think about a time that you have lost something that you really loved.
2. What was that thing and why was it so special to you?
3. What did you do to try to find it?
4. What did you do when you found it?
5. What were your feelings after you found it? (*Relief, joy, happiness, delight*)

This is the unconditional love that God has for us. Many times we wander away from God and sometimes we run away from God. God, however, comes looking for us. God delights in finding us and returning us to a relationship that is so full of love that we think it is too good to be true. Notice in this story that the sheep did not have to find its own way home (as we know that sheep are not exactly the brightest of animals!) nor did the sheep need a bath or fur trimmed before the sheep's owner took the sheep back home. The owner simply loved the sheep and therefore went searching.

Let's look at another story: Ask another camper to read:

The Parable of the Lost Coin

Luke 15: 8-15

⁸ "Or what woman having ten silver coins if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Let's talk about what we just read:

1. Have you ever lost any money?
2. What feelings come up for you if you lost say.... \$100.00?
3. How long did you look for that money?
4. Keep in mind that a "coin" back in Jesus' day, was not simply a dime or a quarter. It was actually more than a day's wages. Does the value of something make you search more intentionally?
5. What did the woman do when she found the coin?

Often in our lives we are not told that we are valuable. Some of us may even have been told we are not smart enough, will never succeed at anything, or are told to get lost.

This is not the relationship we have with God. This is the difference between the world and God. God loves us no matter what. Like the woman in the story God will light as many lights as is necessary, will sweep any and all houses and search carefully, and will rejoice and delight when that relationship is found again.

Is this not crazy love? Is this not love that is too good to be true? The world may say that one stupid sheep is not worth the time and energy. God says the sheep matters. The world says that one little coin is not worth it. God says all coins are worth it. There is no manipulation here. This is GENUINE LOVE.

Finally as we reflect that such love seems almost too good to be true, let's focus on the reality that nothing can take God's love away from us:

So this is the crazy unconditional love of God. The one who made the creation good, the one who has been since the beginning of time, the one who knows all about us came in the form of a tiny little baby.

So as we close our study I want you to close your eyes. I want you to see the tiny hands and feet of a baby. Think about how vulnerable little babies are and how much they need someone to take care of them. Now open your eyes and look at your hands. Your hands are unique to you. No other animal has the exact shape and movements that you have.

Now imagine our God who came to us in the person of Jesus Christ. This God searches us and knows us. This God came to earth to have a relationship with us. In Jesus' death, sin was named and was defeated as Jesus was raised to give us new life. That my friends, is crazy, unconditional love.

Ask the campers to close with you in prayer. Perhaps later in the week they will volunteer to end the session in prayer.

Prayer:

Good and gracious God. Thank you for loving us. Thank you for always loving us unconditionally and for coming to be with us through the person of Jesus. Thank you for showing us what real love looks like. And all God's peace say: AMEN!

E. ADDITIONAL STUDY IDEAS

1. Pay It Forward and the Freedom Writers are both good films references that show love given (although a little dated) when not deserved or when others think you are not a person of worth.
2. 1 John 4:-12 : Let us love one another as God has loved us. This love is shown in the person of Jesus Christ.
3. If you need additional stories from the Bible consider Jacob and Rachel (what we do for love); Ruth and Naomi (loving beyond what society expects); David and Jonathan (love that transcends obvious loyalties); The Good Samaritan (love from those who we least expect it)

F. IDEAS TO INCORPORATE THEME THROUGHOUT THE DAY

1. Obvious theme is to have a Valentine's Day in the Summer. We can "compare and contrast" (high school students all-time favorite thing to do! ☺) the world's love and God's love.
2. Perhaps we can have a lovefeast meal as is celebrated in the Moravian churches. "Lovefeasts originated in the first gathering of Christians after Pentecost. The early believers met and broke bread together, thereby signifying their union and equality. These meals of the church family were associated with the celebration of the Lord's Supper, which followed them. They were called agape, from the Greek word for love, that is for the highest type of spiritual love." (<http://www.moravian.org/faith-a-congregations/moravian-traditions-a-customs/moravian-lovefeast.html>)
3. If we think about breakfast perhaps this can be considered: "There is no rule as to the food to be offered, except that it be very simple and easily distributed. The drink may be coffee, tea, or lemonade, fully prepared in advance, so that it may be served very quietly and without interruption of the singing. Usually mugs are used, which may be passed from hand to hand along a pew from a tray brought along the aisle. A slightly sweetened bun, which can be served in baskets passed along the pews, is a convenient form of bread. Usually men handle

the trays of mugs, and women the baskets of buns. While the congregation partakes, the choir sings an anthem. Later the mugs are quietly gathered and removed. The food served is not consecrated, as in the communion.” (<http://www.moravian.org/faith-a-congregations/moravian-traditions-a-customs/moravian-lovefeast.html>)

4. Heart-shaped food can be considered for any of the meals. ☺ And...God’s love is better than chocolate! It may be a tough sell for some but it is TRUE! ☺
5. Any arts and crafts that can put the word “Beloved” on it from painting the word “BELOVED” on a glass stone or granite stone to stringing “Beloved” on a necklace.
6. Games:

Honey If You Love Me

Everyone stands in a circle and someone starts the game in the middle of the circle. They pick someone, stand in front of them and say to them "Honey, if you love me, give me a smile!" The person has to say (with a straight face and without smiling) "Honey, you know I love you but I just can't smile!" If the person smiles, they become the person in the middle of the circle, if not, the person continues until they get someone to smile!

The Love Song Game

Split the group into two teams and have the teams discuss how many songs they can come up with that have love in the title in five minutes. You can then see if they want to sing the songs they come up with.

Would You Rather Game (What do we “love” or what do we prefer?)

- Would you rather always take a cold shower or sleep an hour less than you need to be fully rested?
- Would you rather always get first digs or the last laugh?
- Would you rather always have to say everything on your mind or never speak again?
- Would you rather always lose or never play?
- Would you rather always wear earmuffs or a nose plug?
- Would you rather always win pie-eating contests or always win wheelbarrow races?
- Would you rather be 3 feet tall or 8 feet tall?
- Would you rather be 3 feet taller or 3 feet shorter?
- Would you rather be a deep sea diver or an astronaut?
- Would you rather be a dog named Killer or a cat named Fluffy?
- Would you rather be a giant hamster or a tiny rhino?
- Would you rather be able to hear any conversation or take back anything you say?
- Would you rather be able to read everyone’s mind all the time or always know their future?
- Would you rather be able to stop time or fly?
- Would you rather be an unknown minor league basketball player or a famous pro badminton star?
- Would you rather be born with an elephant trunk or a giraffe neck?
- Would you rather be forced to tell your best friend a lie or tell your parents the truth?
- Would you rather be forgotten or hatefully remembered?
- Would you rather be hairy all over or completely bald?
- Would you rather be happy for 8hrs/day and poor or sad for 8hr/day and rich?
- Would you rather be invisible or be able to read minds?
- Would you rather be rich and ugly, or poor and good looking?
- Would you rather be stranded on an island alone or with someone you hate?
- Would you rather be the most popular or the smartest person you know?
- Would you rather be the sand castle or the wave?
- Would you rather eat a bar of soap or drink a bottle of dishwashing liquid?
- Would you rather eat a handful of hair or lick three public telephones?
- Would you rather eat a stick of butter or a gallon of ice cream?
- Would you rather eat a stick of margarine or five tablespoons of hot pepper sauce?
- Would you rather eat poison ivy or a handful of bumblebees?
- Would you rather end hunger or hatred?

- Would you rather get caught singing in the mirror or spying on your crush?
- Would you rather get even or get over it?
- Would you rather give bad advice or take bad advice?
- Would you rather give up your computer or your pet?
- Would you rather go to an amusement park or to a family reunion?
- Would you rather go without television or junk food for the rest of your life?
- Would you rather have a beautiful house and ugly car or an ugly house and beautiful car?
- Would you rather have a kangaroo or koala as your pet?
- Would you rather have a missing finger or have an extra toe?
- Would you rather have x-ray vision or bionic hearing?
- Would you rather kiss a jellyfish or step on a crab?
- Would you rather know it all or have it all?
- Would you rather live without music or live without T.V.?
- Would you rather make headlines for saving somebody's life or winning a Nobel prize?
- Would you rather meet an alien visitor or travel to outer space?
- Would you rather never use the internet again or never watch TV again?
- Would you rather not be able to use your phone or your e-mail?
- Would you rather only be able to whisper or only be able to shout?
- Would you rather own a ski lodge or a surf camp?
- Would you rather publish your diary or make a movie on your most embarrassing moment?
- Would you rather spend the day surfing the internet or the ocean?
- Would you rather have one wish granted today or three wishes granted in 10 years?
- Would you rather visit the Doctor or the Dentist?
- Would you rather have a shower or a bath?
- Would you rather find true love or 10 million dollars?
- Would you rather love and not be loved back, or be loved but never love?

Video making

Jason Gray's video for our song that we listened to for our Morning Watch has a great visual for how we remind ourselves through the love of God of who we are. As the video progresses different people are holding up cardboard signs that says who the world says they are: "broken", "rejected", "anxious", "refugee", "victim", "addict", "weak", etc. Have the group consider making cardboard signs with whatever words they think the world places on them. Then discuss God's love and have them write "BELOVED" on the other side and discuss how God turns things around for us through unconditional love. This can be filmed in any way they imagine. Just a thought – this could be a phenomenal all camp thing – each person has a name with a label they've heard put on themselves and then beloved on the other side or over the top of the label – do a whole camp video and each person gets to keep their sign. Hang it on the wall by their bed – take it home with them.

G. OTHER SONGS, STORIES THOUGHTS, QUESTIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

Some campers may have only experienced love with conditions. "You would do this or that if you loved me." Make note that to experience the unconditional love of God there are no conditions. You do not have to wonder...what is the catch?

Perhaps for staff preparation time you can use "What If" by Gadon Lavik.

Songs – From RTLC Song Book

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Borning Cry | 4. Love Round |
| 2. Isaiah 43 | 5. Radical God |
| 3. Shout to the Lord | 6. Jesus, Lover of My Soul |

- 7. Little Room
- 8. Every Love I Make
- 9. Here I am to Worship
- 10. How Great is Our God

- 11. Blessed Be Your Name
- 12. Just Be
- 13. Your Love Never Fails

Psalms

23:5-6	33:5	66:20	115:1
26:2-3	36:5	86:15	147:11
31:7	59:16	100:5	
31:16	63:3	103:9-12	

H. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY DOWN FOR JUNIORS

- 1. Maybe talk with the campers about “LUV” is from what they see in their worlds.
- 2. Think about what valentine cards say or how the word love is used to describe how they love ice cream or ice skating.
- 3. Use the “would you rather” format and have campers stand up and say – this side of the circle is (one thing) and the other side of the circle is (another thing) pick which side you agree with. Then– say things like:
 I’d rather be loved for doing something really well or for who I am
 I believe my parents love me because I’m good at something OR I believe my parents love me just because I am
 I’d rather succeed all the time or lose some of the time
 In my life I’d rather hear my parents say I love you every day or say it only once a month
 In my life I’d rather be really good at one thing or pretty good at lots of things
 In my life I’d rather have lots of sorta close friends or a couple really good friends.

I. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY UP FOR SR HIGHS

- 1. Talk about what the high school students see in social media. What does it mean to “love” someone? Have they told someone they “love” them? If they have what does that mean for them?
- 2. What do television shows such as “The Bachelor” tell you about love?
- 3. Where in your life have you experienced the kind of love the Bible talks about?
- 4. Invite campers to talk about things they have done that make them wonder if God can really love them as they are.

J. PARENT DEVOTIONAL

Scripture: Romans 8:38-39

Reflection:

In our study for this day we focused on the crazy, unconditional love of God. We discussed how this love comes to all of us without us doing anything to deserve that love. God sees us all as people of great worth and loves us accordingly. Such love is completely counter-cultural to what the world says. The world says you must be I am good enough, skinny enough, strong enough, successful enough, rich enough, popular enough, beautiful enough, or smart enough to be accepted into God’s loving arms.

God's love is simply the opposite. You are God's chosen and there is nothing you need to do to be accepted. We reviewed the study of the lost sheep and the lost coin. [You can find both in Luke 15]

Family Activity:

1. Discuss what you think of when you hear the word love?
2. Talk about the different ways we love people and things in our lives.
3. Talk about a time you lost something. Describe the process of looking for that item.
4. Describe your feelings when you found that item.
5. Have you ever gotten separated from your child?
6. Describe your feelings when you thought you lost your child and the joy that came when you connected with each other again.
7. Think about God's love being a million times stronger than the love you have for your child. It may blow your mind but it will warm your heart.
8. Think about creating a space in your family home where you can write "I love you" in post-it note fashion, on white boards, or chalkboards.
9. If you have older children, text them that you love them...just because they are your child.

Prayer:

Lover of all, you have shown us how to love each other through your Son, Jesus. Thank you for your gift of unconditional love. Let your love so fill our hearts that it spills over into all our relationships. Amen.

Forgiven: A Better Version of Me
2014 RTLC Bible Study- Day 2
GOD SEES ME CLEARLY (IN MY BROKENNESS)

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

In the history of God's people one thing is clear about who we are as the people of God. It is certainly not our perfection, righteousness, perseverance, integrity or any other flowery word that would build us up. What is clear is our brokenness; it unites the people of God as shared throughout scriptures. It unites us as the people of God today. Today's theme calls us to explore the reality of our brokenness that is overwhelmed by a God that sees past it and loves us all the more. As we explore this new reality we can start touching on the implications of this reality that will be explored further in the study days to come, but we need not resolve the struggle of this day. In fact part of this day is to feel and accept that much of our struggles are not resolved.

As we explore brokenness it is important to understand how each of us perceive brokenness varies greatly. Consider these realities:

1. Some are very aware of their own brokenness, while others struggle to see it in themselves.
2. Some have experienced profound brokenness in the world while others are less aware.
3. Some see the brokenness in others clearly, but cannot place themselves in the same place.

It is important to define the reality of brokenness as something not simply far off, but deeply real in all of our lives. As we understand this reality we become more aware too that this brokenness though often an obstacle in our relationship with God for us is not an obstacle for God.

Naming this reality becomes very important. A large element of Christianity preaches a prosperity gospel. This gospel states that if you believe strong enough, God blesses you with riches. This gospel leaves no place for our brokenness except as an obstacle to overcome. Today's study acknowledges throughout the history of God's people, God is a God who sees broken people and continues to reach out to them.

One more thing:

You may discover in this study the word "brokenness" could easily be replaced with sin. This is purposefully done because often times the word sin is equated with a particular action. In this study we will be using the term brokenness to get past some of the pre-conceived ideas of what sin is. It is important we understand sin as a condition, and not simply as an action that can be changed. I feel brokenness is a term that allows us to explore this possibility.

B. OBJECTIVES FOR THIS DAY OF THE STUDY

Help campers:

1. See and accept the struggle of sin.
2. Explore and understand the weight of brokenness as it affects individuals, relationships and the world.
3. Relate through scripture that brokenness whether it is ours, others or simply a part of the world comes between us and our relationship with God.
4. Relate brokenness as a condition in the world that will not be overcome by our actions alone, and a primary piece of our brokenness is often our attempts to overcome brokenness through our actions apart from God.
5. Explore how our brokenness can be an obstacle to faith.

6. Explore how our brokenness is our “common language” that might be transformed into a gift.
7. See and understand that God sees through all our walls that we create.

C. MORNING WATCH

Welcome:

Welcome to this time for reflection on God’s love that flows through us to others.

Scripture:

Genesis 11:1-9

Song:

Listen to Mumford and Son’s Babel “lyrics are listed here.”

*'Cause I know that time has numbered my days
And I'll go along with everything you say
But I'll ride home laughing, look at me now
The walls of my town, they come crumbling down*

*And my ears hear the call of my unborn sons
And I know their choices color all I've done
But I'll explain it all to the watchman's son,
I ain't ever lived a year better spent in love*

*'Cause I'll know my weakness, know my voice
And I'll believe in grace and choice
And I know perhaps my heart is farce,
But I'll be born without a mask*

*Like the city that nurtured my greed and my pride,
I stretched my arms into the sky
I cry Babel! Babel! Look at me now
Then the walls of my town, they come crumbling down*

*You ask where will we stand in the winds that will howl,
As all we see will slip into the cloud
So come down from your mountain and stand where we've been,
You know our breath is weak and our body thin*

*Press my nose up, to the glass around your heart
I should've known I was weaker from the start,
You'll build your walls and I will play my bloody part
To tear, tear them down,
Well I'm gonna tear, tear them down*

*'Cause I know my weakness, know my voice,
And I'll believe in grace and choice
And I know perhaps my heart is farce,
But I'll be born without a mask*

Questions For Morning Watch Booklet:

1. **Where do you see brokenness in the world around you? Things that aren’t right or fair or just?**
2. **Where do you see brokenness in you life? What are some of the things in your life that aren’t right? What do you struggle with?**
3. **Think over the past week – are there places/times where you hurt someone or disobeyed someone? Are there places where you chose to do something wrong even though you knew it was wrong?**

Prayer:

God, even when I want to do good and be good, there are so many times when I'm not. Help me. When I look at my life and the world around me I see lots of things that aren't right, just or working the way you'd want. Come Lord and help us! Amen.

D. SCRIPTURE STUDY

Start your study by showing the group a plate, or a pot. (They should be purchased at second hand store by the camp. Choose a ceramic style that will break but won't shatter.) Explain that the group will decorate our plates/pots to represent our cabin. As you walk to your Bible study location, make sure you "accidentally" drop it. Don't drop it just anywhere. Make sure it falls upon something hard and breaks into multiple pieces, but hopefully not into so many that you can't easily pick up the pieces. Seem somewhat distraught as you pick up the pieces, but let the kids know that you plan to still use it.

As you enter your Bible study place point out the pieces again and find out if they realized that you dropped the dish on purpose. Explain that the actual purpose is to remind us we are seen by God even in our brokenness, and indeed we each experience brokenness. Let them know each of them should take a pottery shard and write their name on it. The shards will be collected to create a giant mosaic. (What could be created? The camp needs to decide. It could be a weekly thing, but even better might be an altar created by all of the brokenness, or a cross.)

Now take a moment to make a list of things that define brokenness in our world. These are things that could be added to the "Wall of Brokenness" as listed in the activities, and encourage them to share them there. Help them to "see" and not only list the traditional sins such as murder, theft, drugs and the like, but also some less obvious signs of brokenness. Move them toward understanding brokenness less as the individual actions (they certainly represent brokenness too). Depending on the age this might be hard. Leading them in examples to topic a little is just fine. Help them create a list that includes such things as pride, and even stories of people trying to do good that blew up in their faces. Some of these stories will be hard to write down. The point is simply to gain a broad understanding of what brokenness is. Brokenness that permeates our lives, others lives, and the world.

Read Genesis Chapter 11:1-9 "Our common language is our brokenness"

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." The LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. And the LORD said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

Background Summary:

"The story of the tower of Babel is a "pre-history" story and a part of the oral tradition. As part of the oral tradition it was probably long shared and passed through family and village story tellers. The purpose of these stories was less to communicate a history of the people in the modern sense, and more to help explain a truth that united listeners. The story occurs after the oral tradition story of Noah and

his family. Perhaps this order was to emphasize that this new post-flood world was as broken as the one before. Readers might get caught on the language of the Lord speaking to others. There are multiple interpretations of what this might mean. It may refer to the heavenly of angels and archangels or it could simply be that this is an ancient story passed on from a time period that wasn't certain of their relationship with the God or gods. Encourage listeners to speak about the truths they hear in this text. They include that the people strived to reach the heavens. Why would they do that? That God did not respond well to this behavior. Why would God care? That our common language is seemingly lost? Some might point out there is not clearly a positive resolution in this story. Nothing good seems to come from it. Have we ever had experiences where we are unable to see the "bright side?"

The band Mumford and Sons has written a song named Babel that explores some of the "truths" of this story. They are listed in the Morning Watch section. This song's lyrics wrestle with the truths of this song and are a valuable resource in understanding better this story. Hopefully having listened to this will spark more discussions about the meaning of this song and this text.

Questions to consider:

1. Does anyone know what word in our modern language comes directly from this story? *"Babble" which means to communicate in an unclear way, or in a manner that does not come to the point.*
2. Families passed this story down from generation to generation. What do you think a parent or grandparent wanted their children to learn from hearing this story?

Listen to their answer and explore these answers in relationship with the next question.

So what are some of these truths you hear in this story?

1. God's people sought to reach the heavens and to reach God.
2. God's people sought "a name for themselves".
3. God's people were focusing on futile "short-term" goals.
4. The tower, no matter how well built, would eventually crumble.
5. God's people built the tower of Babel at least partially out of fear for being scattered throughout the earth. Perhaps this is the fear of being insignificant.
6. Ironically in seeking to be like God they experienced even more brokenness.
7. Our common language is now our brokenness

One more thing: I would argue seeking to be like God is the root of all sin. It is at the heart of the creation story in the Garden of Eden. It is imbedded in the first commandment, "Thou shalt have no other God's before me." The first and foremost "god" we put in front of the almighty is ourselves.

Psalm 139: 1-7 "The inescapable God." - Why is this Good news?

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.

Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely.

You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?

Background summary:

Psalm 139 often attributed to David and affirms that God is always there. Versus 1-7 can be read to shorten this text, but it should not be omitted from the study. This text is a reminder to us the hearers that God sees us and individuals. That God knows our actions and our thoughts.

In relationship to the Babel text it is a reminder that God may appear far off, but is not. In one sense this exposes our brokenness and failures. It also emphasizes we as the people of God have a God who cares deeply about us. God is aware! God walks with us whether we are pleasing God, or whether we are disappointing God. (Can we really disappoint God? I'd be careful here – out of my own experience the idea that I disappoint God leads to shame...and a felt need that I have to somehow be better, do better in order for God to really love me. Just asking...)

Questions to consider:

1. How is this helpful?
2. How is this disturbing?
3. Who is excited by this possibility?
4. Who might be most likely to be disturbed by it?

Luke 18:17-43

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.”

¹⁷Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”

¹⁸A certain ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ¹⁹Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ²⁰You know the commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother.’” ²¹He replied, “I have kept all these since my youth.” ²²When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” ²³But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich. ²⁴Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁶Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” ²⁷He replied, “What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.” ²⁸Then Peter said, “Look, we have left our homes and followed you.” ²⁹And he said to them, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, ³⁰who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.”

Background summary:

As a child when I heard this story I always thought to myself. Hmm... you give me a big enough blender and I can get that camel through the needle. It may take a thousand years, but I think there is a way. As a child I was missing the point, but demonstrating the problem in this text. The real issue isn't the wealth. It is the desire for us to do it ourselves, and apart from God.

This story is linked with the story of Babel to emphasize the people of God continue to make their relationship with God about our actions and not God's actions. The question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” This question actually comes up twice in the book of Luke. The first time is as a part of the Good Samaritan story, and here it is once again. Each time it is the question itself that is clearly flawed. The question assumes we have the ability in our actions to reach God by ourselves. Readers can get caught on trying to follow Jesus' words as an instruction to a self-help book, but the bigger point relates once again to our brokenness. The words of Jesus may appear harsh, but the road to despair is in the pursuit of perfection, and Jesus putting up a harsh road block allows the reader and indeed the rich young ruler to reflect upon a life that will not achieve perfection.

The image of the camel and the eye of the needle is often cited as a commentary on the dangers of wealth. The writer of Luke is certainly harsh on wealth, but this interpretation misses the main point that wealth is simply a good example of the material possessions we put before God. In many cultures including the one Luke wrote for there was a prevalent understanding that wealth was a sign God had blessed you. Poverty was a sign of the opposite of this. Luke was challenging this assumption and showing how money is yet another gift we use to try to be God.

Questions to consider:

1. Have the campers ponder the camel through the eye of a needle image too, let them ponder if it is possible? Someone will probably realize the thing I realized as a youngster... there might be a way... but that proves the point. *We get caught on trying to do it ourselves instead of allowing God to center us.*
2. So does the rich young ruler in this story come to Jesus knowing he is broken? *By his initial question probably not. He has succeeded in the world in every way imaginable, and is looking for tips on how to succeed in the world to come.*
3. Look at vs. 27 again. "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God?" Do you see how these words both close a door and open a door for the listener? *Help the campers see the heart of the struggle is to accept we cannot save ourselves.*
4. In addition to money... what are other obstacles that get in our way of allowing God to work in our lives? Examples include: *Power, friends, pride.*

(use any of the "other" study pieces as well)

Returning to the big picture....

So brokenness is real. And a God who understands and sees us clearly in our brokenness is real. Explain that today is not a day we try to resolve this struggle. It is instead a day to acknowledge this reality. Our brokenness **is** real, but a God who sees us struggling within this brokenness is also real. In the coming days we will learn more about that relationship with God. Understanding and living as Christians faithfully surrounded by such brokenness is difficult, but what we do know is God is still a part of our lives and is no less there in the brokenness than God is in the places where things seem closer to perfect.

Take a look at your pot pieces for a moment. Can these ever be perfect again? And yet we find this is who we are. Today we close our Bible study by each acknowledging the brokenness we see in our world. Take a moment of silence of about 15 seconds and then one of us can close us in prayer.

Closing Prayer

Let us pray: Gracious God, We pray you will help us to see our brokenness not as an obstacle to our knowing you, but as a part of who we are. Help us to better accept the brokenness we struggle with in each other. Help us as individuals love ourselves better when we feel broken. Help us love the world as you love it, and empower us to know how we can use our gifts to better your world. Amen.

E. ADDITIONAL STUDY IDEAS

From the Babel story enters a reality that God has not abandoned the world, and see past our brokenness.

"God as the I am" vs "Me as the I am". Read Exodus 3:13-15

But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God

of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

This text in a few short lines explores an interesting reality in the nature of God vs Humanity. If God is the "I AM", and we are created in God's image then perhaps part of the root of our struggles in brokenness revolve around this very relationship. God has created with a nature that cannot turn off our own "I AM." This puts our existence in a constant struggle with God. For truly if God says "I AM" then I should say, "I ain't."

Yet the other aspect of this text is the reality that God has called upon Moses to share God's name. God has reached out to the scattered and broken people and throughout scripture does this again and again.

God Knows Me intimately! The mystery that exists in the name of God

This is especially good for the older audiences and is probably best spoken as a story in worship or in devotion. Perhaps even on the trail, by a designated story teller (what if each hike has a designated story teller gather the campers at some point to tell the story on the trail.)

Read Genesis 2:4-7

This story as translated does not reveal the mystery hidden inside the Hebrew translation. The mystery that has never been solved, and never will be solved is the mystery of God's most sacred name. This name in Hebrew is often translated with the consonants YHVH. It is known as the "Tetragrammaton," which simply means "the four letters". It was so sacred that it was considered blasphemy to utter the word at all. In fact whenever the lector came upon the word they would substitute another one of the less sacred words for God such as Adonai or Elohim and signal the substitution in some way to the listener.

Well over time, and with the reality the original Hebrew had no vowel, it came to be that no one is certain of the pronunciation of the Holiest of Gods name. It became impossible to pass along as it was not spoken. As it appears today some have come to believe the name would be translated Jehovah, others Yahweh. We must be clear we will certainly never know for certain, but allow me to share a thought on this mystery that was communicated to me by Diane Jacobsen of Luther Seminary (a former Hebrew herself)

She pointed out in Genesis 2:4 we have only the second time in Genesis where the YHVH is used. In the first chapter God's name is over and over again written using the less sacred names for God. The one exception is in verse 1:27. Here the YHVH is used as it says "God created humankind in the image of God." Please note the literal translation for "humankind" here is "adam". Now as we hear the second more intimate story of God's relationship with humanity we shift once again to this other term. YHVH is used completely throughout the 2nd creation story.

In verse 7 then when the Lord formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life we have a literal translation that God breathed into Adam the spirit. Perhaps there is a clue in the two creation stories of the pronunciation of the most sacred name of God. For as we consider this breath of life, this spirit of God breathing life into Adam here is the link in God's name of the two stories.

In order to discover what might be the secret I want you to take a moment to listen to our breath. Breathe in deeply with me once all together. Breathe in.... Hold it... Breathe out. (repeat this several times by saying Breathe in.... Hold it... Breathe out.

Now listen closely to your own breath and see if perhaps the spirit of Gods name might be revealed in it. Breathe in with a very clear "Yah" sound uttered as you breath. As you exhale breathe out with a clear "way" on your breath. "Do you hear it?" Listen once again.... Yah..... way.....

Now what if the name that is above all other names for God...The name which was dared not uttered because it was too holy even to be whispered... what if we utter it in every breath of our lives. From our waking moment to our dying death we have a God whose name is literally on our every breath. Now that is a God who is intimately a part of our lives isn't it?

Story of the cracked pot

A water bearer in India had two large pots, one hung on each end of a pole, which she carried across her neck. One of the pots had a crack in it. While the other pot was perfect, and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the mistress's house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For a full two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water to her master's house.

The perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do. After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream: "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you." Why?" asked the bearer. "What are you ashamed of?" "I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your mistress's house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The water bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in her compassion she said, "As we return to the mistress's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path." Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it some. But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologized to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of the path, but not on the other pot's side? "That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you've watered them.

"For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my mistress's table. Without you being just the way you are, she would not have this beauty to grace her house."

Evening Devotion ideas - "Life is not always wrapped in nice bow."

Explore the idea of lamentations. Read Psalm 22 or one of the other lament Psalms and encourage the youth to consider why these songs might have been shared in scripture at all. Help them see God's people have always known our God can hear and know our pain as well as our triumph. Many of the Psalms speak to the good times, but it is wonderful to know God listens to our struggles too. Play "Still Haven't found what I'm looking for" by U2. Share with them this is a modern day lament.

A quote to consider about our modern views of God

"We are puzzled and perplexed by the way God is in the world, by what God chooses to do and how God chooses to do it... "Dissatisfied with the way God really is, we project onto God the way we wish that God was, which is usually a version of ourselves. If we are athletic, then God becomes a kind of cosmic football player. If we're sympathetic to the workers, God becomes a union organizer. If we are political conservatives, God becomes the patron of down home American values. If we are ardent capitalists, God becomes a chamber of commerce advocate."

Will Willimon

F. IDEAS TO INCORPORATE THEME THROUGHOUT THE DAY

Toilet Humor

There is potential for versus from Psalm 139 to be written on index cards and placed throughout camp as a subtle reminder throughout the day that they are not beyond God's watchful eye. Imagine as one sits down in one of the stalls in the bathroom a card reading, "God sees you when you sit down... Yes that means now too." Where else could these be placed? Get creative.

Faith as Journey or a Destination

On the hike one could draw a parallel to the hiker that struggles to enjoy themselves because they focus on the destination instead of the journey itself. In all of our hikes there is a potential one never is satisfied with the pinnacle of the hike. Might this compare to what we might experience if we expect our relationship with God to be about a destination not the journey? Remind campers God desires a relationship that is more than just a pinnacle moment. God doesn't only want to be there when everything is at its highest point. God is there in whatever we face, and sees our day to day struggles.

God is here

Have one person clearly pointed out at breakfast who is wearing a hat that represents "the very presence of God." Let them know someone wearing that hat today will be "tagging" you. Make sure by the end of the day everyone is "tattooed" with the reality of God's presence being there today. Let the village of the day own what the tattoo will be. Examples could be simply the word, "beloved" or two eyes drawn upon the wrists. It is important the entire community is "tagged."

Arts and Crafts – God's Eye

They have been created as a camp staple forever, but if these are done at camp remind campers that this is to represent the God that is all knowing, all present as shared in Psalm 139

Wall of Brokenness- Place a butcher paper covered table out in the mall, and in other public places where youth gather. Invite youth throughout the day to fill paper with the pain of the world they see. Encourage this to be a sort of wailing wall of the struggles we see in the world. Let the wall remain somewhere throughout the week to collect the struggles we share. At the end of the week remind campers the struggles we see might help us to connect to the world to discover our own calling. Maybe it is each of us who are called to respond to the world. (A wailing wall, where these prayers can be stuffed into the wall might even be cooler, but may take a bit of extra time to create.

G. OTHER SONGS, STORIES THOUGHTS, QUESTIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

Worship Songs

1. Cling to the Cross by Lost and Found

Songs from the RTLC Songbook

1. "Messiah" in the song book touches on the brokenness of the people of God
2. Jesus Lover of My Soul
3. God of Wonders
4. Humble Thyself
5. There's a place

Other Songs To Connect With (if nothing else for you the camp counselor in your personal devotions)

1. God Bless the Broken Road by Rascal Flatts
2. Blackbird by The Beatles
3. Just Breathe by Pearl Jam
4. All of My Days by Alexi Murdoch - Remember that God is there even in your darker days.

A personal story for you to consider...

My cousin Charlie had a Brain aneurysm in the spring of 2012. He was told he would not live. We went as a family through a whirlwind of emotions suddenly we found ourselves praying for a healthy 40 something we assumed had many years ahead of him. In one day we went from Charlie is fine and vibrant, to you might want to say good-bye he probably won't wake up. I remember driving down to his brother's house (my best friend) to watch his 2 year old son and allow him to fly out the next morning to say good-bye to his brother.

But even the next morning we were given a new hope. His "hopeless" situation had found a new champion. A world renowned brain surgeon heard about his case and asked to attempt a procedure. He did not die that day, there was suddenly a ray of hope. And the hope rested in such small possibilities. We weren't praying on those days for Charlie to walk, to speak, to laugh with us. We were simply praying for him to breathe. It was then that the song Just Breathe by Pearl Jam took on a much more powerful meaning for myself. So often we desire the moon and more and here I was weeping and praying for simply a breath of life. Consider the words of this song

Just Breathe by Pearl Jam.

*Yes, I understand that every life must end, uh-huh
As we sit alone, I know someday we must go, uh-huh
Oh I'm a lucky man, to count on both hands the ones I love
Some folks just have one, yeah, others, they've got none*

*Stay with me...
Let's just breathe...*

*Practiced all my sins, never gonna let me win, uh-huh
Under everything, just another human being, uh-huh
I don't wanna hurt, there's so much in this world to make
me bleed*

*Stay with me
You're all I see...*

*Did I say that I need you?
Did I say that I want you?
Oh, if I didn't I'm a fool you see*

No one knows this more than me

*As I come clean...
I wonder everyday, as I look upon your face, uh-huh
Everything you gave
And nothing you would save, oh no*

*Nothing you would take
Everything you gave...*

*Did I say that I need you?
Oh, did I say that I want you?
Oh, if I didn't I'm a fool you see
No one knows this more than me
And I come clean, ah...*

*Nothing you would take
Everything you gave
Hold me til I die
Meet you on the other side...*

Today Charlie does more than breathe. Once again he laughs, he walks, he talks. Only recently he delivered his first sermon again. Charlie is a pastor and he is not yet able to do what he once could, but we all have experienced in a very profound way how God is there in every moment of our lives and his.

H. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY DOWN FOR JUNIORS

1. Read the Psalm and Babel story to this group. Omit The Rich Young Ruler story as it is a little hard for this age group to grasp.
2. Kids in this age category are still not above playing "Simon says". Play the game for a few minutes and afterwards relate how listening for Simon can be like listening for God. Can we lead holier lives by seeking to find ways to listen for Gods input. We can also acknowledge what

is difficult in the life of faith is we don't actually get a clear statement of whether it is what God would have us do or what God would not have us do.

3. Focus on building a tower to the sky with cups. See who can build the highest tower. Take a moment to do this before reading the tower of babel story. They will quickly relate to the futility of the story.

I. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY UP FOR SR HIGHS

1. The Yahweh story might be a great story to be told on the hikes as a break.
2. Encourage youth to explore the Mumford and Sons song in further detail. Where do they think the writer really explained things well? Are there any lyrics you don't understand? Are there any statements that you disagree with?
3. Brené Brown's "Ted talk" on vulnerability is a powerful way to apply our struggles to everyday life. The conversation topic is worth hearing for you as counselors, and would be most readily translated to older students.
4. High School Youth will be able to explore how brokenness can sometime draw people away from church. Ask them what they would think of a church that did not accept brokenness? What would be the advantage of a church such as this? Ask Why some do stop coming to church after experiencing great brokenness such as a failed relationship, an argument with others, sex in a relationship that failed, sex with many partners, drugs/alcohol use/abuse, date rape, (things that are more relevant to a teenager) divorce or loss of a job?

J. PARENT DEVOTIONAL

Scripture: Psalm 139:

- ¹ You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.
- ² You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.
- ³ You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.
- ⁴ Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.
- ⁵ You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.
- ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.
- ⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?
- ⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
- ⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,
- ¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.
- ¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,"
- ¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.
- ¹³ For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.
- ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.
- ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
- ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.
- ¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them!
- ¹⁸ Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—when I awake, I am still with you.
- ¹⁹ If only you, God, would slay the wicked! Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!
- ²⁰ They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name.
- ²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, LORD, and abhor those who are in rebellion against you?
- ²² I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies.

²³ Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Reflection:

Day 2 will not resolve itself, but reminds the camper in our relationship with God we are completely broken. Campers are reminded we as the people of God are not united in what we are getting right, ultimately we cannot get it right, and indeed it's in our brokenness is where we find our unity. In this reality we are reminded we have a God that sees all of our brokenness as well as our hopes and dreams. Still in all of this Psalm 139 reminds us God is aware of each and every part of our day. In our brokenness this does not feel all that good, but as we understand our God better (and throughout this week's bible study) we realize this knowledge means a love that transcends the depths of our brokenness

Campers will be hiking today. Many will be focused on "the destination" of the hike and hopefully as the day goes on become more and more aware that the journey itself is the gift of the day. This reality will hopefully help the desire knowing God better as well.

Many of us get caught on viewing church and God as a product that provides goods and services. Pray this parallel to hiking will help campers see a relationship with them is what God desires, and this relationship both sees all of our brokenness, but also see past our brokenness to the child of God that God created us to be.

Family Activity:

Share with someone you love a story from your past that would have brought you great angst when it occurred. Especially consider your own adolescent years. What were you afraid of happening most to you? How has that fear subsided? God was with you in those days as God is with you now. God is with your child at camp and sees the challenges that they are facing.

Consider what blessing that you would pray that God would place upon your child for the rest of the week. Write it down on a sheet of paper. When your child returns share with them this blessing that you wrote.

Prayer:

Loving and all-knowing God. You have walked with me throughout my life. Some days I have forgotten your presence, some days I have pleaded with you to make it more clearly known unto me. On this day I give you thanks that in the midst of all of my struggles you have been there. Grant me the grace and mercy to live out my faith in a manner that might reflect your love and light to others. May my own brokenness not be a stumbling block in our relationship, but a gift in helping others see their own worthiness. AMEN

Forgiven: A Better Version of Me
2014 RTLC Bible Study- Day 3
GOD FORGIVES ME INSANELY

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

Yesterday we learned God sees us clearly. Psalm 139 suggests God sees you and knows you intimately and clearly: when you sit down, when you stand up, when you travel, when you rest, what you think, what you say even before you say it. When life is good and we are living well, God seeing you that clearly is a comfort and a blessing. But, when you fall into sin (that thing you and I do that hurts our neighbor and comes between us and God), God seeing all doesn't feel so good. According to Psalm 139, we can never escape God's Spirit. It would be easy to despair about always being "found out." We can't hide. Maybe that's not such a bad thing. If we lived in darkness, hiding the things we do that God calls sin, we'd live with incredible burdens. Unforgiven sin poisons our lives and our relationships and creates a chasm between us and God and us and our family and friends.

John 1:4-5 says: "The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it." There is such great news in these verses from the Gospel of John. Darkness and the burden of sin is never where God wants us to live. The light and life of Jesus has dispelled the gloom of sin and returned us to an amazing relationship with God. More than that even, the love of Jesus and God's forgiveness through Christ's death on the cross gives us hope and reminds us there is nothing we can do to separate us from God or make God love us less. And the insane part of all of this is God forgives again and again even when we don't think we deserve it.

While none of us can stop doing things wrong because we are human and human beings have a propensity for choosing selfishly rather than *selflessly*, you and I are finally and thankfully, freed from sin by the blood of the Lamb. But like the Israelites in the wilderness, we will fall again. So, the rhythm of our lives must always be a returning to the foot of the cross to hold out our hands once more to receive God's gift of forgiveness, grace and unconditional love.

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME

Fred Buechner writes: "To forgive somebody is to say one way or another, 'You have done something unspeakable, and by all rights I should call it quits between us. Both my pride and my principles demand no less. However, although I make no guarantees that I will be able to forget what you've done and though we may both carry the scars for life, I refuse to let it stand between us. I still want you for my friend.' To accept forgiveness means to admit that you've done something unspeakable that needs to be forgiven, and thus both parties must swallow the same thing: their pride."

While none of us "deserve" God's forgiveness, we are all privy to it because of our love for God and our faith in Jesus Christ. Christ's death on the cross has once and for all, paid for every sin we have committed, are committing or will commit in the future. Using especially the story of the Prodigal Son but also other Scriptural stories and references, we will explore the theme of God's insane and radical forgiveness. Looking at the repeated infractions against God and each other the Israelites lived, we will understand that saying we are sorry is not a one-time deal, but is something that needs to be a part of our everyday life. Only if we bring ourselves to Christ each day and ask to be made clean can we live without poison and burden.

Finally, forgiveness is closing the chasm between us and others. But like Buechner says, we may live with a scar or two and struggle to forget, but God always forgets and creates newness from our broken

lives. We need God's forgiveness and we need the daily reminder that the most amazing scar/tattoo is the one that was emblazoned on our foreheads through the waters of our baptism and remains there until the day we die. We are children of God and when we open ourselves to God's forgiveness, the relationship between us and our heavenly Father is renewed and strengthened. As God's children, we belong in God's heart where we live forgiven and free.

B. OBJECTIVES FOR THIS DAY OF THE STUDY

1. Work throughout the day to create in campers an understanding that they need God's forgiveness
2. Teach campers that forgiveness is not a once and for all deal but that it is a daily, sometimes hourly request
3. Enlighten them through stories like the Prodigal son that God's forgiveness makes no sense, is insane and radical but is ample and free
4. Help campers know while none of us deserve forgiveness, it is ours because of the amazing sacrifice of Jesus' death on the cross
5. Encourage campers to realize that being forgiven means living differently...going a new direction
6. Help kids to know the forgiven life is a blessed life and makes life real
7. Walk with kids throughout the day reminding them that their burdens and struggles are lessened when they offer their brokenness to God asking God to replace it with a fresh start.

C. MORNING WATCH

Welcome:

Welcome to this time for reflection on God's love that flows through us to others.

Scripture:

"But our ancestors were proud and stubborn, and they paid no attention to your commands. They refused to obey and did not remember the miracles you had done for them. Instead, they became stubborn and appointed a leader to take them back to their slavery in Egypt! But you are a God of forgiveness, gracious and merciful, slow to become angry, and rich in unfailing love. You did not abandon them."
Nehemiah 9:16-17

This reading refers to the Israelites; how proud and stubborn they were and how they did their own thing rather than doing what God wanted them to do. They disobeyed...they sinned. But the passage also talks about God and God's forgiveness. It suggests God is gracious and merciful and absolutely rich in unconditional, unfailing love.

Song:

"Beautiful Things" - Gungor

*All this pain, I wonder if I'll ever find my way,
I wonder if my life could really change at all
All this earth, Could all that is lost ever be found
Could a garden come up from this ground at all*

*You make beautiful things, You make beautiful things out of the dust
You make beautiful things, You make beautiful things out of us*

*All around, Hope is springing up from this old ground
Out of chaos life is being found in You,*

*You make beautiful things, You make beautiful things out of the dust
You make beautiful things, You make beautiful things out of us*

*You make beautiful things, You make beautiful things out of the dust
You make beautiful things, You make beautiful things out of us*

*You make me new, You are making me new,
You make me new, You are making me new*

*You make beautiful things, You make beautiful things out of the dust
You make beautiful things, You make beautiful things out of us*

Questions For Morning Watch Booklet:

1. When have you lived contrary to God's desires for you?
2. What behavior has hurt a friend or a family member and separated you from them?
3. In what ways has God turned the "dust" or "brokenness" of your life into something beautiful?

Prayer:

Dear God, I make mistakes and I know I don't live as you desire. There are a lot of days when I love myself more than I love others. I want you to take my selfishness away and make me into the person you really want me to be. So, I guess here and now, I offer my brokenness to you and I ask you to love me the way you loved the Israelites. Forgive me and help me to feel free from the things that burden my life. I pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

D. SCRIPTURE STUDY

Before we look at the parable of the Prodigal Son and the radical forgiveness of the Father in that story, we need to see how God's mercy was continually showered upon the people of Israel. You'll remember God sent Moses to the Pharaoh to ask for freedom for God's people. 10 times Moses pleaded for the Pharaoh to let God's people go and each time, the Pharaoh refused. Finally, the last time, the people of Israel were set free after the Pharaoh got frustrated with Moses' God. The people fled the night of the Passover and found their way to a "Wilderness Detour."

Exodus, chapter 13 says: ¹⁷ *When Pharaoh finally let the people go, God did not lead them along the main road that runs through Philistine territory, even though that was the shortest route to the Promised Land. God said, "If the people are faced with a battle, they might change their minds and return to Egypt."* ¹⁸ *So God led them in a roundabout way through the wilderness toward the Red Sea. Thus the Israelites left Egypt like an army ready for battle.* ¹⁹ *Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear to do this. He said, "God will certainly come to help you. When he does, you must take my bones with you from this place."* ²⁰ *The Israelites left Succoth and camped at Etham on the edge of the wilderness.* ²¹ *The LORD went ahead of them. He guided them during the day with a pillar of cloud, and he provided light at night with a pillar of fire. This allowed them to travel by day or by night.* ²² *And the LORD did not remove the pillar of cloud or pillar of fire from its place in front of the people."*

God loved the people Israel. God made a promise to them that God would always be with them. And most days the Israelites obeyed God but often, they did their own thing, complained about living conditions in the wilderness and even wished they were back in Egypt where they thought they had it so good.

They first complained about not having any WATER. Exodus 15:22 says: *“So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out into the Wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water.”* The Israelites had to cross the wilderness to get to the Promised Land. It was very big and totally barren. It was mostly sand and stone. They had been so anxious to leave Egypt they hadn’t prepared themselves for just how big and barren it would be out there. After three days in the wilderness without water they began to worry and complain. Then, they came to a pool of water.

Exodus 15:23-24 says: *“Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people complained against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?”*

The name of this lake was *Marah*, which means “bitterness.” After seeing God open the Red Sea for them to escape from their enemy, the Israelites should not have doubted \God would take care of their every need. But instead they complained and spoke harshly against God. But God, because God has called the people into relationship with God and because God loved them so much, forgave them their sin.

They then complained about not having any FOOD. Exodus 16:2-3 says *“Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. And the children of Israel said to them, „Oh, that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”*

So you see, even after the miracle of throwing the tree into the bitter waters of Marah to sweeten them, they were complaining about the lack of food. How quickly they forgot how faithful God had been to them all along.

The people complained and said they wanted to go back to Egypt! But, they didn’t really want to be slaves back in Egypt again; they just wanted life to get easier. In the pressure of the moment, they were only thinking of the quickest way of escape from a tough situation. And so, once again, they broke God’s heart by complaining against God and not trusting God.

The children of Israel never thought of asking God to help them. But God spoke to Moses in Exodus 16:4-5 *“Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.”*

Even with the provision of food, the Israelites continued to sin by hoarding Manna. God told them to take only what they needed for the day except the 6th day when they could gather enough for the Sabbath, too. But they got greedy and their brokenness severed their relationship with God. And once again, God forgave them.

And they complained yet one more time. They set off on their journey again and, again there was no water for the people to drink. Exodus 17:3 says: *“And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, „Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”*

In Exodus 17, Moses goes to the Lord in prayer: *“What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!”* And the Lord answers Moses in the next two verses of chapter 17: *“Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.”* And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.”

God knew the people needed food and water; He planned all along to provide for their needs. But He wanted them to be content in knowing He would provide everything they needed instead of complaining about what they didn't have. God might have gotten a bit impatient with the Israelites, even a bit angry at their nagging, but God always provided. And the icing on the cake for the children of God was, that God forgave them again and again for their poor behavior.

The point of looking at the story of the Israelites in the wilderness is that God never stopped loving and forgiving. The people were naughty for sure. However, each time they confessed their naughtiness/brokenness and admitted to being a disappointment to God, God did the most insane thing. Yep, you betcha! God would forgive them again and again. Would God have preferred that they simply stop sinning...oh yeah! But God also knew they couldn't because they were human. So God, insanely as it might seem, continued to be in relationship with them even when they continually hurt God's feelings. And every time God forgave them, their burden of sin was lifted and they started a new day guilt free.

THE STORY OF THE PRODIGAL SON

There is probably no better illustration of God's **insane forgiveness** than the story of the Prodigal Son or The Parable of the Lost Son in Luke, chapter 15:11b-31.

Before you read it with your campers, know the following brief outline of the story.

The parable of the Prodigal Son is a story about God's redemptive grace and mercy. It is a story of God's unconditional love and forgiveness. It is about God seeking sinners. In Luke 15, Jesus tells about the youngest son coming to his father to ask for his inheritance ahead of time. The youngest son would only receive one-third of the father's inheritance in accord to the Old Testament laws in Deuteronomy 21:17. In the Jewish Culture, when the young son came to his father to ask for his inheritance, it was like the Prodigal Son was saying, "I wish you were dead!" This was highly unconventional and was insulting of the father.

Even though insulting, the youngest son took the inheritance and ran away to spend it all on having a good time. He had plenty of "friends" to help him spend it but quickly ran out of his inheritance funds. Then he was reduced to working in a pigpen and the pigs ate better than he. For a Jew, to tend to pigs was the height of humiliation since they were deemed unclean according to the Old Testament dietary laws.

The younger son thought of his father's servants who were at least well fed and had shelter at night. The young son had reached the end of his rope and came back home. He was accepted by his father with open arms. The older son was outraged; he was angry that his father had allowed his brother to return and even more disturbing was the gift of a robe, a ring, and a pair of sandals and a huge feast, in the young son's honor, with the choicest of the fatted calves.

A lot of scholars believe the father represents God. In this parable he gladly and even insanely receives the Prodigal home to return as part of the family. The young son returning to the place he dissed is a good picture of what repentance is. The prodigal son made a change of direction, which is the root meaning of the word repentance. He returned to the father begging for his forgiveness and acknowledging his sin.

Jewish leaders would have understood the youngest son's initial insult to his father as unforgivable, and in their minds, they would not have received the young son back into the family. In fact he would have

been disinherited or even stoned as was done in the ancient Jewish culture in the Old Testament. He would have been disowned and he would not have been allowed to return at part of the father's family.

But, the youngest son does come back with nothing to offer, yet the father receives him with joy and celebration. The son felt unworthy and was remorseful. The son had come to the end of his rope and found himself in desperate need.

The father, as God, our heavenly Father does, shows God's love is unconditional when God accepts him back into the family. In fact, the father had been watching and waiting for his son to return. When the father sees the son approaching he runs to him and embraces him with open arms.

The Jews considered this highly undignified in their culture. The patriarch never ran and certainly never made the first move in such a situation. What this demonstrates to us is God is the seeker, the one who longs to be in relationship with us and who has called us as God's own. We never initiate our own calling into the Kingdom of Heaven (John 6:44) and we can't survive long in the world without the forgiveness and grace of God.

In this beautiful story of admission of guilt and selfishness and beautiful but insane forgiveness, God gives the son what he does not deserve. The Father celebrates as he tells the eldest son, "...*this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found*" (Luke 15:32).

The older brother is filled with anger saying in Luke 15:29-30, "*Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!*"

Even though I would like for you to focus on all three characters in the story I don't want you to get hung up on and converse a long time about the eldest son's anger. Instead, focus on the wildly, loving embrace of forgiveness from the father. God's forgiveness makes no sense in this story. It seems psychotic, insane and totally unreal. The young son should have been sent away. Instead the Father forgives him, celebrates him and restores him to the family.

God's pursuit of us is relentless, it is effectual, and it is with great intensity that God seeks those that are lost. And, to our great benefit, God never gives up this pursuit.

The Bible emphasizes:

1. "*There is no one who is righteous, not even one; there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God.* (Romans 3:10b-11);
2. that our "*Salvation does not, therefore depend on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy.*" (Romans 9:16); and,
3. as Paul stated, God, "...⁴*Even before he made the world, loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.* ⁵*God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.* ⁶*So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son.*" (Ephesians 1:4-6)

So, the story of the Prodigal Son is an amazing story of undeserved forgiveness. My guess is, if the Prodigal Son had made a huge mistake like that again, the Father would go through the very same loving ritual. However, while forgiveness is freely given, it is also a serious breach in our relationship with God and others. To avoid the pain of separation and the burden of guilt that wrong behavior brings to our lives, we should put some effort to "turning around" and avoiding sin.

As you read the story with your campers, make sure you pause to ask the questions placed strategically in the story or come up with your own:

“Jesus told them this story: “A man had two sons. ¹² The younger son told his father, ‘I want my share of your estate now before you die.’ So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.

¹³ “A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. ¹⁴ About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. ¹⁵ He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs.

1. Why was this a repulsive activity? (Jewish culture saw pigs as unclean)
2. What do you suppose he thought about while feeding the swine? (vs. 17-18)

¹⁶ The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸ I will go home to my father and say, “Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, ¹⁹ and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.”’

1. What attitude must the young son have had when he returned home? (humility...even a little shame)
2. What do you think he was feeling? (fear...embarrassment...anxiety...disgrace)

²⁰ “So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. ²¹ His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.’

Wow! What a beautiful picture of confession...of saying “I am sorry for the wrong I have done.”

²² “But his father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. ²³ And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began.

1. By throwing a party, what was the father’s message to the younger son?
2. Was this a case of unconditional love?

²⁵ “Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, ²⁶ and he asked one of the servants what was going on. ²⁷ ‘Your brother is back,’ he was told, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.’ ²⁸ “The older brother was angry and wouldn’t go in. His father came out and begged him, ²⁹ but he replied, ‘All these years I’ve slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. ³⁰ Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!’

If you were the older brother, what do you think the father should have done to your brother?

³¹ “His father said to him, ‘Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. ³² We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!’”

QUESTIONS TO TAKE IT TO THEIR OWN LIVES

1. Do you believe you need a God in your life who forgives and forgets?
2. How do you feel when you receive unexpected forgiveness?

3. Remember a time when you desperately needed someone or God's forgiveness. How did you feel asking for it?
4. Being forgiven for something you've done wrong lifts a huge burden from our hearts and lives. When's the last time you felt such a burden taken from you?
5. What do you need to let go of today... what keeps your heart in darkness? What might you unburden from your soul while you are at camp?

ONE MORE SCRIPTURAL CHARACTER THAT WAS BLESSED WITH FORGIVENESS WHEN HE PROBABLY DESERVED TO BE REJECTED BY JESUS...

Luke 22:54-62 *"Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. But when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, 'This man was with him.' But he denied it. 'Woman, I don't know him,' he said. A little later someone else saw him and said, 'You also are one of them.' 'Man, I am not!' Peter replied. About an hour later another asserted, 'Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Gallilean.' Peter replied, 'Man, I don't know what you're talking about!' Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: 'Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly."*

Jesus has just been arrested by temple troops in the Garden of Gethsemane after Peter cut off the ear of a servant. After they took Jesus away, the disciples fled for their lives. It was a fearful and dangerous night, unsafe for Jesus AND his disciples.

You know this story so well. Jesus is taken away and Peter turns coward. Peter's denial of Jesus is an outward indication of Peter's own brokenness. He was Jesus' friend and yet when push came to shove, Peter chose to save his hide rather than admit he loved Jesus.

1. Why does the story of Peter's denial strikes such a chord in us?
2. Why can we relate so easily to Peter?

Probably because each of us has in some way been false to our friendship with Christ. I'm guessing we've disassociated ourselves from our allegiance to Christ in the presence of friends who don't believe like we do and even make fun of us for believing. In addition, we've all professed Jesus with our mouths, but excuse ourselves when we do things we know are wrong and contrary to Jesus' teachings. All of the disciples... all of us live this kind of dual life that gives those who aren't believers in Jesus an excuse to call us "hypocrites."

1. Isn't it amazing that God forgives even our sin of denying we love God?

What happens to Peter after Jesus dies is a great story, too. In tomorrow's study you may read about how God uses Peter, a big sinner against God and denier of knowing Jesus, to grow the church and share the Gospel. Jesus' death takes Peter's guilt away and empowers him for burden free work on behalf of the Kingdom.

Share this with your campers: Instead of punishment, there is forgiveness. Instead of revenge, there is love. Instead of embarrassment and ostracizing, there is renewal. God is so saddened when we fall away. But, God is equally or even more so heartbroken when we keep holding on to our sin when, instead, we can exchange it for a lighter heart, a lighter life and a lighter load.

Have a camper look up John 3:16 and read: ¹⁶ *"For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."*

Make sure they know: It is for you that Jesus came. It is for you that Jesus died. It is for you that he rose from the grave.

CLOSING PRAYER

Gracious and loving God, when I look at the Prodigal Son or even Peter, I see myself. I know I have failed, disappointed and grieved you – not just once but, like the Israelites, again and again. Thank you for sending your Son to die for me, for forgiving me and for setting me free. Thank you for your patience. Thank you for your love for me and for the whole world. Thank you for Jesus. In his holy and precious name, I pray. Amen.

SOME IMPORTANT, ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. What things are happening in the world today that require forgiveness?
2. What do you think of the father's handling of things?

SOME THOUGHTS FROM "WITH OPEN HANDS" BY HENRI NOUWEN

"When we are invited to pray (seeking God's forgiveness or someone else's) we are asked to open our tightly clenched fists and to give up our last coin. But who wants to do that? A first prayer, therefore, is often a painful prayer, because you discover you don't want to let go. You hold fast to what is familiar, even if you aren't proud of it. You find yourself saying: "That's just how it is with me. I would like to be different, but it can't be now. That's just the way it is, and that's the way I'll have to leave it."

Once you talk like that you've already given up the belief that your life might be otherwise, you've already let the hope of a new life float by. **[You are attached to your old way of being.]** You feel it is safer to cling to a sorry past than to trust in a new future. So, you fill your hands with small, clammy coins (your sin) which you don't want to surrender. **[These clammy coins are the old sins you cling to so tightly. They cause you bitterness, hate, jealousy, disappointment and the desire for revenge.]** But these feelings are not just there, you clutch them in your hands as if they were treasures you didn't want to part with. You sit rummaging in all that old sourness as if you couldn't do without it, as if in giving it up, you would lose your very self."

THE FREEDOM OF FORGIVENESS RECEIVED *by Joel A. Kime*

*Note from CPYU: Joel Kime is a pastor and friend of CPYU. He has a very powerful story to tell and we've asked him to put it into writing for our website. We would love for you to use this somehow with your teens as a starting point for a discussion on a number of issues, including forgiveness, taking responsibility for our actions, and how we communicate with, and learn from, other cultures. Joel has also written a **study guide** with questions to go along with this story.*

In the Gospels Jesus tells the story of a certain servant who owed millions of dollars to a king. When the king requested an accounting of the debt, the servant couldn't pay. The king ordered the servant, the servant's wife, children and all his possession be sold to pay the balance. Horrified, the servant fell on his knees before the king, pleading for time. The king, filled with pity, forgave the entire debt. The man left rejoicing until he bumped into another servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. The first servant violently demanded that this other servant pay him immediately. When the man could not, he had him thrown into prison until the debt was paid in full. Word of this got back to the king who called in the man he had forgiven. How could he have his enormous debt forgiven and then go out and choose not to forgive the small amount this other man owed him? The king, astounded and angry, reinstated the large debt and threw the man in prison until he paid every penny. Jesus' concludes by remarking, "That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters in your heart." (NLT)

It is a story familiar to us; perhaps too familiar. All of us can share probably numerous personal illustrations of broken relationships, bitterness, and grudges. We wonder when we'll ever experience the full life that Jesus promised he came to give us. Jesus skillfully used this parable to illustrate that full life should never include grudges or bitterness toward people for anything they do to us. Symbolically, and certainly in reality, forgiveness frees us. We see in the parable the joy of the first servant, who, if he had not received forgiveness from the king, would have remained locked in a prison, despairing for his lost wife and family and everything he had. Sadly, like us, he returned to that prison as a result of his inability to receive forgiveness and show it to others. I know from firsthand experience that this parable is true-to-life. I am that first servant.

The Crime + In the fall of 1991 just eleven months after passing my driver's license test, I thought I was the best driver in the nation. I remember how much fun it was trying to push the limits. My parents' drive to church, for example,

took about fifteen to twenty minutes; I did it once in eight. It was a video game to me rather than the responsibility it should have been. I hadn't gotten into any trouble, no tickets for speeding, no accidents because of recklessness, though I had a few close calls. But don't we all? On Sunday November 3rd, 1991, I went to church with my family and couldn't wait for it to be done so I could rush home, shovel down dinner, and leave to play football with the guys from church, our Sunday afternoon tradition. After lunch, my brother, Jeff, and I hopped into my parent's early 1980s AMC Concord station-wagon. Yellow with imitation wood grain paneling on the sides, it is a model hardly seen on the roads now twenty years after its manufacture. We picked up his friend, Chad, my friend, Dave, and sped over to Lancaster Christian School for the game.

I knew the back way to LCS very well because my brother, sister, and I all attended there through 8th grade. Part of that back way took us south on Kissel Hill Road just to the east of the Lancaster Airport. It was a beautiful fall day, cool, clear, and crisp. I clearly remember driving on the section of Kissel Hill Road between Millport Road and Oregon Road. As I came over the crest of one small hill, I hit the gas and we felt the car lurch into high gear. Sounding like I knew what I was talking about, I made some inane comment about the car "doing good today because it hit third gear at 70 mph." Dave, who hadn't yet put on his seatbelt, responded that he'd better do so! Little did he suspect that his caution might have saved his life. As he fumbled with the belt, I saw an Amish buggy about 100 yards in front of us in our lane, heading the same direction as us. I said to everyone in the car something like, "I'm going to blow by these guys." I thought I was so incredibly cool.

For those of us in Lancaster County, accustomed to the Amish community within our borders, the sight of Amish horse and buggies is commonplace. Lancaster is known world-wide as a hotspot of Amish culture. Thousands of tourists visit each year hoping to catch a glimpse of gray horse and buggies on the roads or of Amish families in their traditional black and blue outfits. Subject to religious persecution in Europe, the Amish journeyed to the New World in search of their own promised land. Their culture and customs have remained, for the most part, exactly as they were centuries ago when they first came to America. The Amish know English, for example, but talk amongst themselves in their Pennsylvania Dutch/German dialect. All Lancastrians can tell you stories about how their culture is changing incrementally, but there is no denying that the Amish have maintained a traditional culture in the midst of a progressive one. The changes and pressures of a farming county that is rapidly blossoming into a wealthy suburban county have, however, over the last few decades, soured many Amish to their Lancaster County soil. As neighborhoods and business parks cover farmland, hundreds of Amish families have migrated to quieter farmlands in such places as Indiana and Mexico.

This small second exodus has done little to change the face of the Amish in Lancaster. Buggies are still regulars on country roads like that one I traveled. By and large, the American culture in Lancaster treats the Amish just as they do their slow-moving buggies, taking them for granted and passing them by. The standard legal practice for passing buggies is to slow down behind them, put your left turn signal on, verify that the left-hand lane is clear ahead, pull over the double-yellow lines into the left-hand land, pass the buggy, put your right-turn signal on, and move back over the double-yellow into the right-hand land. For some this drill is a nuisance: "They slow our progress. Their metal rims wear ruts into our roads, and their horses make a stinking mess everywhere." This minority view with its accompanying round of Amish jokes can be contrasted, as most Lancastrians will tell you, by the accurate description of the Amish as extremely hard-working, peaceful, and prosperous.

I stomped on the gas again, now doing about 70-75 mph and steered the car into the left lane to pass the buggy. As we raced closer to the buggy, I will never, ever forget seeing the nose of the horse turn out in front of me. Instantly I knew they were trying to turn in front of me. I hadn't looked for, nor had I seen their turn signal or the small country road they were attempting to turn left onto. Instinct took over as I pounded the brake pedal with my foot. The brakes locked and the car skidded forward, tires screaming. We smashed into the buggy, and I heard the POP of my windshield shattering into tiny pieces of glass. The buggy flew over top of the car and we rumbled to a stop in the field to the left. My hands, gripped tight to the wheel, were streaming with blood, but only from shards of windshield glass that grazed my knuckles. I still have a tiny scar in between two knuckles on my left hand, a constant reminder that basically nothing happened to me.

Dave never quite got his seatbelt buckled. When I hit the brakes, he grabbed the shoulder belt and held on with both hands. The belt locked and swung him around like Tarzan and his left shoulder hit the windshield. Possibly his shoulder, but maybe the buggy, broke the windshield. Other than soreness, though, neither he, Jeff, nor Chad was hurt. Dave's father, who visited the scene that evening after it was cleared, later told us that the skidmarks from the car quite visibly ran off the road, missing a telephone pole by about 12 inches. It all happened so fast, I do not even remember seeing a telephone pole.

After making sure everyone in my car was okay, I tried to open my door but the collision had jammed it shut. Just then an Amish man came running up to our car yelling frantically, "Does anyone know CPR? Does anyone know CPR?" At 17, I was the oldest in the car. I think Dave had a bit of training, but we were not prepared for what we saw after we got out. We walked down to the crash site, and there the Amish man was holding from behind the crumpled pile of what looked like his mother. She was severely injured, convulsing, and definitely missing teeth. I told Jeff and Chad to run to the nearest homes, which in that area were all farms, to find a phone and call 911. They sprinted across the fields, so riveted on getting to a phone that my brother never even saw the Amish lady. He remembers that the fields were recently plowed, as though he was running sluggishly on a sandy beach. A very frustrating prospect when all you want is to get to a phone as fast as possible. My brother's race to the phone is the first instance of many in which I realize the extreme pain my sin brought not only to the Amish family, but also to my family. Imagine being a 13 year old, running with all your might to get to a phone to call 911 because your older brother had caused an awful accident? Dave and I stayed and flagged down cars hoping someone might have a mobile phone, which at that time was still a rarity. I tugged at his shirt in desperation saying something like "What do we do?"

Immediate Aftermath + Eventually cars stopped, and a policeman and an EMT/ambulance crew came to scene. That was a huge relief for me. A family friend who was driving by picked Jeff up from the scene and dropped him off at our home. He was the first to inform my parents, and together with my dad returned to pick me up. On their way back to the accident they could see from a distance the car in the field, the buggy unrecognizable. Imagine the dreadful feeling of driving to the scene of devastation that your son caused. How that must have felt for my dad! As my dad and I sat in the back seat of the police cruiser, I don't remember much except fear and an overwhelming desire to tell the truth, to get what I knew was a weighty burden off my back. The officer gave my dad and me a few moments alone after I had blurted some initial details. We figured he left us to ourselves then so we could go over the details of the story together, possibly to come up with a spin that didn't make me so culpable for the accident. I knew it was horrible, so I told him exactly what happened, even that I was going at least 70 mph. They were able to confirm that later anyway by the length of the skid marks. I came to find out in the coming weeks that the officer was really impressed with my honesty. At the time I was simply scared to death of any further trouble. Lying was not an option. I didn't know if I was going to jail, the local juvenile detention center, Barnes Hall, or some other awful place. But the cop let me go home with my dad clearly stating that there would be follow up.

I'll never forget what my dad said in response to my rather tepid apologies as we drove away, "You've been through enough. We're not going to make it worse for you." He was right, and I'm very glad for it. It was already bad, about to get worse. When we arrived at our house, less than five minutes away, my mom met me at the door. I must have spent the next half hour just crying on my mom's shoulder. As the news got out many family and friends showed their love and support by coming over to do nothing and everything at the same time: be there. The friends from church who we were on our way to meet stopped their football game and came over, dirty and disheveled from the game. Gradually a herd of my school and church friends migrated to our house to show support. That in itself was meaningful because I had rarely attempted to mix these two groups of people. I think they even prayed together.

As I was with my friends huddled downstairs in my basement, my parents called me upstairs to my bedroom to tell me that the police officer had just called with a report about the Amish lady who had been taken to the hospital. Due to permanent brain damage, she needed life support to stay alive. Since the Amish don't believe in life support, she died that night in the hospital. The horrible news began to pile on top of me. The Amish lady, the officer told us, wasn't the mother of the man. It was his wife. More than that, it was his newlywed bride, and they had been on their honeymoon. They had only been married for 5 days, he was 21 years old, and she was 19. Traditionally, November is the Amish marrying season, and they were on their customary Amish honeymoon travels, visiting a few days in one relative's home then moving on to another and another and so on. In the midst of that bliss, she was dead, and I had killed her. It was, and still is by far, the worst day of my life. My mother recalls that she held me crying in her arms while my dad and brother sat next to me on the bed, and my 9 year old sister Laura was convinced I was going to jail! Eventually everyone left our house, but God and I talked long into the night.

The next day my parents let me stay home from school, and actually, one of my friend's parents let him stay home with me. He picked me up and we watched Monty Python videos to get our minds off the disaster. In the middle of Live at the Hollywood Bowl, my parents called. They had found out from my uncle, who had connections in the Amish community, that the viewing was going to be that day, and they told me that I was going. It was extremely frightening news. Yet it signals the depth of my parents' character. I know my dad later told people that it was the hardest thing they ever had to do. As a parent of a 6 and 5 year old now, I can hardly imagine what I would do if I was in their shoes. How would I handle this horrible thing my son did? How responsible would I feel? And what would my reaction be? Step by step through the process of dealing with my sin, my parents did everything right. In a world where so many want to shift blame, especially when their children mess up, my parents stood by me and guided me through handling this situation in a God-honoring, responsible and truthful manner.

That evening, my parents, my youth pastor (who had only been at our church for 3 months...it still amazes me that he came...another example of godly commitment), and I went to where we thought the viewing was going to be. I felt so nervous there was actually pain ripping across my guts. I didn't know what these people were like (shows how much this Lancastrian cared about the Amish sub-culture as I grew up around it) or what was going to happen. Would they come pouring out of the porch of the house with shotguns? That was literally the image in my mind. We got the house and it didn't seem like anyone was home. We had mistakenly been given the location, not of the viewing, but of the husband's family's home. Some of his relatives were inside, and my mom remembers his grandmother coming out to meet us, hugging me and expressing her forgiveness. This kind gesture I do not recall, most likely due to the fact that in my mind the worst was yet to come. Amazingly the husband's father was there and needed a ride to the viewing. So we took him with us, and he led the way. The father, while very reserved, wasn't mean to us, and even expressed his forgiveness. But can you imagine driving to the viewing of your son's new wife with the family of the guy who was responsible for her death?

When we finally made it to the viewing, we saw Amish buggies parked all over the farm property, heightening my fear. This was a tragedy in the life of Lancaster's Amish community, drawing many to support the family and attend the viewing. A loss in what was supposed to be a joyful season made the front page of the local paper. Then the moment came. We got out of the car and walked into the dimly lit house. My mom mentioned that because the father-in-law was with us we didn't have to go through the painful process of knocking on the door, we were immediately ushered into the house. I had never been in an Amish home and was surprised at how similar it looked to my own. The family, through the grapevine, knew that we were coming and met us in the front room. The parents of the Amish lady who died, Melvin and Barbara Stoltzfus, walked up to me and put their arms around me. Through tears I muttered how sorry I was, and they spoke

some of the most incredible words that I think are possible to utter, "We forgive you; we know it was God's time for her to die."

Unbelievable. It was totally, absolutely amazing. But they went even further than that! They proceeded to invite my family to come over for dinner! And they wanted us to come soon, within a few weeks' time! I cannot express the relief that flooded over me.

Then someone led me to a back room where the husband, Aaron Stoltzfus, stood beside the open casket of his wife, Sarah. To my surprise, as I nervously glanced at her, I was looking at a beautiful young woman. Aaron, like her parents, came to me with open arms. I said, "How can I ever repay you?" He simply forgave me. We hugged as the freedom of forgiveness swept over and through me.

As I read and reread the previous few paragraphs, I feel extremely limited in my command of the English language to evoke the feeling of what took place. When I tell the story live, it seems to carry a greater impact. Maybe the audience reads my face. Maybe the emotion can't help but flow through me. All I know is that the Stoltzfus' concise words of forgiveness rushed through me with power. Some people have said that Amish are able to forgive like that because their theology leans toward fatalism, meaning that they believe everything is determined, is bound to happen, so there's no reason to get all bent out of shape about something bad. God is in control. They become somewhat emotionless about all the pain and suffering in life and are much more capable of dealing with it well. I don't know how true that is for every single Amishman, but I do know that this particular family is very emotional. In a positive way. They are incredibly upbeat and warm people. And I know the accident, Sarah's death, was very, very hard for them.

My mom, recalling the events said, "I will never forget what Pastor Jim told us the next day. He watched Joel during this entire night. He said he started out as a young teen with an incredible burden of guilt on his shoulder but walked out of that house with a tremendous weight taken him through forgiveness."

The Sentence + The Stoltzfus' did have us over for dinner sometime in that next month, an event I recall with wonder. There we were sitting in that same Amish home with Sarah's family, Aaron, and some from his family too. The table was loaded with delicious food, and never once did they show any kind of resentment. Never once did they attempt to make us feel bad. On the contrary, it was a kind of a get-to-know-you session, an intentional beginning to a meaningful relationship. We exchanged stories comparing and contrasting the Amish sub-culture with mainstream American culture. They were so kind. They had opened their home and hearts to us!

The larger Amish community in Lancaster was also very impressive to me. I still have the pile of at least 50 cards that I received from various Amish people across the County. They were constantly encouraging and pointing me to God.

It was also in this time that I clearly recall a striking visit from my soccer coach. I remember meeting him at the door one evening, probably just a few days after the accident. I will never forget what he said. "Joel, you will be compassionate from now on." How true. Since that time I have never had trouble forgiving people. Not that I have worked on it and have become talented at it. On the contrary, I think God must have changed my heart, because I don't have to try to forgive anymore. It flows out as naturally as my heart beats without me having a say in the matter.

In the ensuing months, I did not drive again, handing my keys over to my parents. My trial was set for February 5, 1992. Because of the severity of the accident I was charged with vehicular homicide, a charge that indicates the accidental, but irresponsibly reckless use of a vehicle that caused the loss of life. I'm not sure where it falls on the murder/manslaughter scale, but I do know that if I was one year older, I could have been facing jail time, which is another facet of the whole story that points me to the grace of God. I was 17, a minor, and was therefore dealt with under the juvenile justice system, saved from a much harsher penalty in the adult courts. Soon after the accident, I was assigned a probation officer and a public defender to walk me and my family through the penal process prior to the court date. The standard punishment for juvenile vehicular homicide at the time was a suspension of the offender's driver's license for 3 years, 200 hours of community service, payment of all court costs (only about \$100), and probation until the community service requirement was completed. To me, with Sarah's life gone because of my actions, it was an extremely generous sentence.

My trial and punishment served as another instance for the Amish family to demonstrate the freedom of forgiveness. They wrote letters to the judge begging for my pardon, asking that I be acquitted on all counts! Imagine the character it would take to write that letter! Because of the severity of the crime, however, there was no way pardon was possible based on the law. At the trial the only thing my dad asked the judge was if it might be possible for me to get my license back sooner because I would be going to college soon and would need to drive. I hoped that maybe I could have more community service in exchange for a short suspension, but the judge held firm to the standard. A wise decision that was completely rational and acceptable to my thinking. As we walked out of the courtroom, my probation officer met us in the hallway. I will never forget pulling out my wallet and handing my precious driver's license over to her that day after the court appearance.

From Forgiveness to Friendship + Our relationship with the Stoltzfus' family has continued ever since (both Aaron and his in-law's surname is Stoltzfus.) Over the years they have come to our house and we to theirs, about once each year near the anniversary of the accident. Once when they came to our house, I remember playing ping-pong with Aaron. We must have played 10 games and I beat him every time, which was to me an awkward situation. Here I am, I thought, an irresponsible kid who killed his wife, and now I'm playing ping-pong with him. He really seemed to enjoy it and wanted to keep playing. I wondered if I should have let him win, but what would that do? I came to realize that our relationship with Aaron and the rest of the Stoltzfus family, though it began under the most horrible circumstances, had grown into a legitimate, normal relationship. They had forgiven me, and never, ever, went back on that decision. And they backed it up with a real relationship. Consider this: five years after the accident, Michelle and I invited them to our wedding, and they came--for the ceremony and the reception, bearing gifts! Some may read this and think, "How insensitive! You invited them

to your wedding? Isn't that a slap in the face!?!?" On the surface, it certainly looks like it. It does seem odd to me that we would invite the Stoltzfus' to share in our celebration when only five years earlier, I had totally shattered theirs. But that viewpoint fails to realize the depth of the relationship. The past had been forgiven, and we were actually friends. People invite their friends to their wedding. I particularly like the idea of trumpeting to the world their brand of forgiveness. To me, having the Stoltzfus' at my wedding was not to show off the fact that I had friends in the Amish community, it was to display for everyone who knew us the glory of God that results when people obey his commands! To accent this further, when we moved to Jamaica to be missionaries three years later, the Stoltzfus family supported us financially. Forgiveness, they taught me, is not always a one-time event. Perhaps this is one angle of what Jesus intended when he replied to Peter that we ought to forgive someone not just seven times, but seventy times seven. In other words, Jesus said, in order to follow its purpose of freedom, it requires follow-up, the rebuilding of a relationship or, as in my case, the creation of a new one.

God blessed the situation even further as Aaron eventually remarried Sarah's younger sister, Levina. To me it was as though God allowed the family to be whole again. They now have a beautiful family, full of children.

This past year when we visited Melvin and Barbara (Aaron and Levina live in a house on Aaron's family's property in Leola, so we don't see them as much) on their farm/bakery in Lititz, it was the first we had seen them in a couple years. We missed one year when we lived in Jamaica, and the next year because we had just returned home, so it was good to see them after a 2 or 3 year gap. For the first time in 11 years we talked about the accident frankly, but very kindly. Again, they were never condemning, just admitting how hard it was. How they miss Sarah. I had the chance to express my gratitude and share with them how the freedom of forgiveness they gave me impacted so many people whenever I share the story. I cried then as I am now as I type this.

In this land of liberty, that kind of freedom I received often eludes us. We have so few pictures of what it actually looks like. God glorified himself in my life, however, by blessing me with a wonderful picture of how people can handle terrible crimes against themselves. My uncle, Jim Ohlson, when commenting on an early manuscript of my story added, "What I have seen in you is that the forgiveness of the Amish gave you the confidence to live life to the full." Jesus said "I have come that they might have life, and life to the full!" That full life is only possible through the freedom of forgiveness received.

ANOTHER GREAT STORY...

A couple of years ago I heard a story on NPR that reinforced such a belief for me. *Michael Garofalo* told the story on "Morning Edition" about a 31-year-old New York City social worker named Julio Diaz. Garofalo noted that Diaz's customarily followed the same routine each evening, ending his hour-long subway commute to the Bronx one stop early, just so he could eat at his favorite diner. But one night a few weeks earlier, as Diaz stepped off the No. 6 train and onto a nearly empty platform, his evening took an unexpected turn.

He was walking toward the stairs when a twelve year old boy approached and pulled out a knife and asked for his money. So Diaz gave the boy his wallet. As his assailant began to walk away, Diaz said, "Hey, wait a minute. You forgot something. If you're going to be robbing people all night, you might as well take my coat to keep you warm."

The young boy looked at his victim like he was crazy, and asked, "Why are you doing this?" Diaz replied, "Well, if you're willing to risk your freedom for a few dollars, then I guess you must really need the money. I mean, all I wanted to do was get dinner... and if you want to join me... hey, you're more than welcome." "I just felt maybe he really [needed] help," Diaz said. Remarkably, the boy agreed, and the unlikely pair walked into the diner and sat in a booth.

Shortly the manager came by, the dishwasher came by, the waiters came by to greet him. Diaz remembered, "The kid was like, 'You know everybody here. Do you own this place?'" "No," Diaz replied, "I just eat here a lot." The boy responded, "But you're even nice to the dishwasher." "Well, haven't you been taught that you should be nice to everybody?" Diaz asked him. "Yeah, but I didn't think people actually behaved that way," the boy said.

The social worker saw an opening. He asked the boy what he wanted out of life. "He just had almost a sad face," Diaz said. He couldn't answer--or he didn't want to. When the bill arrived, Diaz told the teen, "Look, I guess you're going to have to pay for this bill 'cause you have my money and I can't pay for it. But if you give me my wallet back, I'll gladly treat you."

The boy "didn't even think about it" and handed over the wallet, Diaz said. "So, I gave him \$20... I figured maybe it would help him...." But Diaz asked for something in return, and the boy gave it to him. It was his knife. Sometimes grace and forgiveness so astonishes us that all we can do is change course. All we can do is repent... turn around. There are times, I know, when the repentance seems to come first. But look closely, and more often we will find that it works the other way around. Grace, once demonstrated and experienced, can change everything about us. Everything.

ACTION IDEAS

1. In your cabin, take time to write sins on paper to be burned at evening worship. Ask your campers to reflect on their life and in writing, confess something that has been burdening them for some time. Make sure you honor the privacy of each camper.
2. Remind each other every morning or every night in your cabin of the forgiveness you receive in your baptism. Have a cup of water with you, ask campers to sit in a circle on the floor and ask them to make the sign of the cross on the forehead of the person on their right.

3. Create fake tattoos on camper's foreheads reminding them they are children of God and forgiven in the waters of their baptism and by the blood of the Lamb.

E. ADDITIONAL STUDY IDEAS

BLESSING OF FRIENDSHIP (from For Everything a Season)

This blessing can be used in your cabins at some point this week...

PRAYER: God of love, we thank you for all who make life richer through the gift of friendship especially (name your cabin members). We are grateful for how we are making new memories this week. We also thank you for the gift of knowing and being known, and for friendship that holds our hearts together long after we leave Rainbow Trail. Bless us and forgive us if we have said anything hurtful or unkind. Teach us the amazing wonder of forgiveness. Amen.

SOMEONE READ: Proverbs 18:24

REFLECTION

Share with each other a conversation or something that happened this week that meant a lot to you? Why is this week so special? What do you need from your cabin mates to feel even closer to them?

RITUAL ACTION

Pass the blessing cup and as you do, say these words using the name of the person on your right as you speak:

"Thank you, (person on your right) for sharing your life with me."

COUNSELOR BLESSING

May the love of Christ continue to bind us together in joy and sorrow, through laughter and tears, with love and hope long after we leave this special and holy mountain. Amen.

F. IDEAS TO INCORPORATE THEME THROUGHOUT THE DAY

1. Make sure, if you are the village of the day, that you have communion at your evening worship.
2. Do corporate (large group) confession at morning worship...have the following corporate confession printed on little sheets of paper for each camper. Have a pastor lead corporate confession and absolution during morning worship.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

P: Trusting in the promise of Baptism, that Jesus takes our sin and gives us His life, let us confess our sin and humbly receive God's forgiveness.

P: Most merciful God,

Campers: we confess that we are sinful and cannot change that ourselves. We have sinned against you in our thoughts, with our words, , by what we have done and by what we have not done. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, make us new, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen. (these are just suggestions that would make this in words closer to what kids would actually speak and understand on a daily basis)

P: Hear once again the words of Jesus: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to proclaim release to the captives." In the name of + Jesus Christ, I proclaim to you that your sins are forgiven; you are released and renewed. The joy of the Lord is your strength, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are yours forever.

Campers: Amen.

3. Offer confession/absolution/prayer stations at evening worship. Perhaps worship can be in Aspen...light candles...make the atmosphere contemplative...sing songs while campers go to pastors or congregational leaders for personal confession and prayer.
4. Flash Paper...cross with nails...for forgiveness of sins + ask campers to do this confession in cabin groups and then bring the flash paper with their sin written on it to evening worship...

G. OTHER SONGS, STORIES THOUGHTS, QUESTIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

1. *Jeremiah 31:34* “No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.”
2. *Joel 2:13* “Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.”
3. *Psalms 51:6-12* “You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. ⁹ Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.”

4. SONGS:

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| a. Thy Word | j. Sing Alleluia |
| b. Shut De Do | k. Grace Like Rain |
| c. I Love you x 12 | l. Come Thou Fount |
| d. Walkin' in the Light | m. I Will Follow |
| e. Humble Thyself | n. Psalm 121 |
| f. Shine, Jesus Shine | o. We Are Walking in the Light of God |
| g. Messiah | p. Create in Me a Clean Heart |
| h. Jesus | q. Lord, I Lift Your Name on High |
| i. Lover of My Soul | |

H. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY DOWN FOR JUNIORS + A STORY TO SHARE

1. Focus on the story of the Prodigal Son – have kids talk about a time when they “sinned” went against a parent or teacher did something they know is wrong. Have each person share aloud.
2. Have campers think about the past week – where have they hurt someone else – where have they done things they know God would not approve of?
3. Even campers at this level – know they do “bad” things – they hurt people, they do bad things, they sin...have them write down what they've done – the flash paper, throwing sins in the fire, - these all make great connections for this age level too.
4. This age group can also understand the idea of repentance – that turning around – after the prodigal son story, you could give slips of paper and have them write down a “confession” and then ask them how they could live differently. Have them stand up facing one way and read or tell one thing they have done (confess) and ask for forgiveness. AS the leader speak God's words of unconditional forgiveness to them – something like – (Name) you are forgiven totally – God has wiped that sin away and you stand before God whole and holy. Then have them turn around and take a few steps

and declare how they could live differently or simply at this point declare God’s love for them and the absolute forgiveness that is theirs. Celebrate with them! If they need help figuring out how to live differently – help them out or let the group help them out. This is something you could do throughout the rest of the week – anytime someone “sins” have them stand still – confess – give words of forgiveness then have them turn around and state how they could live differently. Could be an interesting experience for the whole group! At the end of the time – have the group pray – let each person pray either for themselves or the person on their right.

I. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY UP FOR SR HIGHS

1. How important is it to offer our love, especially to those closest to us, with no strings attached?
2. What is it that you need forgiveness for?
3. God is like the Papa and the Mama. God forgives, no strings attached. How difficult is that for you to believe and why?

Also – can use Romans 8 again – go back to in reminding campers that nothing can separate them from the love of God!

Ernest Hemingway wrote a poignant short story called “The Capital of the World.” In it he tells about a Spanish father who wants to reconcile with his son who has run away to Madrid. In order to locate the boy he takes out this ad in the El Liberal newspaper: "Paco, meet me at the Hotel Montana at noon on Tuesday. All is forgiven. Love, Papa."

Paco is a common name in Spain, and when the father goes to the square he finds 800 young men named Paco waiting for their fathers. What drew them to the hotel? As Hemingway tells it, it were the words “All is forgiven.” I notice that the father did not say, “All WILL BE forgiven IF you do this or that.” Not, “All WILL BE forgiven WHEN you do such and such.” He simply says, “All is forgiven.” No strings attached.

And that’s the hard part – un-attaching the strings. Wiktionary tells us that the origin of the expression “no strings attached” may go back to ancient times when documents were written on parchment that were rolled up and secured with a string. The Babylonian Talmud in Tractate Bava Metzi'a tells of a man who gives his wife a bill of divorce on such a parchment, but holds onto the string so that he can snatch it back, should he choose to do so. The divorce, therefore, is not considered valid since he will not give it freely. Similarly, love, forgiveness or friendship that is given with strings and conditions attached are a sham and not valid, since they can be snatched back at any time.

An unknown author beautifully portrays the possibilities of no-strings-attached love in this heartfelt story titled “The Rock.” As she grew older her teenage daughter became increasingly rebellious. It culminated late one night when the police arrested her daughter for drunk driving. Mom had to go to the police station to pick her up.

They didn’t speak until the next afternoon. Mom broke the tension by giving her a small gift- wrapped box. Her daughter nonchalantly opened it and found a little rock inside. She rolled her eyes and said, “Cute, Mom, what’s this for?” “Read the card,” Mom instructed. Her daughter took the card out of the envelope and read it. Tears started to trickle down her cheeks. She got up and lovingly hugged her mom as the card fell to the floor. On the card were these words: “This rock is more than 200,000,000 years old. That is how long it will take before I give up on you.”

This mother is not saying, “I will love you IF...” Instead she says that she will love her daughter forever and nothing can change that. No strings attached. When we learn to love like that, I think we’ll understand the words of Emmett Fox, who said, “If you could only love enough, you could be the most powerful person in the world.”

J. PARENT DEVOTIONAL

1. Necessary items for today’s devotion...you’ll need a small bowl of water to remember your baptism and small pieces of paper on which you will write a sin you need to be forgiven for.
2. Before you begin, dip your fingers into the water and make the sign of the cross on your own forehead and say: I remember my baptism this day in the name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Scripture:

“Jesus told them this story: ‘A man had two sons.’¹² The younger son told his father, ‘I want my share of your estate now before you die.’ So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.¹³ ‘A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living.¹⁴ About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve.’¹⁵ He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs.

¹⁶ The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.¹⁷ ‘When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger!’¹⁸ I will go home to my father and say, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you,¹⁹ and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.’”²⁰ “So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.²¹ His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.’

²² “But his father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet.²³ And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast,²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began.

²⁵ “Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house,²⁶ and he asked one of the servants what was going on.²⁷ ‘Your brother is back,’ he was told, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.’²⁸ “The older brother was angry and wouldn’t go in. His father came out and begged him,²⁹ but he replied, ‘All these years I’ve slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends.³⁰ Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!’³¹ “His father said to him, ‘Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours.³² We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!’”

Luke 15: 11b-31

Reflection:

NO MATTER WHAT + Our lesson is about the radical and insane forgiveness of God. Nothing we can do will make God love us less. No matter what, God will forgive if we come to God with a repentant heart. And the forgiveness God gives is with no strings attached...and it is abundant...and it changes our lives if we allow it to.

An unknown author beautifully portrays the possibilities of no-strings-attached love in this heartfelt story titled “The Rock.” As she grew older her teenage daughter became increasingly rebellious. It culminated late one night when the police arrested her daughter for drunk driving. Mom had to go to the police station to pick her up. They didn’t speak until the next afternoon. Mom broke the tension by giving her a small gift- wrapped box. Her daughter nonchalantly opened it and found a little rock inside. She rolled her eyes and said, “Cute, Mom, what’s this for?” “Read the card,” Mom instructed. Her daughter took the card out of the envelope and read it. Tears started to trickle down her cheeks. She got up and lovingly hugged her mom as the card fell to the floor. On the card were these words: “This rock is more than 200,000,000 years old. That is how long it will take before I give up on you.”

Family Activity:

On your own piece of paper, write some wrong doing that you need to confess...something that has been weighing heavy on your heart for a brief or a long time. After you have done this, fold your paper in half and hand it to the person next to you. Without looking at what is handed to you, tear that paper in little, bitty pieces and repeat these words: "In the name of Jesus, your sins are forgiven. You are free."

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for loving me unconditionally and for forgiving my every sin. Turn my heart toward you, O God, take my pain and brokenness, shape my life for you. Come, and turn my heart O God. Amen.

Forgiven: A Better Version of Me
2014 RTLC Bible Study- Day 4
GOD’S FORGIVENESS INSPIRES ME

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

We have focused, so far, on God’s action in our lives:

1. God loves me personally – unconditionally – loves me enough to die for me. There is nothing that can separate me from the love of God in Christ.
2. God sees me clearly – knows my every thought; no sin is hidden from God.
3. God forgives me – insanely – radically – it is in God’s very nature to forgive me.

Today we turn to how God’s action in our lives inspires us. To be fully loved, fully known, and fully forgiven is an extraordinary experience; one that humans rarely experience with one another. Yet this is how God chooses to relate to us. Even though we are not worthy, God declares we are of great worth: worth loving; worth forgiving; worth dying for. The more deeply we experience this, the greater the impact it has on our lives, and on our living. When we experience God’s forgiveness – this extraordinary, undeserved, life-changing forgiveness – it opens our minds up to an entirely new way to live. To be forgiven by God can inspire us. It can create within us the desire to give and receive forgiveness with one another.

As sinful human beings, we are not naturally inclined to give or receive forgiveness. When another person harms us, our brokenness tempts us to choose vengeance over forgiveness. (“Do the crime; do the time.”) When we harm another person, our self-centeredness comes up with myriad excuses for our behavior, seeking to prevent us from humbling ourselves, admitting our wrongdoing, and asking for forgiveness. (“I didn’t mean to do you any harm.”)

Yet God’s action in our lives invites us into a different way – in fact, compels us to live in a different way. God, who loves us personally, and who knows us clearly, could easily have chosen to despise us and to reject us. As we consider God’s goodness, and our brokenness, we may even expect that. Certainly Saint Peter expected that the first time he met Jesus after having denied him three times. Certainly the Apostle Paul expected that when he was on his way to arrest Christians for (supposed) false belief and Jesus met him on the road. Certainly King David expected that when he was identified as an adulterer and a murderer.

Thankfully human ways are not God’s ways. God chooses love over hate, life over death and forgiveness over judgment. When we are expecting hate, death and judgment, the experience of receiving love, life and forgiveness can be life changing.

In the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (St. Matthew 18:23-35), Jesus explains to his disciples the gift of forgiveness intends, in part, to inspire a life of forgiving and receiving forgiveness. The servant who is forgiven much, and who then refuses to forgive even a little, illustrates this. The fellow slave, the master, and the reader quickly see the scandal.

Recalling stories from the Bible (Peter, Paul, David...) and from recent history (Nelson Mandela, Michael Davis [the father of Claire Davis, the young woman who died in the Arapahoe High School shooting], Corrie Ten Boom...) we will explore what happens when people live with a commitment to forgiveness.

B. OBJECTIVES FOR THIS DAY OF THE STUDY

1. Campers will be able to express, in their own words, the extraordinary love and grace that comes to us through God's forgiveness.
2. Campers will explore how receiving forgiveness from God can inspire / compel them to forgive and receive forgiveness from one another.
3. Campers will identify their own resistance to forgiving and receiving forgiveness.
4. Campers will articulate concrete, specific ways they can become a vehicle of life-changing forgiveness in their daily lives.

Key Goal for the Day: Have each camper come up with one specific, concrete situation in which he or she wants to be a vehicle of forgiveness for someone they know.

C. MORNING WATCH

Welcome:

Welcome to this time for reflection on God's love that flows through us to others.

Scripture

[Jesus said,] "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' "

Matthew 18:23-28

Song:

What I've Done (Linkin Park)

*In this farewell
There's no blood
There's no alibi
'Cause I've drawn regret
From the truth
Of a thousand lies*

*So let mercy come
And wash away
What I've done*

*I'll face myself
To cross out what I've become
Erase myself
And let go of what I've done*

*Put to rest
What you thought of me
While I clean this slate
With the hands of uncertainty*

*For what I've done
I start again
And whatever pain may come
Today this ends
I'm forgiving what I've done!*

*What I've done
Forgiving what I've done*

Questions For Morning Watch Booklet

1. **When you hear the word forgiveness, what do you think of?**
2. **Think of a time you have forgiven someone. Was it difficult? How did you feel afterward?**
3. **Something (a sin) you want God to forgive.**

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for your gift of forgiveness. Help my heart to be touched by your forgiveness, and inspire me to share and receive forgiveness with everyone I know and love. I pray this in the name of the one who loves me enough to die for me, and who promises me the hope of new life, Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.

D. SCRIPTURE STUDY

Hopefully you have been inviting your campers to pray out loud, invite one of them (or all of them) to open this Bible study with a prayer. Pray that campers might appreciate how much God loves them, might be aware of their need for forgiveness, and might be grateful for God's commitment to share forgiveness and new life with them.

Ask campers to identify what they have learned and experienced during the three days of camp.

1. What have they learned about God? (*God loves us in amazing ways. God has great patience with us. God never gives up on us. God is determined to share forgiveness with us...*)
2. What have they learned about themselves? (*Even though I try my hardest, I'll never be perfect. I hurt others sometimes, even when I don't intend to. It feels good to be forgiven by God...*)
3. How has their understanding of forgiveness deepened, or changed, through the events of this week?

As an introduction, suggest to them that when we come into direct contact with God, it can have an impact on us. It can change us.

1. Have they ever had a family member, or a close friend, or a teacher, or a coach, who has made an impact on them – who has changed them? (*My mom helped me know what it means to love. My dad helped me understand the value of saving for the future. My friend introduced me to a sport or a book series or a computer game that I love now... My coach helped me realize how important it is for me to do my very best...*)
2. In what ways has God (or their faith) made an impact on them – or changed them? (*I am more humble about myself. I have become more thankful. I have become more generous. I have had more compassion for others. I am not worried about the future. I feel like there is meaning in my life...*)

This week we are focusing on forgiveness. But forgiveness isn't always easy, is it? Let's make a list of times when forgiveness is hard. (*Invite campers to share examples of times when it would be hard for them to forgive. If they can't think of any, suggest: someone hurts a person you love; someone lies about you to a friend; someone steals or destroys an item that is important to you...*)

1. Why do you think it is so hard to forgive? (*Because we get mad, or hurt, and we want to get even. Because we think people should be punished, not forgiven, when they do something wrong. Because if we let them get away with it, they'll be more likely to do it again. Maybe they'll even do it to us next time...*)
2. Do you think it is easier, or harder, to ask for forgiveness than to give it? (*Harder: I don't like to admit that I'm wrong; it is embarrassing. If I show weakness, people will take advantage of me; I have to stand up for myself.*)

The truth is: it isn't easy to forgive. It isn't easy to ask for forgiveness. It is hard enough, that people often resist it. But forgiveness is at the very center of how God deals with us, and at the center of how God wants us to live together. God's forgiveness is an amazing gift! And God desires that this forgiveness will completely change the way we look at ourselves and at the world around us; that we'll want to share this gift with others; that we'll want to receive this gift from others.

Let's take a look at two stories from the Bible.

The first story is a parable that Jesus told, as he was trying to help his disciples understand the kind of change that forgiveness can make in their lives. Let's read it together, in parts. I need four volunteers. (Choose volunteers, and have each of them read a part.)

Matthew 18:23-35

Jesus: Let me tell you a story... the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying,

1st Slave: Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.

Jesus: And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said,

1st Slave: Pay what you owe.

Jesus: Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him,

2nd Slave: Have patience with me, and I will pay you.

Jesus: But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him,

King You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?

Jesus: And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

You have to understand what is going on here. The debt of the first servant (the unforgiving one) is 10,000 talents. In those days, a Talent is worth 6,000 denarii. In the Roman Empire, a denarius is a day's wage for a common laborer or a soldier. That means somehow this servant has come to owe his master a sum of money that is equal to 60 million day's wages (164 thousand years of 7-day weeks; 230 thousand years of 5-day weeks). Obviously, Jesus is reaching for a number that is unbelievably large. None of his listeners can understand how a slave could have amassed that much debt. They have a hard time even imagining this amount of money. On the other hand, the second servant owes a few hundred denarii. This debt isn't insignificant — it is somewhere shy of a year's salary — but it is nothing compared with the debt of the first servant.

The first servant is terrified when the master decides to settle his accounts. He knows he is about to lose everything. He falls on his knees, begs for mercy, and promises to pay it all back (a ridiculous promise, if you think about it). The master does something extraordinary: he forgives the entire debt. He wipes it clean. He gives back to this slave his entire life: his wife; his children; his possessions...

1. What do you think this must be like for that slave? (*He must have been startled, confused, ecstatic, overjoyed, grateful...*)
2. How would you feel if someone did this for you? (*incredible relief; deep indebtedness; amazement.*)
3. How would that change the way you think about life? (*re-evaluate what is most important; become more interested in people who forgive than in people who have power or money; become excited about the chance to begin again...*)

4. How would that change the way you think about people who owe you money? (*Think about them with compassion; understand the situation they are in; do everything possible to help them escape the burden of their debt – perhaps even by forgiving them what they owe us...*)

Here is why this story is insanely crazy: when the second slave appeals to the first slave for mercy, it seems the forgiveness of the king has had no affect on him at all. He is the same greedy, self-indulgent person he was before receiving what should have been a life-changing gift. Another slave owes him money, and he has him thrown into prison, until he pays back the entire sum.

1. Who can tell me, in your own words, what is crazy about this story?
2. Why are the other slaves so disturbed about what they have seen?
3. Would you be angry if you were one of them?
4. How do you suppose the master feels when he hears about this?

The first slave receives the gift of extravagant mercy, but it only affects his bank account, and not his heart.

Jesus makes it clear God is all about forgiveness, and God's forgiveness intends to change our hearts. If we receive forgiveness from God, but refuse to forgive each other, there is something wrong. (Does that remind you of anything? Maybe in the Lord's Prayer...) But when we receive forgiveness from God, and find ourselves more inclined to forgive each other, this is exactly what God wants to happen.

Let's take another story in the Bible – a story that turns out better than this one did. (*Counselors: decide which of the following stories you want to discuss. Pick the one you would have the most fun sharing with your campers – the one you would be most excited to share. To keep the study fresh for you over the course of the summer, you might want to change your selection from week to week.*)

Simon Peter

Who can remember the story of Simon Peter? (*Let campers tell the story. They may remember early aspects of Peter's story: being a fisherman, being one of Jesus' first disciples, seeing Jesus transfigured, walking on water... but what we want them to remember takes place at the very end of his story.*)

Remember too, some campers might know nothing about Peter or his stories – so be prepared to share.

Most everyone remembers that on Maundy Thursday Jesus predicts Peter will deny him three times before the cock crows (at sunrise). Peter protests, and declares he never would do that. But of course, he does. Three times he claims to have nothing to do with Jesus. St. Luke describes the final denial:

Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!" At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.
Luke 22:60-62

After Jesus is crucified, Peter goes into hiding with the rest of disciples. He is alone with (and haunted by) his memories of what has just taken place. He continues to replay the events of Holy Week over and over in his mind. By Easter Sunday, Peter is devastated. He has let his Lord down at the most important time. The image of Jesus turning and looking at him in Pilate's courtyard is painfully burned into his memory. Peter is furious with himself. He is humiliated at his lack of courage and conviction. Most of all, he is devastated at the prospect that Jesus has gone to his death, deeply disappointed in Peter.

Peter and some of the disciples leave Jerusalem, and go back to the Sea of Galilee (also known as the Sea of Tiberius or Lake Gennesaret). Jesus meets them on the shore, and he and Peter have this exchange:

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

John 21:15-19

Peter disappoints his Lord in a profound way on Good Friday. Jesus has every reason to despise Peter; to reject him as unworthy. But he does the exact opposite. Not only does he forgive Peter: he restores him, by offering him three opportunities to publicly profess his love (clearly answering his three failures to do so on Friday). Jesus also establishes Peter as the leader of the church – the leader of the community of believers who will practice the forgiveness of Christ with one another.

Peter’s strong role in the story of the early church is grounded in the gift of forgiveness he receives from Jesus. It changes him, and compels him to give the kind of forgiveness he receives from Jesus a central place in his own life and living.

The Apostle Paul

Who can remember the story of the Apostle Paul? (*Let campers tell the story. They may remember that he was a trained Pharisee, that he became a Christian, that he traveled extensively, that he started many churches, that he wrote letters to the churches, that he was arrested and sent to Rome for causing a disturbance, that he died as a prisoner in Rome... but what we want them to remember is his conversion from Judaism to Christianity, and the passion this gave him for helping others to experience grace and forgiveness in Jesus Christ.*) Again remember, some might not have ever heard of Paul or can’t recall any of his stories so be prepared to share!

Saul (Paul’s name before he became a Christian) was a trained Jewish Pharisee – and one of the most accomplished religious leaders of his age group. He was a diligent student of the Bible, and insistent that God’s law be obeyed to the fullest extent by every believer. That is why he was so furious when people were teaching Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God, and The Messiah. Saul didn’t believe this to be true, and was determined to stop people from spreading these beliefs. He describes the first part of his life in the third chapter of his letter to the Christians in Ephesus.

I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else has reason to be confident... I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.
Ephesians 3:4-6

One day, Saul is making his way to Damascus. It is a long trip: some 135 miles as the crow flies. It is a long way to travel by foot, and an even longer way to travel with prisoners in tow. But Paul is determined to stop people from believing in Jesus. (In those days they weren’t called “Christians” yet – they were referred to as “The Way.”) Paul obtains authority from the Temple officials, and is on his way to Damascus. The Book of Acts picks up the story:

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to The Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and

approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Acts 9:1-9

This meeting with the Risen Christ completely changes Saul's life. (It even changes his name – to Paul.) He is welcomed in Damascus by those who believe in Jesus, experiences forgiveness for having persecuted the church of Christ, and receives the gift of a new beginning from God. From this time on, Paul will spend the rest of his life trying to help others have the same kind of experience he had.

King David

Who can remember the story of King David? (*Let campers tell the story. They may remember early aspects of David's story: his life as a shepherd boy, the battle with Goliath, being anointed by Samuel, being opposed by Saul, his deep friendship with Jonathan, becoming King of Israel... but what we want them to remember is the story about Bathsheba.*) Remember – they might not know it at all....

David was King of Israel, with all the power and prestige that came with it. David had many wives and concubines. David fell in love (in lust?) with his neighbor's wife. He seduced her, and got her pregnant. He tried to make it look like the child was her husband's, but when that didn't work, he had her husband put in a very dangerous situation where he was killed by enemy fire.

God was quite unhappy with David, so he sent Nathan, the Prophet, to speak with David. Here is how that went:

But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord, and the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him." Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." Nathan said to David, "You are the man!" 2 Samuel 11:27–12:7

David heard what Nathan was saying, and here is how the story concludes:

David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan said to David, "Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die." Then Nathan went to his house. 2 Samuel 12:13-15

God forgave David. God gave David a second chance. There was a result of his sin (the child died), but David went on to be Israel's greatest king. He was successful in battle, wise in ruling God's people, and tradition holds that he was the author of many Psalms that are still in our Bible some 3,000 years later. Perhaps inspired by how God forgave him, David certainly took to heart the words of Psalm 51; a psalm that is still used today by God's people (especially on Ash Wednesday).

You could make the case that because David experienced God's forgiveness, he went on to encourage many others to seek God's forgiveness, and continues to do so today as we are inspired by the words of the 51st Psalm.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.
Psalm 51:10-12

There is a clear difference (Isn't there?) between the story of the unforgiving servant and the story of [Peter / Paul / David].

1. How would you describe this difference? (*One was changed and one wasn't. One began to see life differently and one didn't. One took what he received and ran, and one took what he received and let it have a place at the center of his life.*)
2. Which one do you think experiences what God wants for him? (*Peter / Paul / David: because forgiveness isn't just a one-time experience, but it becomes a way of life.*)

Here's the bottom line: God loves us fully, knows us fully, and forgives us completely. God doesn't want to be separated from us because of our sinfulness. God wants us to be forgiven. But God also wants forgiveness to be more than a one-time experience for us. God wants forgiveness to shape our lives. God wants us to be the kind of people who give and receive forgiveness with one another whenever we can.

(Counselors; there are many stories about people whose lives have been turned around by forgiveness, and who afterwards have practiced an extraordinary measure of forgiveness. Three of those stories can be found below, in Section G. If you think it would help to drive home the point, share one or two of these stories – or another story that has been meaningful to you – with your campers, and ask them to articulate: (1) how the main character of the story practiced forgiveness, even at a time when many people would have refused to do so, (2) how extending forgiveness created a healthier and more hopeful community, and (3) how differently the individual experienced life from that point on, having rejected the possibility of living with anger and bitterness, and embracing the possibility of living with hope and new life.) There's also the story from the day before with the young man and the Amish

We've shared some very dramatic stories this morning; examples from the Bible and from our own times. But the most important story is yours. You are a person whom God loves very, very much (enough that God is willing to die for you!). You are a person who is human – sinful, broken, and making choices that grieve God's heart. God knows this. God sees everything you do, and is aware of everything you think. Still, God's deepest desire is to share forgiveness with you, and help you to experience a new beginning. A new beginning where your life is shaped by the forgiveness you receive and the forgiveness you share.

With that in mind, let's think about forgiveness on a very personal scale. Picture, in your mind, someone who has done you harm. A friend. A neighbor. A classmate. A family member. A classmate at school. Someone you just haven't been able to bring yourself to forgive. Think about how you feel, right now, as you remember that person and what he or she did to you. Feel how your heart begins to race just a bit. Maybe you feel your chest tightening, your breathing becoming a little more shallow, or your shoulders tensing. There is a good chance this person feels the same way when they think about you.

Now, remembering how it feels when you become aware of God's forgiveness for you, close your eyes for a minute, and imagine yourself forgiving this person. Picture the two of you in a safe, quiet place. Imagine yourself walking up to this person and shaking hands or giving a hug. (*Counselor: pause for a moment here.*) Picture yourself saying, with a quiet but firm voice, how their actions hurt you; what it felt like for you. (*Counselor: pause for a moment here.*) Picture this person thinking about what you've said for a moment, apologizing for having hurt you, and asking you to forgive them. (*Counselor: pause for a moment here.*) Now imagine yourself saying, "I forgive you." Just like God forgives you, imagine

yourself forgiving this person. (*Counselor: pause for a moment here.*) How do you feel? (*Counselor: pause for a moment here.*) How do you suppose this person feels? (*Counselor: pause for a moment here.*) It may have been awkward to have this conversation, but imagine what it will be like the next time the two of you meet. (*Counselor: pause for a moment here.*)

Now, open your eyes, and let's sit for a moment, thinking about what we just did. What was that like for you? How did it feel? Do you think you could actually do this in real life? How do you think the person would respond? Even if they resisted, and refused to acknowledge they hurt you, or failed to ask for forgiveness, is it helpful for you to set aside your anger and bitterness? Once you've shared your hurt, and have been willing to forgive, do you think of them in a different way?

Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian life. We are first of all people who have been forgiven by God. That is why we meet together at the foot of the cross. And we are people who forgive and share forgiveness. This may not be the way the world acts, but it is our calling as followers of Jesus. Be aware some campers might talk /think about situations where the person they want to forgive is abusing them or is not a safe person. Talk about the difference between forgiving and saying everything is "ok".

Closing Prayer

Lord God, we are not worthy of your love. We fail you in small and large ways every day. Yet you declare that we are people of great worth to you, and you offer us the gifts of forgiveness and a new beginning. Help us to be inspired by your forgiveness. Help us to take as much pleasure in forgiving others as we have in receiving it from you. Help the forgiveness you have given to us become the gift we share with each other. We pray in the name of the one whose death and resurrection makes all this possible, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

E. ADDITIONAL STUDY IDEAS

Have the campers describe two fictitious worlds: one in which people never forgive each other, but punish those who do wrong to them, and try to get even whenever they are harmed; and another one in which everyone who does wrong admits guilt, and everyone who is wronged expresses forgiveness. Which world would you prefer to live in? How can you help your family or church or neighborhood be more like the world you might choose?

Have a volunteer stand on one foot with eyes closed. First, have two or three group members lightly bump into the volunteer over and over, causing him or her to lose balance each time (but not abruptly knocking them over!). Then, have two or three group members place their hands on the volunteer's shoulders or elbows, making it possible for him or her to stand with more stability. Have the volunteer describe these two experiences. What did it feel like? How did they feel? Could they have stayed in this situation for 10 minutes? 20 minutes? How different would our lives be if everyone was trying to support us and strengthen us, instead of knocking us down? When we live with forgiveness at the heart of all that we do, life is much richer – much more like what God intended for us in the first place.

F. IDEAS TO INCORPORATE THEME THROUGHOUT THE DAY

Confession at Worship

The Village of the Day may want to emphasize the rite of confession during worship services on this day. Writing down sins and nailing them to the cross (or throwing them into the fire), approaching the worship leaders for laying on of hands and individual absolution (perhaps the Maundy Thursday formula: "In obedience to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your son."), making the sign of the cross on your neighbor and declaring, "God loves you and forgives you all your sin."

What about imagining and committing to being people who bring love and forgiveness into the lives of others? What could that look like? Maybe there's a ritual way campers could bring forward their commitment to live lives of forgiveness or lives that bring God's love and light into the lives of others? Pieces of paper, nailed to the cross, stones that are written on that build an altar or remembrance place, etc.

G. OTHER SONGS, STORIES THOUGHTS, QUESTIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

Songs From The RTLC Song Book

1. Humble Thyself
2. Create In Me A Clean Heart
3. Messiah
4. Amazing Grace
5. Psalm 121

A poem (set to song by a number of artists) that speaks of becoming a vehicle of God's purpose:
Prayer of St. Francis

Here are three stories about individuals who sought to locate forgiveness at the center of the community in which they lived. You may want to use them, above, to help your campers see more clearly the difference forgiveness can make in a community.

Nelson Mandela

News article from USA Today: Mandela taught the power of forgiveness: His example saved South Africa from civil war.

By Barbara Mutch; author of The Housemaid's Daughter.

I never met Nelson Mandela, but I have lived in the same country as him for most of my life.

I first became aware of him when I was a teenager, living in the Eastern Cape province. It was the 1960s, and an era of increasing protest over the divisive policies of apartheid. But because of press censorship it was difficult to learn about these protests – and the people who led them. As a result, most white South Africans like myself were kept largely in ignorance of the cataclysmic events occurring in our own country. For example, I only read the full text of Mandela's famous speech at his 1964 trial 10 years later, on a trip abroad. And during his 27 years in prison, Nelson Mandela's writings and even his image could not be published in the country of his birth.

A quarter of a century of violence and pain ensued in South Africa until that long, silent imprisonment was broken in February 1990, when Mandela was released and South Africa embarked on its journey to full democracy. I remember watching his speech on television, as he stood on the steps of Cape Town's City Hall addressing a crowd of 50,000, some 10 miles from where I lived. For most of us, it was our first glimpse of a man who had been painted as a dangerous revolutionary and yet whose moral authority had never been compromised by the prison walls that surrounded him for so long.

But what would he do?

South Africa was a country on the brink of civil war. Violence stalked our communities. There were many who felt that no single person could put an end to the terror. Could Mandela lead South Africa to the broad uplands or would he be powerless to halt the cycle of violence that had acquired a life of its own while he had been incarcerated? Would he even wish to take up the challenge? After all, the years in prison had damaged his health. He deserved the chance to retire, to hand over his authority to the next generation.

History now shows he did lead South Africa back from the abyss. But he did more, and it was this that sealed his reputation forever. He showed the world and his countrymen – black, white, rich, poor – that revenge is not the answer to years of injustice. Who among us, in coming out of prison after 27

years, would have had the generosity to turn away from settling scores? Who among us would have refused to avenge ourselves on those who had treated us with such cruelty?

But he did. Nelson Mandela sat down with his enemies and forgave them and moved on. And in doing so, he rescued his country, and he rescued each one of us, and gave us hope that there could be a future for our beautiful, fractured land. And for the greater earth that we all share.

Michael Davis

News article from NBC News: Family of slain Colorado student Claire Davis forgives killer
By Erik Ortiz, Staff Writer, NBC News

The grieving family of the 17-year-old Colorado girl fatally shot by another student at school have expressed a powerful emotion toward her killer: forgiveness. “My wife and I forgive Karl Pierson for what he did,” Michael Davis said Wednesday night during a memorial for his daughter, Claire. Pierson, 18, shot Claire Davis in the head before killing himself Dec. 13 at Arapahoe County High School in the Denver suburb of Centennial, sheriff’s investigators said. “We would ask all of you here and all of you watching to forgive Karl Pierson,” said Michael Davis, his voice choked with emotion. “He didn’t know what he was doing.” Eight days after an Arapahoe High School classmate shot her, Claire Davis died. The 17-year-old died of her severe head injuries...

Some law enforcement officers have vowed not to use Pierson’s name and have referred to him publicly as “the murderer,” but Michael Davis was conciliatory. “The young man that shot Claire had a name. His name was Karl Pierson,” said Davis, fighting back tears with his wife, Desiree, at his side. Davis said Pierson “allowed himself to become filled with anger, rage and hatred. ... The fact is that Karl was so blinded by his emotions he didn’t know what he was doing.” Davis said his daughter’s last words were to ask Pierson, “Oh my gosh, Karl, what are you doing?” That was her way of trying to illuminate the emotional darkness that had enveloped Pierson, Davis said. “Karl is no longer with us,” he added. “It’s no longer our responsibility to pass judgment.”

...Claire’s dad said his family wanted to forgive Pierson to highlight [the] sense of understanding their daughter had. “Unchecked anger and rage can lead to hatred, and unchecked hatred can lead to tragedy, blindness and a loss of humanity,” Davis said. “The last thing Desiree and I would want is to perpetuate this anger and rage and hatred in connection with Claire. Claire would also not want this.”

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Corrie Ten Boom

Excerpt from “I’m Still Learning to Forgive”

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By Corrie ten Boom

It was in a church in Munich that I saw him — a balding, heavyset man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands. People were filing out of the basement room where I had just spoken, moving along the rows of wooden chairs to the door at the rear. It was 1947 and I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives.

It was the truth they needed most to hear in that bitter, bombed-out land, and I gave them my favorite mental picture. Maybe because the sea is never far from a Hollander’s mind, I liked to think that that’s where forgiven sins were thrown. “When we confess our sins,” I said, “God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever. ...”

The solemn faces stared back at me, not quite daring to believe. There were never questions after a talk in Germany in 1947. People stood up in silence, in silence collected their wraps, in silence left the room.

And that’s when I saw him, working his way forward against the others. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones. It came back with a rush: the huge room with its harsh overhead lights; the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor; the shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister’s frail

form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment skin. *Betsie, how thin you were!*

[Betsie and I had been arrested for concealing Jews in our home during the Nazi occupation of Holland; this man had been a guard at Ravensbruck concentration camp where we were sent.]

Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: “A fine message, Fräulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!”

And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course — how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women?

But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. I was face-to-face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.

“You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk,” he was saying, “I was a guard there.” No, he did not remember me.

“But since that time,” he went on, “I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fräulein, again the hand came out — will you forgive me?”

And I stood there — I whose sins had again and again to be forgiven — and could not forgive. Betsie had died in that place — could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

It could not have been many seconds that he stood there — hand held out — but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.

For I had to do it — I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. “If you do not forgive men their trespasses,” Jesus says, “neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.”

I knew it not only as a commandment of God, but as a daily experience. Since the end of the war I had had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that.

And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion — I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. “... Help!” I prayed silently. “I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.”

And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

“I forgive you, brother!” I cried. “With all my heart!”

“For a long moment we grasped each other’s hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God’s love so intensely, as I did then”

H. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY DOWN FOR JUNIORS

The Golden Rule(s)

“Do unto others as you would have them do to you,” is commonly described as “The Golden Rule.” What kinds of things do others do to you that you don’t like? Can you remind yourself not to do those things? What kinds of things do others do to you that you like? Can you remind yourself to do those things?

When you do something wrong, do you appreciate it when someone says, “I forgive you.” The more you treat others that way, the more they will treat you that way. And the more we all will live the way God wants us to live: with forgiveness at the center of who we are and what we do. Maybe a second Golden Rule could be: “Apologize whenever you wrong someone, and forgive whenever someone apologizes to you.”

The Smile Game

Mark off a circle on the ground, large enough that the group can wander around inside the circle without bumping in to each other, but small enough that each group member has to pass within a few inches of the other members. In the first half of the game, have them make eye contact with each other and glare or look disapprovingly at one another. In the second half, have them smile or wink or try to make each other smile back.

Afterwards, have the group sit down and discuss how they felt during each half of the game. Is it different when we are trying to be near one another in a way that lifts others up (instead of tearing them down)? If God has lifted us up with forgiveness, how would it feel to be the person who lifts someone else up with forgiveness?

I. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY UP FOR SR HIGHS

Here are a couple of questions that might be directed towards campers, either during the Bible study or while you are gathered together during free time. Let campers struggle for a while to answer these questions. Don't be too quick to resolve the issues for them. Wrestling with these kinds of questions can help us grow in faith and understanding.

Once we have been forgiven by God, if we don't forgive and receive forgiveness, do we risk losing the forgiveness we have received?

1. That may be one conclusion someone could draw from the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. When the King learned of the slave's unwillingness to forgive the debt of another slave, he had him thrown into prison until the debt could be paid. (In other words, he rescinded his promise to cancel the slave's debt.) It is important to remember that God's forgiveness is not conditional. We are not forgiven because we deserve it, and we do not stay forgiven because our response is appropriate. God continues to shower us with forgiveness we don't deserve. That is the definition of grace: a gift undeserved and freely given.
2. This is typical of a parable. Generally, parables intend to make one point. They are not like analogies, where every aspect of the story has a correlation in life. To understand a parable, the interpreter has to discern what the one central point is, and take that into account. In this parable, the point is that when people experience forgiveness, it makes a difference in their hearts, and how they treat others. If that isn't the case, something is wrong.

Once we receive forgiveness from God, are we commanded to forgive and receive forgiveness? Or is it something that we choose to do on our own?

1. This question brings us very close to the core of what it means to be a Lutheran Christian. It is a question that has been hotly debated for 500 years. Some have contended even after we have been forgiven, and even if the gift of God's forgiveness touches us in a profound way, we still need guidelines that help us to respond to the gift in a way that is appropriate. After all, we are still sinners, and we will still do even what we ourselves wish we wouldn't do (see Romans 7:14-25).
2. Luther pushed back against this notion. He believed the law (in other words rules and regulations and guidelines) only leads to despair, because try as we might we never live up to the expectations it carries. Besides, we might convince ourselves it is in following these rules, regulations and guidelines we make ourselves acceptable to God. Luther's advice, when a believer's life doesn't seem to match up to what it should be (which is almost always, right?), is this: it is not that the law needs to be laid down, but the promise needs to be proclaimed – forgiveness needs to be extended – the Gospel needs to be preached. Only the Good News of Jesus Christ has the power to turn our lives in new directions.

Is there a difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?

1. One Greek word often used in the New Testament for forgiveness is ἀφίημι (a-fi-ay-me). It literally means to set something down and walk away from it. This is a good image for forgiveness. To forgive means to set down the hurt that we feel, and walk away; to refuse to be ruled by anger and bitterness. It means to assign to the past our negative feelings about what has been done to us. Forgiveness is not something that takes place as part of a transaction. (If you do this or that, I'll forgive you.) It is what takes place in the context of a relationship (I forgive you because I care about you, and nursing the hurt I feel is not worth destroying our love or friendship.) It is the first step towards reconciliation (I forgive you. Now let's start working on the damage your sin has caused.)
2. We sometimes confuse forgiveness (refusing to take with us our resentment and bitterness about what someone has done) with reconciliation (doing the hard work of working through the pain that was caused, and learning to live together in peace again). Forgiveness can sometimes lead to reconciliation, but it is not identical to reconciliation. There will be times when forgiveness is possible, but reconciliation is not (for instance, when the offender has died, or continues to offend...).

Youth Group Covenant to "Promote Forgiveness in All We Do."

1. If you are a member of a youth group, you might want to encourage your group members to form a covenant with one another to promote forgiveness. The church is one place where forgiveness should be central, but that is not always the case. After all, we are human, and despite our best intentions we don't always live up to God's expectations for us.
2. Perhaps every member of your church's youth group (or the cabin/village for the rest of the week) could sign a pledge professing (1) forgiveness is central to our life together as Christians, and (2) whenever one of us hurts another of us, we will help the affected parties to come together, talk the situation through, admit where there is wrong, and grant (and receive) forgiveness. That sort of commitment to each other could strengthen the group in powerful ways, and give each group member the opportunity to practice forgiving skills that will serve them well for the rest of their lives.
3. The same kind of pledge could stand at the center of a school club, a sports team, a scouting group, a musical ensemble...

J. PARENT DEVOTIONAL

Scripture:

[Jesus said,] "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' "

Matthew 18:23-28

Reflection:

We have been learning about forgiveness this week. We started out considering God's powerful love for us, God's intimate knowledge of our every thought and action, and God's absolute commitment to forgive us, and provide the gift of a new beginning. Now, today, we begin to talk about how we who have received God's forgiveness can respond to this gift. When a person is profoundly forgiven, it can inspire (even compel!) that person to a life of forgiving others, and seeking forgiveness when a wrong has been committed.

This is true in communities, in congregations, and in families. God invites us to consider how we can promote a climate of love and forgiveness in our families. After all, the strongest family is not one where nobody ever hurts anybody else. We are imperfect humans, and bound to hurt one another from time to time. The strongest family is the one that responds to hurts by acknowledging that a wrong has been committed, and by asking for and receiving forgiveness. Have you experienced this in your family? If so, in what ways?

Family Activity:

Read 1 John 1:5-10 together, and make a list of those times when family members have asked God for forgiveness. Make another list of when family members have asked each other for forgiveness. If the family has a fireplace, throw the lists into the flames, and remember how God sets our sin aside and “remembers it no more.” (If you don’t have a fireplace, the family could tear the pieces of paper into the smallest pieces possible and do the same.)

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for your gift of forgiveness. Help our hearts to be touched by your forgiveness, and inspire us to share and receive forgiveness with those we know and love. We pray this in the name of the one who loves us enough to die for us, and who promises us the hope of new life, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Forgiven: A Better Version of Me
2014 RTLC Bible Study- Day 5
NOW WHAT? GOD GOES WITH ME!

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

Camp is a mountaintop experience –but heading home is another story. The great news of today is the God who is here, loving us, claiming us, forgiving us, helping us love and forgive, is the same God who goes home with us and promises to be with us. In fact this God actually *sends* us home so we can bring the love and forgiveness we experience into our worlds!

The hard part if we actually do this is people will look at us and call us crazy. People will tell us we're wrong. Who loves this way? Why would anyone want to forgive someone who might not even ask for forgiveness? Why would you put yourself out there and take the chance of getting hurt? That's crazy! It's way safer to fit in with the crowd instead of leading it. But this is what God calls us to do – lead by loving, forgiving – in crazy, insanely, non-conforming ways. It is by doing this, that the world will be able to see the God of love we know in us.

And the God who knows us, knows our every thought, knows everything there is to know about us, knows too, that people will think we're crazy and they might treat us poorly, if we live as people centered in and offering love and forgiveness. God knows it won't be all happy, it won't all go right, it won't be easy; it will in fact at times be downright hard.

There will be times when we offer forgiveness and it's thrown back in our faces. There will be times when we ask for forgiveness and it won't happen. There will be times when forgiving someone for something they did to us or someone we love will feel like the hardest thing on earth to do...or even start! Just because we choose to love, to forgive, doesn't mean the world will love and forgive right back.

And that's why God goes with us. And that's why he gives us a community to be with us.

Living as a Jesus follower is harder at home – that's the honest truth. But God does not leave us on our own. There are places to connect and people who want to walk with us; people who will help us, lead, guide, support, love and comfort us...so that we can continue to live in grace and forgiveness and be people of grace and forgiveness. These communities are found in our churches, with pastors and youth directors, with adults and other people our age...in places where Jesus shows up and lives among us.

And these communities, these people – will love us and walk with us, if we let them, when the tears come and the scars run deep. They will cry with us, laugh with us, pick us up and love us –not because we're a certain way, but because we are. They will help us forgive and move on, they will help us stop carrying the poison of unforgiveness, hurt and anger. And they will be there for us. And with us. And together – because that's how God designed it to be – we can live into the joy and freedom found in lives lived with this amazing God...AND be the light of this God in the lives of others.

B. OBJECTIVES FOR THIS DAY OF THE STUDY

1. Campers will know even though it's harder to follow Jesus away from camp, their God who is here goes with them and is with them all the time
2. Campers will understand the importance of community and staying connected to God in community once home

3. Campers will discover the community that surrounds them already and can them stay connected to God once they are home
4. Campers will know, as forgiven people, they have the power to change the world around them, through giving the gifts of love and forgiveness to others and will imagine ways that could actually happen

C. MORNING WATCH

Welcome:

Welcome and do not fear, for God says I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you ...

Scripture:

Don't be afraid, I've redeemed you. I've called your name. You're mine. When you're in over your head, I'll be there with you. When you're in rough waters, you will not go down. When you're between a rock and a hard place, it won't be a dead end—Because I am God... Isaiah 43:1-2 (The Message)

Song:

All the People Said Amen by Matt Maher

You are not alone if you are lonely
 When you're feeling frail, you're not the only
 We are all the same in need of mercy
 To be forgiven and be free
 It's all you got to lean on
 But thank God it's all you need

And all the people said Amen, whoa oh
 And all the people said Amen
 Give thanks to the Lord for His love never ends

And all the people said Amen
 Give thanks to the Lord for His love never ends
 And all the people said Amen

Blessed are
 The poor in spirit who are torn apart
 Blessed are
 The persecuted and the pure in heart
 Blessed are
 The people longing for another start
 For this is the Kingdom
 The Kingdom of God

And all the people said Amen

If you're rich or poor, well it don't matter
 Weak or strong, we know love is what we're after
 We're all broken but we're all in this together
 God knows we stumble and fall
 And He so loved the world He sent His son to save
 us all

And all the people said Amen, whoa oh
 And all the people said Amen, whoa oh
 And all the people said Amen
 Give thanks to the Lord for His love never ends
 And all the people said Amen
 [x2]

And all the people said Amen

Questions For Morning Watch Booklet:

1. Who in your life helps you know Jesus?
2. Who are people in your life at home who can “be there” for you in your walk with Jesus? Name them specifically (pastor, youth director, adult at church, Sunday School/confirmation leader, other youth, etc.)
3. What is the scariest thing about living as a Jesus follower at home?
4. Do you know anyone to whom you can reach out?

Prayer:

Make the sign of the cross on yourself and say: God knows we stumble and fall. And God so loved the world God sent God’s son to save us all!! God, I know you are always with me. Thank you for loving me unconditionally, thank you for forgiving me insanely. Help me carry your light into the world. Amen.

D. SCRIPTURE STUDY

So, it’s the last day. Today’s scripture reminds us three important things –

1. Through the story of the disciples being sent after Jesus returned to heaven, we learn there are things we’re supposed to be about while on earth. And it’s not standing, looking in the sky, wishing Jesus was still here, wondering what now?! (Or wishing we could just stay at camp!) (Acts 1:6-11, 2:1-13)
2. When we are sent, when we go home – God goes with us. God doesn’t promise it will always be easy, but God promises to be with us (Isaiah 43:1-5a)
3. Just as we are in community here at camp, it is imperative we stay connected to Christian community back home – through this community and means of grace we will be able to live as forgiving, called children of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

What Now? (Acts 1:6-11, 2:1-13)

ASK CAMPERS Have you ever had a favorite teacher/coach/pastor/youth director? What were they like? What was it like when you had to move on to another grade or change teams? Or perhaps they (teacher/coach/pastor/youth director) moved. How did you feel?

Jesus had a small group of people he hung out with all the time when he was here on earth. These were his best friends, the ones who were with him all the time. He had told them many times he was going to go away, but they never seemed to quite catch on. So after he rose from the grave, Jesus tries to tell them once more and they still don’t get it that he’s not staying. Our story today picks up here...Read Acts 1:6-11.

1. Imagine standing there and all of a sudden having angels standing staring at the sky with you asking – “hey, watcha looking at?” Kind of crazy! But the angels’ words draw the disciples eyes off the sky – reminding them Jesus is going to return – but not now. And I wonder if in their “reminding” the disciples kind of went – oh yeah – okay...and then...went home.
2. It seems they didn’t even really hear Jesus’ commission to them – “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*”. Instead they just went home. It took until the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13) when the Holy Spirit shows up, for them to grasp what Jesus had left for them to do. And they were still scared at times...but they went.

ASK CAMPERS – Have you ever done something that was scary – but you got up the courage to do it anyway? What was it? What did you do? How did it feel in the middle of it? How did it feel when you were done?

How often are we like the disciples? Your campers will be heading home tomorrow and they'll be feeling the loss of the community here, just like the disciples were feeling the loss of Jesus. This story is a great reminder to them (and us when we leave) that we leave here because the life Jesus calls us to is actually at home/out there. Where we get to be witnesses to Jesus love and forgiveness to Jerusalem (our city), Judea (our region), Samaria (those we don't like)*, and to the ends of the earth. It would be great if you could tell the story – not just read it out of the Bible. Know it well enough to kind of “act it out” – story tell it!

**Samaria – this region in the ancient world was filled with people the Jews didn't like – didn't like enough that they would take a longer route around the region, rather than going through it while traveling. For more on the Samaritans – check out: <http://newlife.id.au/a-brief-history-of-the-samaritans/>*

Go back to the list of brokenness... go back to the list your campers made earlier in the week and look at those broken places. Brainstorm with your campers how they could go out like the disciples, taking Jesus and his love and forgiveness into those dark places. Encourage creativity AND encourage them to think of ways or things they could/would actually do. Don't let them “get away” with – someone could blah, blah, blah. Help them think in terms of themselves being the light.

You Don't Go Alone Isaiah 43:1-5a

The scariest thing about going home is it won't be the same. People at home have not had the great experience of this week of camp. They haven't changed. Even if your campers have. And that's what campers go home to – a world that has not changed. The same group of friends are there, the same family system is there, the good and the bad are still there.

Just as Jesus calls us to go from camp back into life...he knows we can't do it alone. *And in fact he never expects us to.* A great reminder of this week and the fact that God goes with us is Isaiah 43:1-5a.

I have redeemed you – called you by name you are mine – this is a powerful statement! God has claimed us – not just here at camp – but for always. And the God who is here at camp claiming us, is the God who goes home with us.

CLAIM YOUR CAMPERS – ask campers – when you claim something as yours what do you? (*write your name on it, keep it close to you, somehow identify it as yours – maybe it's a cover on a book, or a ball with your name on it, etc. God claims us and marks us as his – forever.*) So...use the words of Isaiah 43 and say to each camper individually: **(NAME...God has called you by name and you are his. When you're in over your head, God will be there. When you're in rough waters, God will be with you. When you are in a hard place or times are tough, God will be there. He'd trade all of creation for you, so don't be afraid, God is with you.)** As you claim them, take a sharpie marker and mark them for God. Maybe it's a cross on the inside of their wrist, maybe it's the word “claimed” or “beloved” on their arm – “tattoo” them for God. Let it be visible that God has claimed them. After everyone has been claimed – pray! (a creative twist on this would be to have the whole group surround the person being “claimed” – lay hands on them, and different people say each line:

- NAME God has called you by name you are his
- When you're in over your head...
- God will be there
- When you're in rough waters...
- God will be there
- He'd trade all of creation for you
- So don't be afraid...God is with you.

Then have the group pray for the camper being claimed. This version is probably better with older kids.)

Notice – after claiming – God never promises life at home will be easy. What does the passage say about the water and fire? (It will come, but it won't overwhelm you, the fires won't burn you up).

One of the false things kids sometimes pick up is that if we follow Jesus it's always like camp ☺ - or it's easy or everything is always nice. God never promises that – he simply promises to be with us and not let us go under!

When we go home and try this whole forgiving thing out on others – sometimes it might go well. You can imagine with kids what it might look/sound/feel like when they forgive someone and it goes well. Also, then imagine what it might look/sound/feel like if they go to forgive and things don't go well (the person doesn't accept the forgiveness, tells them they're crazy, person doesn't “deserve” forgiveness and they hang onto bitterness, pain, etc.).

You could **ROLE PLAY** out what some of these situations might look/feel like- have someone go to forgive someone or ask forgiveness of someone and role play both a great turnout and a poor one. Ask kids:

1. How would this make you feel?
2. What might it make you want to do?
3. Where could you go for help or support if things didn't go well?
4. Help them name the concretes of this – real people in their lives they could turn to.

Talk about the power of the words “I will be with you”. When God says he is with us – he means it. God is always with us – even when it doesn't seem like it – when things go wrong or bad, when we feel down or far away from God. God is still there. Often times God shows up in the people around us.

Our Cloud of Witnesses - Hebrews 12:1-2

Who are people in their lives they know will be with them, be there for them? Look back at the names they wrote down during Morning Watch. (Remember – for some kids it might not be a parent – not all parents are there for their kids) Maybe it's a parent, grandparent, neighbor, aunt, uncle, sibling... maybe it's a teacher, pastor, youth director, another adult at church. Who in their lives do they know will be there for them? Have them name specific people and tell about those people. Who are they? What are they like? How does your camper know those people/person is there for them?

POST IT CLOUD A way to help kids envision their cloud is to take post it notes and have them put a name on each post-it – the names of people who are there for them, who help them stay connected to Jesus, who have taught them about God and will walk with them. The more post its used the better. Each post it can only have one name on it. After kids have had a chance to write, take all the post it and do one of two things: either put all the post its on a wall so they make a “cloud” or put all the post its on the floor/ground around your group – so your group is in the center of the post-its. Read Hebrews 12:1-2a.

These people are your “cloud of witnesses” the people around you that can help you stay connected to God. And it's these people who help us when things go wrong, when life feels bad, when we're angry, sad, feeling helpless or lost. These people embody God for us. The” trick” is to let them in and let them help/love us.

Talk with campers about how important it is to stay connected to those people who help us stay connected to God. It's hard to help you when you aren't around! So, you've named people who are

there – how can they help? How might the camper ask those people for help? Help campers understand we are not made to do life alone – ever.

Closing Prayer

Have each camper think about one thing they want to be courageous about when they return home. Get a thumbs up from each to know when they are all ready to share. Then you begin the prayer, let each share their thing they want to be courageous about, and then you close the prayer.

E. ADDITIONAL STUDY IDEAS

Hearing the voice of God (importance of role of community at home)

Divide your group in half. Put blindfolds on half the group. The other half are all “voices” trying to get the blindfolded ones to come their way. Before you start – but after half are blindfolded, pick one person to be the “voice of God”. Tell your blindfolded ones that the voice of God is in the midst of the group of voices – their job is to discern the voice and follow it. The challenge comes when the other voices get in there as well trying to take kids off course. After a few moments switch places and do the whole thing over again.

ASK CAMPERS:

1. What was hard about this?
2. What did it feel like?
3. How is this like trying to listen for God’s voice in our own lives?

POINT TO MAKE: God is always with us but we often can’t sense or hear God, because we choose to listen to all the other voices in the world. At camp we’re part of a whole place that is trying to help us listen for God, so it’s easier to hear. When we go home – it’s important to have people in our lives that will help us hear and follow God’s voice, so we don’t get lost among all the voices we hear!

Encourage One Another (good for the end of the week)

Give each student a piece of paper to pin/tape to their backs. Then ask the group to circulate and write one thing they like about each person on his/her piece of paper. (Remind this is not a time to be funny or mean – but sincere and honest) Allow time for everyone to write on everyone’s sheet, then give time for each person to sit and read their own piece of paper.

We’re in this Together

Have kids sit around (doesn’t have to be in a circle). Give one person a skein of yarn and have him/her wrap the yarn around their waist a couple of times then pass it to someone else in the group and have them do the same. Keep the yarn pretty taut. Continue until the whole group is webbed together. When the web is complete, turn to someone and tell them to stand up. (If the lines are taut enough the group will be impacted – others might have to move or stand up – that’s OK. Once the kids are standing have the whole group answer these questions:

1. What happened when people were asked to change their position?
2. How is this like what happens in life? Do your choices really affect the people around you?

Now, have everyone stand up and get the yarn taut again. Then ask one or two to try and sit down. What happens? Ask these questions:

1. Imagine you are a group of people trying to follow Jesus – being loving and forgiving and these one/two fell down? How does our combined strength help them not fall?
2. How is this like what can/could happen at home? With your friends? With your family? With your church group?

Make a point of talking about the influence of friends – how they can lead us to good places or bad! Stress the importance of having good people around you to support and encourage you.

The Light of Christ I See in You...

One at a time put each camper in the middle of the circle. Have them face one person in the circle at a time. When the inside camper is facing you, you say – “The Light of Christ I see in you is...” then add descriptive words – love, patience, a giving spirit, a servant’s heart, etc.). Each person says the good they see in the person in the middle. Once everyone has spoken, choose another person to be in the middle. Instruct your group to look the person they are encouraging in the eyes as they speak. Make that connection on a deep level. (This might work better with the older campers – junior high on up – high schooler’s for sure!)

There For You (for more advanced groups)

Following Jesus can be hard at times and we all need the love and support of others in our lives. People who can be there for us, sit with us in our pain, share in our joy, guide and direct us. Think of the people in your life – adults or older youth. Who could walk with you in your journey? Name them –specifically and why you would choose them. Write a letter to them, asking them to be a mentor or faith coach for you. Tell them why you would choose them, and what you hope they can help you do.

The trick now is when you get home – go to that person and give them the letter or even better, know the letter well enough to be able to say it to the person(s). Remember most people are honored to be asked to do something like this! Make a pact with someone in your group here at camp – to hold each other accountable for delivering the letter/message of the letter once you get home!

F. IDEAS TO INCORPORATE THEME THROUGHOUT THE DAY

1. ALL THE PEOPLE SAY AMEN VIDEO – have campers video different campers, cabins, staff “shouting” AMEN – with big cards that say AMEN...be creative (jumping off logs, jumping in the air, coming over a hill, all laying down and then sitting up in bed, etc., etc...and then put the music to today’s song to the video
2. Today is about two things: understanding our need for community and knowing we are sent out by God...so any activities where people have to work together – be there for each other:
3. Trust walks
4. Western Day
 - a. Line dancing – dancing where everyone participates together
 - b. Cabin “Rodeo” – Each cabin is a team and enters each event. You could have roping a counselor, barrel racing where each team of 3-4 are tied together and must make it around the barrels, bale stacking relay, pole bending – each contestant “rides” a stick as a pony and weaves in and out of a set of poles without knocking the poles over, etc. Be creative!
 - c. Meals - could be western style – grilled, beans, cornbread or fire meals – where you put hamburger, potato slices, carrots, onion, etc. all together and wrap it in foil – put it in the fire and let it cook, s’mores
 - d. Worship – campfire worship, tellin’ stories, singin’ songs, everything has a “howdy ya’ll” kind of atmosphere
 - e. Language – everyone has to talk with a southern drawl all day ya’ll ☺
5. The Amazing Race Day
 - a. All day long is a “race” – teams where a certain color to identify them (red, blue, yellow, etc.) by a piece of fabric or a stripe of paint, etc. Each part of the day has a “great race activity” to complete?

- b. All Camp – Amazing Race – based off the Great Race on TV – each team is given a clue to where they have to go and what they have to do once there. Once the event is complete, to the satisfaction of a “judge” they are given a clue to the next place they have to go and thing they have to do. Be creative with the tasks to do. Pinterest is a GREAT supplier of awesome ideas...but some suggestions might be:
 - i. Whole team has to cross the creek barefoot in a minute or less
 - ii. Team has to play a round of Gaga ball until only one person is left
 - iii. Get the whole team on top of the bus and take a picture in 2 min or less
 - iv. Whole team has to crawl the length of the field together
 - v. Tie entire team’s legs together, then “3 legged” run to the other side of field
 - vi. Detour ideas:
 - 1. Dress in a ridiculous costume and run 3 laps around lake
 - 2. Build a bike and ride 1 lap around lake
- c. Meals - could be from different countries or a meal could be part of the race?!?
- d. Worship – morning could be the start of the race, evening the “finish line” or champion’s circle – emphasizing doing life together.
- e. All day long is a “race” – teams where a certain color to identify them (red, blue, yellow, etc.) by a piece of fabric or a stripe of paint, etc. Each part of the day has a “great race activity” to complete?
- 6. Cabin Variety Show – each cabin must come up with a 30 second “variety” – skit, song, dance, whatever to entertain – prizes could be getting to eat first or Snack Shack first or...something the whole cabin can do together.
- 7. Team/cabin scavenger/counselor hunts – where they not only travel together but at each spot have to do something together to get the needed signature
- 8. All for One - At one meal – take yarn and tie each person’s right hand to the left hand of the person next to them. This way everyone has to work together to be able to eat/pass food, etc.

G. OTHER SONGS, STORIES THOUGHTS, QUESTIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

Songs From The RTALC Song Book

- 1. Isaiah 43
- 2. All The People Said Amen by Matt Maher
- 3. We are the Family of God
- 4. Psalm 25
- 5. They’ll Know We Are Christians by our Love
- 6. Light the Fire
- 7. Kum By Yah
- 8. History Maker
- 9. All in All
- 10. Your Love Never Fails

Supporting Stories

An Afternoon in the Park

(this could go with the idea that we can be God’s light as we go home – age doesn’t matter!)

There once was a little boy who wanted to meet God. He knew it was a long trip to where God lived, so he packed his suitcase with Twinkies and a six-pack of root beer and he started his journey. When he had gone about three blocks, he met an old woman. She was sitting in the park just staring at some pigeons. The boy sat down next to her and opened his suitcase. He was about to take a drink from his root beer when he noticed that the old lady looked hungry, so he offered her a Twinkie. She

gratefully accepted it and smiled at him. Her smile was so pretty that the boy wanted to see it again, so he offered her a root beer. Once again she smiled at him. The boy was delighted! They sat there all afternoon eating and smiling, but they never said a word. As it grew dark, the boy realized how tired he was and he got up to leave, but before he had gone more than a few steps, he turned around, ran back to the old woman and gave her a hug. She gave him her biggest smile ever. When the boy opened the door to his own house a short time later, his mother was surprised by the look of joy on his face. She asked him, "What did you do today that made you so happy?" He replied, "I had lunch with God." But before his mother could respond, he added, "You know what? She's got the most beautiful smile I've ever seen!" Meanwhile, the old woman, also radiant with joy, returned to her home. Her son was stunned by the look of peace on her face and he asked, "Mother, what did you do today that made you so happy?" She replied, "I ate Twinkies in the park with God." But before her son responded, she added, "You know, he's much younger than I expected." – *A Third Serving of Chicken Soup for the Soul*, Julie A. Manhan, books.google.com

Reconciliation: Chancing One's Arm

(talking about taking a risk once you get home)

The oldest Christian site in Ireland is said to be St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. It is a beautiful edifice, but it also has an interesting piece of history involving one of its doors— it is known as the "Door of Reconciliation." There's a rectangular hole hacked out of its center. In 1492, two prominent Irish families, the Ormonds and Kildares, were in the midst of a bitter feud. As the feud grew and turned into an all-out fight, the Earl of Ormand was besieged by the Earl of Kildare. The Earl of Ormand and his family and followers took refuge in the chapter house of St. Patrick's cathedral and bolted themselves in. However, as the siege wore on, the Earl of Kildare concluded the feuding was foolish. Here were two families worshiping the same God, in the same church, living in the same country, trying to kill each other. So Kildare called out to the Earl of Ormand and pledged that he would not seek revenge or indulge in villainy — he wanted the Ormands to come out and the feud to be over. But the Earl of Ormand was convinced that it was a scheme full of treachery and refused to come out of the cathedral. So Kildare grabbed his spear, chopped a hole in the door with it, and thrust his hand through. There was a tense moment until his hand was grasped by another hand inside the church. The door was opened and the two men embraced, thus ending the family feud. The Scottish have a saying, maybe you have heard it, "Chancing one's arm." It came about from the incident at St. Patrick's — it means to "take a chance" especially in reaching out to someone in reconciliation. (From a sermon by Duane Smith, "The Work Of Reconciliation - Chancing One's Arm" 7/26/2009, sermoncentral.com)

H. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY DOWN FOR JUNIORS

1. Keep things simple. Not "lite" but simple. Focus on two things:
God calls them by name – they are his
God helps us at home by putting people in our lives that can help us know him
2. So make sure you do the "Claim Your Camper" (God claims us) and the Post-it Cloud of Witnesses (God puts people in our lives to help us). Emphasize those two things. It will take this age longer to do both of these so allow time.
3. Also this crew doesn't sit still very long – so choose to keep them moving by adding some of the extra activities in such as Hearing the Voice of God and We're in This Together. Don't worry as much about the role playing and going back to the brokenness list...rather keep them focused on concretes about themselves and people at home who can help them.

I. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY UP FOR SR HIGHS

1. By this time of this week – there has been some pretty powerful stuff happening in the lives of your group. Don't underestimate the power of the Claiming Your Camper" and the Post-it Cloud.
2. **With Claiming**... a possibility is to let them "claim" each other – you do the ritual with the first person, then they turn and do it with the next and so on. There is power in hearing your peers tell you, you are claimed by God!
3. **With the Post-It cloud**... have them share who they put on their post-its and why – if you don't have much time, have them pick 1-3 people and share. Ask them whose "cloud" they might be in? Are there people around them – maybe younger youth or family members, maybe adults, that they hang with...if they can't think of anyone – challenge them to think of someone's cloud they could step into – who might that person be? What could they do? Would they be willing to do that?
4. **Once they have named** people, pray for each of them and the person(s) they named. Pray for God to bring opportunity and courage!
5. **There for You**...this is an activity really only high schoolers can do effectively. Challenge them with this. The hardest thing for us as people to do is allow ourselves to be held accountable by anyone. Yet – we do so much better when there are people in our lives supporting and encouraging us. Talk with your campers about how important community really is – how important it is to have relationships with those who are older than us and can guide us, support us, pray for us along the way. It can truly make the difference between being a light for Jesus that shines brightly and a flame that wavers and goes out. Why? Because who we surround ourselves with matters!

J. PARENT DEVOTIONAL

Scripture:

"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. ² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. ³ For I am the Lord your God...Isaiah 43:1-3

Reflection:

Today is the last day. We have journeyed into God's unconditional love for us, our own brokenness, God's insane way of forgiving us again and again and again, the ways God empowers us to share this love and forgiveness with others. What a great way to see God present and at work in our lives and the lives of our children!

Today is the last program day. They are getting ready to say good-bye to new friends, counselors and staff. They are preparing to leave the "safe" world of camp and come home. Home to a world that has not changed while they were away. A world that won't necessarily "get" what happened for them or in them this past week. A world where the social order is set by kids at school instead of the love of God. A world that is more concerned about consuming than it is about forgiving.

And so today we remind them...God calls them by name. God claims them as his own. And then...God sends them out. Out of the safety of camp, back into that world that can be so different – back to shine his light of love and forgiveness into the world around them. This is no easy task. Because God, while promising to be with us –never promises it will be easy.

We will face the reality that even if we're ready to forgive, even if we initiate forgiving someone or asking for forgiveness, it doesn't assure a positive result. Others might not be ready, or might not understand. They might not be able to accept the forgiveness we ask for or offer. Some days it will seem that this whole love and forgiveness thing is for the birds.

That's where you come in. Hebrews 12:1-2 talks about "...since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith". Your camper has a race to run when they get home. A race run for the Kingdom of God. And when your camper arrives home, they will need you. They will need their "cloud of witnesses" to encourage them, support them, cry with them, love them, challenge them...be there for them. YOU are an important part of that cloud!

Who's in your cloud of witnesses? Who helps and encourages you? Who has your back and keeps you accountable for making sure you are part of Christian community? Who are the people who encourage, support, grow your faith in Jesus? Have you ever told them? Do they even know the impact they've had on your life? If you haven't, I encourage to do so. Write a letter/email. Make a call. See them face to face. Tell them.

Then turn around and be part of your child's cloud. Be part of other kids' cloud of witnesses. We were never made to do this journey of life and faith and forgiveness alone. Do try to do it on your own. Don't make your child do on their own. Be that cloud together!

Family Activity:

As a family – help each other identify those people/places who are there for you and encourage your discipleship. If you don't have anyone commit, to finding people. Talk to pastors, youth directors, other adults – help yourself and your camper build that network of witnesses. And then, pray together. Pray to walk with each other, pray to share with each other, pray for God to work in and through you – together.

Imagine this – with you and God together – you can change the world around you. By being bearers of the light of Jesus' love and forgiveness, you bring light and life and healing. And remember this – no matter where you go, no matter the struggle or the joy of the moment on the journey – you don't go it alone. The God who has claimed you by name, promises to go with you. Thanks be to God!

Prayer:

Dear God, where I need to forgive, help me forgive. Where I need to be forgiven, give me courage to admit it and ask for it. Where I am weak, show me you are there...and where I wander alone, show me people who will walk with me. Let me be your light and a carrier of your love to all I meet – family, friend, neighbor, stranger. In your name I pray, AMEN