

# 2

# Circle of Forgiveness

## YOU'LL NEED

- two to four sets of dominoes
- two adults to play the roles of Jacob and Esau (optional)
- bathrobes, sandals, and towels for costumes
- photocopies of the "Twin Troubles" script (p. 21)
- Bibles
- pencil
- photocopies of the "Cup of Forgiveness" handout (p. 26)
- 8-inch squares of paper
- a pitcher of water

## LESSON AIM

To help kids understand that ★ God forgives us as we forgive others.

## OBJECTIVES

Kids will

- experience frustration setting up dominoes,
- learn how Jacob and Esau forgave each other,
- understand that God wants them to accept his forgiveness and pass it on to others, and
- ask God's help in forgiving others.

## BIBLE BASIS

### Genesis 25-33

The story of Jacob and Esau is a story of grace. Sibling rivalry and parental favoritism created an ugly environment of trickery and hatred between the twin sons of Isaac. But God intervened and used these less-than-perfect heroes to perpetuate the Messianic line begun by Abraham.

After years of hatred and estrangement, the reunion of Jacob and Esau is nothing less than miraculous. Jacob had stolen Esau's two most precious possessions: the birthright and blessing of the firstborn. During their years of living apart, Esau had plenty of time to nurse his grief and hatred.

But no blood was shed, no hard words spoken. "Esau ran to meet Jacob and put his arms around him and hugged him.

Then Esau kissed him, and they both cried” (Genesis 33:4).  
What a beautiful, touching scene!

Our God is a God of grace and mercy. The mercy God shows us, he also requires of us.

### **1 Peter 4:8**

When people intentionally hurt us, our first human reaction may be to defend ourselves. Our second reaction is almost always to think of ways to strike back.

People who know God know that the healing of a broken relationship is far more powerful and gratifying than revenge. Love is stronger than hate, and in the lives of God’s people, love must always prevail.

## **UNDERSTANDING YOUR KIDS**

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“No fair!” How many times have you heard that from your students? Kids have a strong sense of justice, especially when they’re the victims! And when they don’t think justice is being served, their objections will come through loud and clear.

For younger children, forgiveness can be a confusing issue. When they’re wronged, they want justice and they want it now. When a parent or teacher fails to exact a satisfactory punishment, they’re upset. A young child often learns the best lessons about mercy and forgiveness when he or she is the wrongdoer—the one who broke the plate, hit a friend, or made the baby cry with an unkind word or action.

Older children may have entered the “grudge zone” where it’s cool to run in cliques and put down their enemies. Kids in the middle grades need to be challenged to put themselves in other people’s shoes and to respond in love.

That’s a big order—one that many adults find difficult. But it’s what God requires of us, and, in his grace, empowers us to do.

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## **ATTENTION GRABBER**

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### **Knock Me Down**

As kids arrive, assign them to one of two groups. Keep the balance of younger and older students the same in each group. Give both groups a set or two of dominoes and chal-



# **The Lesson**

lenge them to make a design with the dominoes that will fall over when one of the dominoes is pushed.

Visit the groups as work progresses. When a group is nearly done, pretend to adjust one of the dominoes and “accidentally” knock over the entire arrangement. Apologize, then back away from the scene of the accident straight into the other group’s dominoes. Apologize again, then call a halt to the work and ask:

● **What did you think when I knocked over your dominoes and ruined your hard work?** (I couldn’t believe you did that; it was frustrating.)

● **How would you feel about me if I knocked over the dominoes by accident—just because I was clumsy?** (I wouldn’t feel so bad; I wouldn’t be mad at you.)

● **How would you feel if you knew I knocked over the dominoes on purpose and that I’d keep knocking them over again and again?** (I might cry; I’d probably get mad at you; I’d quit trying to set them up.)

● **If I said I was sorry would you still be mad at me?** (Maybe; I’m not sure; not if you never did it again.)

Say: **It can be hard to forgive people, especially if they do hurtful things on purpose, and *most* especially if they do them again and again. Today we’re going to learn that ★ God forgives us as we forgive others. Later in our class we’ll work with the dominoes again—and this time I promise not to knock them over! Now let’s listen to a story of two brothers who had a lot to forgive.**

## BIBLE STUDY

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**Twin Troubles (Genesis 25:27-34; 27:1-45; 32:9-21; 33:1-4)**

You may want to invite two adults from your congregation to read the roles of Jacob and Esau. Simple costumes such as bathrobes, sandals, and towels wrapped with fabric strips for headgear will add to the effect when two Bible characters suddenly appear in your class to tell the Bible story.

Or, you may choose two students who are good readers to take the roles of Jacob and Esau.

In either case, assign half the students to belong to Jacob’s group and the other half to belong to Esau’s. Have the Jacob and Esau characters stand facing each other, with their groups behind them.

## Twin Troubles

**Esau:** I'm Esau. My brother Jacob and I are twins, but I was the first to be born. That gave me the right to get almost all my father's money and land. My father is really proud of me because I'm a great hunter.

**Jacob:** I'm Jacob. One thing I can tell you about my twin brother Esau is that he's not too smart. One day he was out hunting and came back really hungry. I had just finished fixing a pot of soup. It smelled good, and Esau wanted some right away. So I said, "Sure, you can have the soup if you'll give me your rights as the firstborn son." Esau agreed. I couldn't believe it. He traded away all his rights as firstborn son for a pot of soup!

**Esau:** One day when my father was very old, he called me in and asked me to go hunting and prepare him a meal of delicious meat. He told me that after he had eaten the meal I prepared, he would give me his blessing—the one thing Jacob hadn't taken from me.

**Jacob:** So while Esau went off to hunt, my mother prepared a meal of goat meat. My father couldn't see very well, so we thought we could trick him into giving me his blessing if I pretended to be Esau. It worked! My father gave me the blessing for the oldest son before Esau got back from his hunting trip.

**Esau:** I hurried back from my hunting trip and prepared a tasty meal for my father. Then I took it to him, only to discover that he had just given his blessing to my scheming brother, Jacob. What a dirty trick! I decided right then that I would kill Jacob.

**Jacob:** My mother heard about Esau's plans to kill me, so she sent me far away to my uncle's house. Saying goodbye to my parents was hard because I didn't know if I'd ever see them again. I lived many years at my uncle's house. I got married and had a big family. But I longed to return to my old home. Still . . . Esau had threatened to kill me. And who could blame him? I cheated him out of all of his rights as firstborn son.

**Esau:** Many years passed. One day I looked up and saw well-dressed servants coming toward me bringing flocks of goats, sheep, camels, cows, and donkeys. They said they were from my brother, Jacob. So Jacob was on his way home. I'd wondered for a long time if I'd ever see him again.

**Jacob:** I prayed all night before I went to meet Esau. I asked God to protect me from Esau's anger for stealing his share of my father's possessions. You can imagine how I felt when I looked in the distance and saw Esau coming with about 400 men. I wondered if this would be the end of me.

**Esau:** Jacob wasn't prepared for the welcome I gave him. You can read about it in Genesis 33:4.

## TEACHER TIP

Depending on the age of your students, you may or may not experience “gender repulsion” in your group. Kids may be reluctant to touch or even work with those of the opposite sex. If this is the case with your group, stick to handshakes rather than hugs!

Say: **Our Bible story comes from the book of Genesis. It’s about two brothers—twins—who didn’t get along very well.**

As the characters read through the “Twin Troubles” script (p. 21), encourage the kids in both groups to cheer for their characters.

At the end of the story, hand out Bibles and have everyone look up Genesis 33:4. Be sure to pair nonreaders with older students who can find the verse and point out the words. Have a volunteer from each group read the verse aloud together with the other group’s volunteer. Then have the Jacob and Esau characters shake hands or hug each other as the rest of the kids hug or shake hands with kids from the opposite group. Ask:

● **Did the ending of this story surprise you? Why or why not?** (Yes, because I expected them to fight; no, because I’ve heard it before.)

● **What would you have done if you’d been in Esau’s shoes?** (I’d have chased Jacob away; I’d have forgiven him if he’d asked me to; I’m not sure.)

● **Why didn’t Esau try to kill Jacob?** (Because God helped him forgive Jacob; because a long time had passed, and Esau realized he still loved his brother.)

● **How do you think God felt when Jacob and Esau forgave each other? Explain.** (Happy, because God loves everyone; glad that they were friends again.)

Say: **Sometimes it’s hard to forgive people who do mean things to us. But the Bible tells us that ★ God forgives us as we forgive each other. Let’s find out more about what that means.**

## LIFE APPLICATION

### No Tricks Allowed

Form three groups. Make sure you have an older student in each group.

Say: **You’re going to help me make up a story. I’ll take turns asking each group to give me a word for our story. When it’s your group’s turn, make a huddle and then call out the word you choose. I’ll tell you exactly what kind of word I need. When we’ve filled in all the blanks, I’ll read our story out loud.**

Jot down kids responses in the blanks of the “Championship Trick” story (p. 23). Then read the story aloud, inserting the kids’ words as you read.

## TEACHER TIP

Encourage kids to use good judgment in choosing words that will make the story interesting, but nothing negative or in poor taste.

## Championship Trick

It was the bottom of the ninth. The \_\_\_\_\_ Hornets and the \_\_\_\_\_  
(town) (another town)  
 Stingers were in a fight for the \_\_\_\_\_ league championship. The game  
(name of animal)  
 had been really \_\_\_\_\_, and everyone was feeling \_\_\_\_\_.  
(adjective) (adjective)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ stepped up to bat. The crowd grew even more \_\_\_\_\_. The  
(boy's name) (adjective)  
 Hornets fans were yelling, "\_\_\_\_\_, Hornets, \_\_\_\_\_." The Stingers fans were  
(verb) (same verb)  
 yelling, "\_\_\_\_\_, Stingers, \_\_\_\_\_." \_\_\_\_\_ the bat and stared  
(verb) (same verb) (same boy) (past tense of verb)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ at the pitcher. Two men on, two outs. This was it—the championship.  
(adverb)  
 The pitch \_\_\_\_\_ in. \_\_\_\_\_ swung. The bat hit the ball with a loud  
(past tense of verb) (same boy)  
 \_\_\_\_\_. The ball \_\_\_\_\_ into center field—a base hit! \_\_\_\_\_  
(sound) (past tense of verb) (same boy) (past tense of verb)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ down the line toward first base. But suddenly he \_\_\_\_\_ to the  
(past tense of verb)  
 ground with a thud. While \_\_\_\_\_ was at bat, the catcher had untied both  
(same boy)  
 his shoelaces, causing him to trip. The \_\_\_\_\_ center fielder threw the ball to  
(adjective)  
 the first baseman well before \_\_\_\_\_ arrived. The game was over—ended on  
(same boy)  
 a \_\_\_\_\_ trick.  
(adjective)

Read the story aloud and enjoy a good laugh. Then say:  
**That's pretty funny, but when someone hurts you or plays a trick on you in real life, it's not funny at all. In fact, you may feel like doing something to get back at that person. But let's read about what God wants us to do.**

Have a volunteer read 1 Peter 4:8. Then have another volunteer summarize the verse in his or her own words.

Say: **In your groups, tell about a time you were able to forgive someone and how it felt to do that. Let's have two rules: Don't use people's real names and don't tell about anyone in this room.**

Travel from group to group as kids share. After two or

three minutes, say: **Now let's do something fun that shows us how God's forgiveness works.**

## COMMITMENT

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### Cup of Forgiveness

Distribute photocopies of the "Cup of Forgiveness" hand-out (p. 26) and 8-inch squares of paper. Have everyone watch as you demonstrate how to fold the cup. Then have kids work together in their groups as they each fold their own cups. Encourage kids who are quick with their paper folding to help others complete their cups.

Then form one large circle. Pour water from a pitcher into your cup as you say: **Forgiveness comes from God. ★ God forgives us as we forgive others.** As you say "others," pour the water from your cup into the cup of the student on your right. Have that student repeat the sentence "God forgives us as we forgive others," and pour the water into the next student's cup. Continue in that manner around the circle.

If someone spills the water, refill his or her cup from the pitcher and say: **God's forgiveness never runs dry.** Then continue until the water comes back to you.

Say: **God's forgiveness works just like our circle. We receive forgiveness from God, then we pass that forgiveness on to others. Our circle of forgiveness becomes a circle of love. Hold your cup in both hands and think of one person you need to forgive. Silently pray and ask God to help you love and forgive that person.**

After a few moments of silence, pray: **Thank you, Lord, for your gift of forgiveness. Help us pass that gift on to others. In Jesus' name, amen.**

## CLOSING

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### Circle of Love

Say: **Remember my promise that we'd do something more with the dominoes? Now is the time! Let's make one big circle using all the dominoes and see if we can all get inside the circle without knocking them down.**

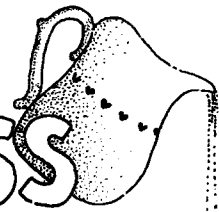
Have everyone step inside the completed circle. Ask:

● **What did we learn today?** (God forgives us as we forgive others).

Say: **Let's shout that aloud together, then** (name the youngest child) **can push the first domino in our circle of love.**

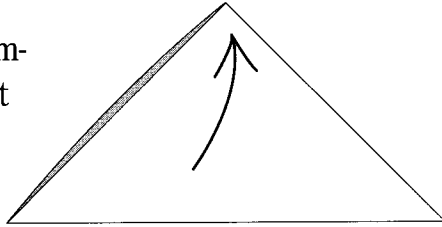
Encourage kids to keep their cups as reminders of God's forgiveness.

# CUP OF FORGIVENESS

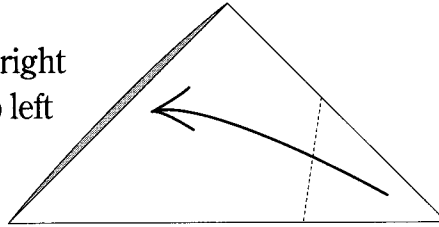


**“Love each other deeply, because love will cause many sins to be forgiven” (1 Peter 4:8).**

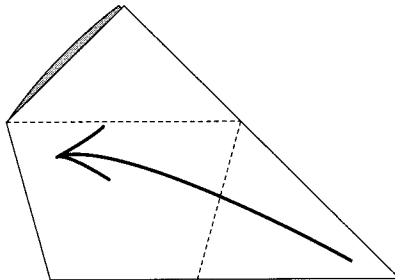
1. Fold a square of paper in half, forming a triangle that points upward.



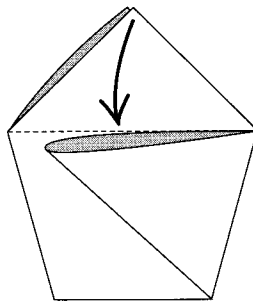
2. Fold the bottom right corner to the top left edge.



3. Turn the paper over. Fold the bottom right corner to the top left edge.



4. Fold the top front flap into the front pocket. Fold the back flap into the back pocket.



5. Here's your finished cup!

