

Creative idea

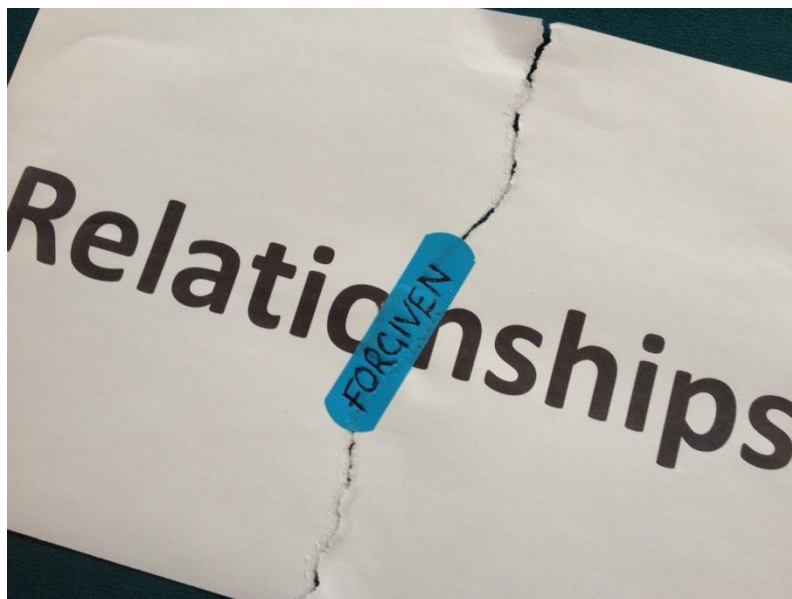
For praying for forgiveness and reconciliation

Each week we have a different issue in focus at the Sanctuary's centre, alongside rotating round different nations, regions and responding to headlines and updates from key organisations. This ensures we cover key topics even if they don't come into the spotlight of the media.

During the last week of June 2015, forgiveness and reconciliation came round as the issue in focus. It was just a matter of days after the shooting in Emmanuel Church, Charleston, USA and the incredible example of forgiveness demonstrated by the families of those who were killed. Their example brought home Christ's costly call to forgiveness again – and demonstrated its power.

On the Wednesday of that week, our characteristic of God in focus was 'present' and celebrating a life lived with God – as well as for him - and thinking about the difference the Spirit makes in our lives spoke even more about forgiveness – its source, its impetus and its power.

We hope you find the following ideas, which began in that session, as helpful as we did to use on your own or as the basis to pray in a more structured way as a group or congregation.



Creative idea for praying for forgiveness and reconciliation

You will need: pens and paper, (optional) sticking plasters, access to the internet

Thanksgiving

1. Begin by spending some time worshipping and thanking God for the fact he is 'present' with us. Thank him that we get to live life *with* him as well as *for* him. And that he is with us through every season and circumstance.

2. Think about the fact that he is *always* present and that – as believers – he lives in us and rests on us. Think also about the times when you are more *aware* of his presence, or where it seems to increase. What do you want to say thank you for?
3. On a piece of paper make a list of the difference it makes when there is a strong sense of his presence and you are tuned into this and living from it... how do you feel? What difference does it make to how you can think? And how you can hear and receive from God?
4. You may well find you have written down a number of the fruits of the Spirit in your list. This isn't surprising! Add any you're missing... (see Galatians 5:22-26)
5. Think about verses 25 and 26. What do they suggest as the source for negative feelings of pride, envy, provocation and potential conflict?

Input and inspiration

6. Watch this clip - www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-33217143 - which shows the response from Emmanuel Church, Charleston – and the surrounding community – just days after a shooting which killed nine of their members. How is the forgiveness spoken of possible? And what does it speak to the world about God's love?
7. Now watch this one from Open Doors about one woman's response to the persecution she experienced in Eritrea - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjqX1v9a8cU> or this one from the Minya diocese in Egypt whose church was destroyed - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTD6TZN7qj4> : what questions and reflections do they raise for you? How do you want to pray in response?
8. What other experiences of forgiveness have you encountered that have inspired and challenged you? If you are using this resource on your own, jot down what struck you about each one and then think about the patterns between them. If you are with a group, talk about these stories together.

Intercession

9. Take a new sheet of paper and tear it in half. Think about any conflicts or broken relationships in your life, in your church or community and in the headlines... write the 'opposing' parties on each half of the paper and then move the two pieces towards each other, praying for forgiveness between them. (As a symbol, you could stick plasters over the join and pray for the Spirit's covering to bind up broken hearts and heal wounds.)
10. Look at the scar or fault line left where the paper rejoins, and pray that where possible there would be reconciliation and that the scars of the past would gradually fade and be completely healed in God's mercy and perfect time – whether or not reconciliation is appropriate.
11. Finish by singing a song such as *Spirit Break Out* (by Ben Bryant, Luke Hellebronth, Myles Dhillon and Tim Hughes) over the situations – inviting God's healing presence to move in people and situations, even when they have yet come to know him.