



Elie Wiesel, who witnessed the horrors of Auschwitz, wrote in his book, *Night*: ‘never will I forgive, not if I live for a thousand years. Never’. Yet when Corrie Ten Boom’s sister Betsie died in a concentration camp, her dying words were, ‘no hate Corrie. No hate.’ There must be a religious case for forgiveness, whose meaning is something like ‘to give up your right to revenge and your feeling of hate’.

Ask students to discuss the first two questions in pairs.

1. Think of a time when you have had difficulty forgiving someone. What did they do? What did you do? Write a few sentences about your feelings at the time.
2. Jesus said, ‘love your enemies, do good to those that hate you’ and when asked by Peter “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven” Matthew 18:21-22. Why do you think Jesus seems to have stressed forgiveness as a key value of the kingdom of God?

Possible answer: *The Bible teaches that a holy God cannot tolerate sinful human beings and so mercy and forgiveness are key ingredients of the word ‘grace’ – the gracious generous gifts of God which include the offer of friendship and reconciliation. So just as Christians ‘love because he first loved us’ (1 John 4:19) so they forgive because Jesus and God the Father are ‘full of grace’ and, they believe, graciously forgive them. Jesus’ dying words were ‘Father forgive them for they know not what they do’ (Luke 23:34). And Stephen, the first Christian martyr, followed the same example (Acts 7:60). There is also the point that Gandhi (a Hindu) was making when he said – ‘an eye for an eye will make all of us blind’. Forgiveness and reconciliation, as we have found in Northern Ireland following the Good Friday Agreement of 2000, and which South Africans discovered after apartheid was dismantled, breaks the cycle of retaliation and hate which fuels violence and misery.*

3. Have students fill in the table finding three reasons for and three against forgiving your enemy. A first idea has been filled in for them on their worksheet. Possible student answers are below.

For forgiveness	Against forgiveness
<i>It breaks the cycle of hate</i>	It seems unfair – against natural justice
<i>It disarms the enemy</i>	<i>The enemy may think me weak</i>
<i>It is a powerful reflection of divine grace</i>	<i>It is unrealistic, when people understand strength and force</i>
<i>It brings me release and freedom from spite and consuming hate</i>	<i>The other person may not reciprocate and so the cycle of evil continues</i>