

Name: _____

Date: _____

The following is an excerpt from Mere Christianity by C. S. Lewis. This specific passage deals with the idea of forgiveness. There are discussion questions after each paragraph that we will discuss as a class.

Christian Behavior

7. Forgiveness

I believe there is one [virtue] even more unpopular [than others]. It is in the Christian rule, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' Because in Christian morals 'thy neighbor' includes 'thy enemy', and so we come up against this terrible [obligation] of forgiving our enemies.

1. What is a virtue?
2. Have you ever thought about having to forgive your "enemies"?

Every one says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive, as we had during the war (WWII). And then, to mention the subject [of forgiveness] at all is to be greeted with howls of anger. That sort of talk makes them sick,' they say. And half of you already want to ask me, 'I wonder how you'd feel about forgiving a [terrible person] if you were [affected]?'

3. What is easier? To say how people should act or to set an example? Why might that be the case?
4. Think of the worst thing that someone has done to you (don't say it out loud). Did you forgive that person?

So do I. I wonder very much. Just as when Christianity tells me that I must not deny my religion even to save myself from death by torture, I wonder very much what I should do [if] it came to the point. I am not trying to tell you in this book what I could do...I am telling you Christianity exists [no matter what I do]. I did not invent it. And there, right in the middle of it, I find 'Forgive us our sins as we forgive those that sin against us.' There is no slightest suggestion that we are offered forgiveness on any other terms. [We need to act how we want others to act towards us.] There are no two ways about it. What are we to do?

5. Should we always expect forgiveness?
6. Even if we are not forgiven should we give forgiveness?

It is going to be hard enough, anyway, but I think there are two things we can do to make [forgiving] easier. When you start mathematics you do not begin with the calculus; you begin with simple addition. [If] we really want (but all depends on really wanting) to learn how to forgive, perhaps we had better start with something easier. One might start with forgiving one's husband or wife, or parents or children, or [a friend], for something they have done or said in the last week. That will probably keep us busy for the moment. And secondly, we might try to understand exactly what loving your neighbor as yourself means. I have to love him as I love myself. Well, how exactly do I love myself?

7. Why would C. S. Lewis state that our ability to forgive depends on us really wanting to learn?

Now that I come to think of it, I have not exactly got a feeling of fondness or affection for myself, and I do not even always enjoy my own [community]. So apparently 'Love your neighbor' does not mean 'feel fond of him'. I ought to have seen that before, because, of course, you cannot feel fond of a person by trying. Do I think well of myself, think myself a nice chap? Well, I am afraid I sometimes do...but that is not why I love myself. In fact it is the other way round: my self-love makes me think myself nice, but thinking myself nice is not why I love myself. So loving my enemies does not apparently mean thinking them nice either. That is an enormous relief. For a good many people imagine that forgiving your enemies means making out that they are really not such bad fellows after all, when it is quite plain that they are. Go a step further. In my most clear-sighted moments not only do I not think myself a nice man, but I know that I am a very nasty one. I can look at some of the things I have done with horror and loathing. So apparently I am allowed to loathe and hate some of the things my enemies do. Now that I come to think of it, I remember Christian teachers telling me long ago that I must hate bad man's actions, but not hate the bad man: or, as they would say, hate the sin but not the sinner. ...

8. Do we have to be fond of those we are asked to forgive?