

Session 2: The villain inside

READ

What makes a villain? Is it enough to do one wrong thing? Does it matter 'how' wrong it is (are there different levels of 'wrong')?

I wonder what villains you can think of in the Bible? Try to find some of these people's stories: King David; Judas Iscariot; Delilah; Pontius Pilate
Were they simply bad people? Why did they do what they did? Did something or someone lead them into it? Did they always do wrong? Did they ever change? Where did they end up?

I wonder how God views villains? (Romans 3: 9-18, 23,24; John 3: 17)

YOURSELF

I wonder if there are things that you dislike about yourself?
How might God look at you?

Are there things that you have done wrong?
Are there things you wish you could have done differently?

There is a difference between feeling shame (feeling worthless or no good) and feeling guilt (recognising we did something wrong). Feeling shame can often be rooted in not feeling valued by other people. Feeling guilty is rooted in what we have done. God looks at shame and wants to us to know we are fully loved and accepted. God looks at guilt and wants to know whether we regret what we did and if we want to be forgiven.

Look at this picture of [the return of the prodigal son](#) by Rembrandt. The father is welcoming the son home. How is this welcome expressed? Does it feel welcoming?

I wonder who might be the villains or the heroes of this story? How does this painting add to or contradict this?

OTHER PEOPLE

I wonder what annoys you in other people? (sometimes this can highlight something we actually dislike in ourselves)

How have other people hurt you, or done wrong to you?

How have you responded to the things other people have done?

What if you assume they are doing the best they can?

THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY

I wonder what frustrates or annoys you in the URC?

I wonder what mistakes the Church has made in the past and today?

What can you find out about the URC (and other church's) involvement in the transatlantic slave trade? What are the ongoing impacts on communities around the world and the structures of the URC?

<https://urc.org.uk/legacies-of-slavery.html>

<https://www.cwmission.org/what-we-do/cutting-edge-mission-initiatives/legacies-of-slavery/>

THINK...

PRAY

How easy do you find it to forgive yourself? Perhaps we can follow the example of how God forgives and accepts us:

1. Do you want to be with God and do you recognise that you have done things wrong? (1 John 1:8)
2. God forgives us, whatever we have done, if we ask. (1 John 1:9)
3. We are completely accepted by God – no 'ifs' or 'buts'. Nothing we do can make God love us more. Nothing we do will make God love us less.
4. Now can you see yourself as God sees you?

DO

Write a list of the hurts that you might be hanging on to – burn the piece of paper – or write it on tin foil and wash it off – can you let go of them (ask God to help you)?

Consider what further steps you might want to take next.

How easy do you find it to forgive other people? Again we can follow the example of God forgiving and accepting others:

1. Have they acknowledged what they have done wrong? (Do they know they have hurt you?) Are they sorry for what they have done?
2. If they don't know or don't care that they have hurt you, you can still forgive them. They just cannot receive your forgiveness unless they have recognised what they did.
3. Do you want to forgive them? The alternative is to hold on to your anger and hurt, but this will usually hurt you more in the long run.
4. God has forgiven you and asks you to forgive others. Ask God to help you to forgive – it might not happen immediately, it might take time, you might need to keep asking God for help.
5. Sometimes showing your acceptance of someone (as long as this is safe to do) can help make forgiveness real.

Is there someone you know who you might need to forgive? If they are aware and are sorry, try telling them. If they are not aware or sorry, you could tell them or write in a letter how you feel and that you want to forgive them.

What can the Church do to ask forgiveness of those that have been hurt?

Pray for honesty and wisdom where the Church has caused harm to people.

Write a lament on behalf of the church.

How should the URC be responding today to the mistakes of our past? What can you do about it?

How can your church make a difference?

Encourage your church to respond to something that is wrong in your local area or in the world.

Write a reflection about the things that have touched you in this session. You can send your reflections to the URC's Children and Youth Team or the Global & Intercultural Ministries Department, to be shared on their websites.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

- Forgiving others might make us heroes. Being forgiven and accepted might turn villains into heroes.
- Always assume the best in others (that they are trying their hardest and they are acting out of good intentions). This can transform you and them.