



EXPLORE THE BIBLE.

Session 10: I Am the Light
Suggested Week of Use: February 5, 2023
Core Passage: John 8:3-18

News Story Summary

Jonathan Nelson and Matthew Roberts didn't know each other when they were younger, but their lives became connected forever in one tragic moment. A few weeks ago, though, the two men stood before a group of teenagers to share their story of forgiveness.

In September 1998, both young men attended a party at which several rival gangs were creating chaos. Nelson, 16 at the time, remembers fights between the gangs breaking out in the house and spilling out into the yard and street. When Roberts, then 19, arrived, things had already gotten intense. He was moving toward a friend to break up a fight when someone hit him and knocked him down. Running after the guy he thought was his attacker, he grabbed Nelson by the arm and spun him around. Nelson, carrying a gun, fired two shots into Roberts' abdomen.

Nelson, now 41, was sentenced to a six-year suspended prison sentence and went to a boot camp program for teens. From there, he spent most of the next several years in and out of prison—serving a total of 15 years behind bars. Sick of the “rut” he had created for himself, Nelson determined to change his life and was released from prison in 2021.

Meanwhile, Roberts, 43, made the choice to forgive Nelson during his extended recovery time. In 2019, he began working with the victim assistance unit of the Denver Police Department; and, in 2021, he reached out to Nelson through social media. The two of them met officially for the first time and began building a friendship.

Roberts believed that if they could tell their story together, at-risk young people could reject gun violence and find hope beyond the gangs. Nelson agreed; and, last month, they shared their story together with an audience of young people for the first time.

Roberts and Nelson focus on helping community programs that work to prevent violence and promote mental health. Because Nelson chose a new path for his life and Roberts chose to forgive, they are a living testimony of the power of healing and reconciliation.

For more about this story, search “Jonathan Nelson, Matthew Roberts reconcile.”

Focus Attention

To supplement **FOCUS ATTENTION**, call for adults to share examples of stories about forgiveness and reconciliation. Ask: *Why do stories of forgiveness make such a powerful impact? How does a story of forgiveness help us better understand God's forgiveness?* Share the story of

Jonathan Nelson and Matthew Roberts. Ask: *If you were Matthew Roberts, how would you have responded to your attacker? How hard would it be to forgive? Why?* Challenge adults to consider what would make a relationship between Nelson and Roberts difficult. Share that this session examines Jesus's claim to be the Light of the world and what that means for us in terms of forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

Summarize and Challenge

To supplement **SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE**, remind adults that this lesson highlighted how those who have been forgiven should serve as agents of forgiveness themselves. Ask: *While we don't know about Matthew Roberts' faith, what about his story indicates that he wants to be an agent of forgiveness? What can we learn as Christians from his story?* Explain that the relationship that Roberts has built with Nelson can be an illustration of the relationship that Jesus wants to have with us. Point out that now, as friends, they are sharing their story to help others. Draw a connection to the way believers are called to share their Jesus story as a way to help others as well.