

Session 1: Introduction, Chapters 1 – 3

Gather *Create and protect connections*

Begin by going around and introducing yourself with your name, your connection to the congregation, and your “why” – your reason for joining a small group this Lent.

Once everyone has introduced themselves, have someone read out loud the guidelines for gathering found in the *About this Guide* document. Decide if any additional guidelines should be added for your group. Make sure you all understand what time to wrap up your conversation to best honor each other’s time.

Center *Ground yourselves in common purpose*

Have one person read: *An invitation to a Brave Space* by Micky Scottbey Jones

Together we will create brave space
Because there is no such thing as a
“safe space”

We exist in the real world

We all carry scars and we have all caused wounds.

In this space

We seek to turn down the volume of the outside world.

We amplify voices that fight to be heard elsewhere,

We call each other to more truth and love

We have the right to start somewhere and continue to grow.

We have the responsibility to examine what we think we know.

We will not be perfect.

It will not always be what we wish it to be

But It will be our brave space together,

And

We will work on it side by side.

Discuss *Pick a few questions below to respond to as a group*

1. In the Introduction, Ruttenberg argues that there are key factors in American culture that make repentance work especially challenging. What are your reflections on American culture and our ability to practice repentance?

2. What are the stages of repentance that seem most intuitive or natural to you? Which ones seem (or have been, if you have done this practice in the past) most challenging or daunting?

3. Rabbi Ruttenberg writes “Judaism doesn’t emphasize forgiveness to the same degree that Christianity and secular American society do. Jewish law teaches that the person harmed is certainly not obligated to forgive a perpetrator who has not done the work of repentance.” She says of *tshuvah*, repentance: “In a spiritual context, *tshuvah* is about coming back to where we are supposed to be, returning to the person we know we’re capable of being—coming home, in humility and with intentionality, to behave as the person we’d like to believe we are.” *Tshuvah* has a correlative in the Greek New Testament word *metanoia*, “change of heart.” How has the idea of *metanoia/tshuvah* been central to Christian theology since the beginning? Has it gotten lost in our modern Christian spiritual practices and priorities? Where do you see it at work in yourself or community?

4. Is there a particular situation or relationship that comes to mind for you as you read through the first chapters of this book? Has it challenged or shaped how you reflect on that harm you’ve experienced, or a harm you’ve inflicted on others?

5. In Matthew 18:21-22, Peter asks Jesus how often he should forgive someone who keeps sinning against him. Up to 7 times? Jesus answers either “not 7 times—but seventy-seven times” or “seventy times 7 times!” depending on the translation. Christians have been taught that our forgiveness should be limitless, even if the transgressor keeps harming us.

Supererogatory grace is a virtue. What damage can that idea do in perpetuating cycles of harm? What are some other ways we might read this text in light of the wisdom of Rabbi Rutenberg and Maimonides?

6. What parts of this chapter were most challenging or thought-provoking for you?

Close *End your discussion with prayer*

Close your time together with the prayer below, adding any prayer concerns from your group. Before you depart, confirm your next gathering date, time, and space.

Loving God, We seek to walk the pathway of your love and compassion. Strengthen us in this work. Where we feel anxiety, grant us peace. Where we encounter fear, grant us courage. Where we face unknowns, grant us hope. May Christ guide us, the Spirit sustain us, and this community uphold us. Amen.

