

Exod. 14:19–31

Ps. 114

Rom. 14:1–12

Matt. 18:21–35

Multiply Forgiveness

Goal for the Session *Third- and fourth-graders will recognize that forgiveness is central in Jesus' teachings.*

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Matthew 18:21–35

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Lewis R. Donelson

Peter’s suggestion that he must forgive up to seven times is not an attempt to place a limit on forgiveness. In fact, since seven is a holy number, Peter is probably asking something like, “Must I practice perfect forgiveness?” To which Jesus responds, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times” (v. 22). While the exact number is not clear in the Greek, the point of the number is. Your forgiveness must be beyond perfect; it must be beyond counting. The parable places human forgiveness in the context of divine forgiveness and divine punishment.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Kathryn D. Blanchard

This parable is a reminder of the high value Matthew’s Jesus places on forgiveness, particularly among his followers. The church is meant to be a uniquely forgiving people, a people of humility and repentance. Hearers of this parable must not place themselves in the judgment seat of the king who forgives, but rather in the hot seat of the unworthy servant who is forgiven. In any reading of this text, the theological tenet that God’s “default” stance toward the penitent is one of mercy must lead to the conviction that God’s people are those who likewise practice mercy—willingly, concretely, and as a communal way of life.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Charlotte Dudley Cleghorn

Although Peter’s question is directed toward others within the church, those with whom there is a bond through the Spirit of God, the area of forgiveness is one that weighs heavily upon people of faith in all areas of their lives as they seek to live in a way that is faithful to Jesus’ life and teaching. Jesus speaks to the necessity of forgiveness because he knows the effects unforgiveness has on individuals and communities. There are so many situations within our society that, when not dealt with, can sow the seeds of bitterness and fester into deep, painful wounds.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Charles L. Campbell

The forgiveness spoken of by Jesus in this passage is set within the communal process outlined in Matthew 18:15–20—a process that includes naming the sin, the repentance of the sinner, and where necessary, the communal support of the victim. It is a challenging process that does not minimize the sin and that provides resources to support and empower the one who has been sinned against. Only within this process does Jesus call us to forgive other church members countless times. The forgiveness Jesus calls for is inseparable from truth telling and accountability within the church.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Matt. 18:21–35

Focus on Your Teaching

Forgiveness is central to the life of faith, and it is challenging for Christians of all ages to understand and practice. Third- and fourth-graders usually think in concrete terms about fairness, focusing on what is right and wrong. Seeking retribution for being wronged by someone may seem to be a fair response to them. Still, they are open to wondering about how the teachings of Jesus pertain to them personally. They are able and ready to explore this central practice of Christian discipleship.

Gracious God, be present and guide me as I teach the children entrusted to my care. Help us all to grow in our understanding and practice of forgiveness. May your way of compassionate grace become our way. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- green fabric
- large white candle; matches, if allowed
- bowl of uncooked rice
- construction-paper bookmarks
- Singing the Feast*, vol. 1, and CD player
- Color Pack 3, 4
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- pens or pencils

For Responding:

- option 1: small, clear plastic containers with lids, self-stick labels, fine-tipped markers, glue or tape, rice
- option 2: plain paper, pens or pencils
- option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 2 and materials needed

Bim Bom

Bim bom bim bim bim bom
 Bim bim bim bim bim bom.
 Bim bom bim bim bim bom
 Bim bim bim bim bim bom.

Shabbat shalom!
 Shabbat shalom!
 Shabbat, shabbat, shabbat,
 Shabbat shalom!

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the children arrive, write each of the following references on a construction-paper bookmark: Matthew 18:21–22; Matthew 18:23–27; Matthew 18:28–30; Matthew 18:31–34; Matthew 18:35.

Greet children by name as they arrive. Ask for volunteers to take one of the bookmarks, find the verses, and be ready to read them aloud. Invite learners to arrange the green fabric, candle, and bowl of rice in the center of your table or on a low table in your meeting space.

Gather and light the Christ candle, welcoming Christ in your midst. Listen to the song “Bim Bom” (track 11 on *Singing the Feast*, vol. 1). Encourage the children to clap with the beat of the music and sing along. Remind learners that this is a Jewish Sabbath song. The words *bim bom* do not have meaning. The words *Shabbat shalom* mean “peaceful Sabbath.” Offer this prayer:

Loving God, thank you for calling us together. Thank you for your gifts to us of forgiveness and kindness. Open our hearts and minds to hear and wonder what it means to be your forgiving people. Amen.

Extinguish the candle. Invite learners to think of times they have forgiven another person and times another person has forgiven them. Discuss:

- ✎ When have you been forgiven for something hurtful you did or said? How did it feel to be forgiven?
- ✎ When have you forgiven another person?

EXPLORING

Together, look at Color Pack 4, a map that shows the cities and countryside where Jesus

The rice is used during the session to aid in visualizing God's abundant forgiveness.

Teaching the Revised Common Lectionary
FEASTING *on the* **WORD**
CURRICULUM

Multiply Forgiveness

lived and traveled over 2,000 years ago. Jesus and his followers traveled from town to town teaching about God's love. Ask a volunteer to find Capernaum. This is where the events in today's Bible reading take place.

Explain that at the beginning of today's Bible reading, Jesus is teaching about what it means to live together as God's people. When the disciples and other followers asked Jesus questions, he sometimes answered their questions by telling a parable, a kind of story. Jesus often used stories to help people learn about living in God's ways.

Distribute Bibles and work together to locate Matthew 18:21–35. Give each learner a copy of Resource Sheet 1 (Things to Know: Matthew 18:23–35). Ask the volunteers with the bookmarks to read their sections of the story, pausing as noted below for conversation:

Circle of Love

Refrain:

The circle of love goes around,
around,
The circle of love goes around.
Stop, reach out, your sister
(*your brother; someone*)
needs you,
And the circle of love goes
around.

Listen, someone is crying,
Wondering why she's been
denied.
Stop, reach out, your sister
needs you,
And the circle of love goes
around.

Refrain (*your brother*)

Look, someone is searching,
Trying to find his way back.
Stop, reach out, your brother
needs you,
And the circle of love goes
around.

Refrain (*someone*)

No one can travel life's road all
alone;
We all need a friend now and
then.
Stop, reach out, someone
needs you,
And the circle of love goes
around.

Refrain (*someone*)

After verses 21–22:

- ✪ How does the information in the "Numbers" section of the resource sheet help us understand this part of the story?
- ✪ Why do you think Peter asked this question? How do you understand Jesus' answer?

After verses 23–27:

- ✪ What did the slave owe to his master, the king? What did the slave ask the king to do?
- ✪ What information in the "Words" and "Money" sections of the resource sheet help us understand this part of the story?
- ✪ How did the king show mercy?
- ✪ Do you think the slave deserved what he got? Why or why not?

After verses 28–30:

- ✪ How did this first slave treat the slave who owed him money?
- ✪ What information in the "Words" and "Money" sections of the resource sheet help us understand this part of the story?
- ✪ Why do you think the first slave refused to have mercy on the second slave?

After verses 31–34:

- ✪ What did the people who saw what happened to the second slave do?
- ✪ Why do you think the king was angry with the first slave?

After verse 35:

- ✪ Why do you think Jesus spoke such harsh words?
- ✪ What do you learn about forgiveness from this story?

Show Color Pak 3, explaining how a balancing scale works. Discuss:

- ✪ If this were God's scale, what might it mean that God's mercy weighs more than God's anger?
- ✪ Do you think it is easier for a person to be angry or to be merciful? Why?
- ✪ What might you do to make your mercy stronger than your anger?

Take care not to imply that forgiveness removes consequences, especially in situations of abuse. Review Matthew 18:15–17 for how to confront someone who has caused harm in word or in action. Caring adults can help children with this kind of confrontation.

**EASY
PREP**

With the children's permission, print the recipes in your church newsletter or post on the church Web site. Do not use last names.

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Forgiveness Containers** Forgiveness containers can remind children how often Jesus tells us to forgive. Begin with a small, clear plastic container. On the top of the lid, glue or tape seven grains of rice. With markers, write *Forgive 77* on a self-stick label. Add a colorful border to the label and stick it to the side of the container. Fill the container with rice from the bowl in the worship space, recalling that Jesus used the number 77 to indicate a large amount. Place the lid on the container. Suggest that the learners put these containers in a place where they can be reminded of what Jesus teaches about forgiving others.
- 2. Recipes for Forgiveness** Creating “forgiveness recipes” is an imaginative way for third- and fourth-graders to think about what steps or “ingredients” help them practice forgiveness. Like a recipe for baking, the process of forgiveness involves the use of several “ingredients.” Explain that a recipe usually includes a list of items, the amounts of each, and directions for how to put the items together to make food. A recipe can also be a way to figure out how to do something or make something happen. Work together to list what actions or words—“ingredients”—are part of forgiveness (such as handshake, hug, working together to fix something that was broken, “I forgive you,” “it’s OK,” “I’m not mad anymore,” “let’s be friends again”) and how much of each ingredient might help a person practice forgiveness. Ask the following questions to help the children get started:
 - ✪ What materials or “ingredients” are needed to help forgiveness happen?
 - ✪ How much of each is needed?
 - ✪ How do you mix or put together these ingredients?
- 3. Scale of Mercy** Mercy and forgiveness may not be readily affirmed in our culture, but they are important attitudes and practices for Jesus’ disciples. Making a scale with mercy heavier than anger is a visual reminder of how God is merciful, and how we can extend such loving mercy to others. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Scale of Mercy) and follow the directions to make balance scales.

CLOSING

Gather the group in a circle and light the Christ candle. Invite learners to tell about what they wrote or made in Responding. Encourage them to say one thing they will remember from Jesus’ teaching about forgiveness.

Play “Circle of Love” (track 12 on *Singing the Feast*, vol. 1). Encourage learners to sing along and move their bodies in time with the music.

Close with a circle blessing. In turn, each learner will turn to the person on her or his right and say: “Forgive others as God forgives you.” The person on the right will respond with “Amen.” Begin this blessing with the person on your right.

Thank each child for being a part of the learning session and invite her or him to come again.

Scale of Mercy

Make a simple balance scale as a reminder that God's mercy and love are more powerful than God's anger.

Materials Needed:

1 wire coat hanger
 2 paper cups
 5" x 8" piece of card stock or heavy paper
 string or yarn
 ruler
 permanent markers
 several small stones or pennies
 scissors
 tape

Directions:

1. Punch a hole near the top of the card stock or heavy paper.
2. Write on the paper: **God's Scale of Mercy.**
3. Put the hook of the clothes hanger through the hole in the paper.
4. On one paper cup, write the word **mercy** with a permanent marker. On the other cup, write the word **anger**.
5. Punch two holes near the top of each cup, directly across from each other.
6. Cut two pieces of string or yarn 14 inches long.
7. Thread one string through the holes in each cup. Tie one string to each end of the hanger. Secure the string to the hanger with tape.
8. Place several pennies or small stones in the cup marked **mercy**.
9. Find a place to hang your balance scale at home to remind you that God's merciful love is strong. God's mercy is more than we deserve. Knowing God's mercy for us helps us to forgive others.

