



Jesus Calls Us to Forgive

Goal: To practice forgiving another person.

RECOGNIZING GOD’S GRACE . . .

. . . In Matthew 18:21–35

One of the hardest things to do is forgive. When we are wronged, our first instinct is to strike back, to gain revenge. We want what is due to us, no matter what!

When Peter asked Jesus how often he should forgive someone who sinned against him, he suggested, “as many as seven times?” This may have seemed to be generous to Peter. However, Jesus responded, “Not seven times” but “seventy-seven times.” Jesus meant there should be no limit set for forgiving.

We must pray to be ready to forgive others, always. Forgiveness can purge our hearts of hatred. Forgiveness can free us from living with the burden of a desire for revenge. However, even more, we forgive others because, by grace, God has forgiven our sins in Jesus Christ. In Jesus’ parable of the unforgiving servant, the king forgave the servant, but the servant would not forgive someone who owed him. The king said, “Shouldn’t you also have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?” (v. 33, CEB).

We forgive others—without limit—because God has forgiven us—without limit. Jesus calls us to forgive, just as Jesus forgives us. We are grateful!

. . . In Your Children’s Experiences

When you think about the most important words we teach our children, “please,” “thank you,” and “I’m sorry” are probably at the top of the list. Children need help understanding the behavior of others. They also need our help in interpreting their actions and how important it is to treat others in the way they want to be treated. Peter’s question to Jesus, which prompted the parable, is still relevant for us today. In a culture where stories about hate and revenge are endless, we have a different story for children to learn—one that teaches about forgiveness and mercy.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

This is the Fourth Sunday in Lent. The children will hear one of Jesus’ parables about forgiveness. You have an excellent opportunity to invite children to consider the season of Lent as a time of personal reflection on how Jesus wants us to live. Invite children to share examples from their life of how they needed to forgive someone or how somebody forgave them for something they did. Lent is a time for making room for living gratefully and with grace.

*Dear God, you forgive me as I forgive and even more.
Give me a heart of grace and mercy toward others. Amen.*

Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 4, 20, 22, 25

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

blanket or mats

snack

Guided Play

choice 1: white
envelopes

choice 2: books such
as *Bruno's Hat* by
Canizales and/or *What
in the World Is Wrong
with Gisbert?* by Jochen
Weebeer

choice 3: container of
many small stones

Exploring

choice 1: gift-wrapped
box (with removable
lid), copies of **Grace
Notes (GN) 1**, gift
envelopes from “Guided
Play” choice 1

choice 2: container of
small stones

choice 4: copies of **GN 2**

GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Before the Children Arrive

Designate a story corner and lay out a blanket or individual mats for the children so their backs will be to the door.

Use **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual Schedule,” to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM iii–iv** for the key to icons (for example,  ) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

Select the activities that will work best for you and for your children. You do not need to do everything suggested!

Before the session, Obtain *Bruno's Hat* by Canizales (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, copyright 2018), pcusastore.com, and/or *What in the World Is Wrong with Gisbert?* by Jochen Weebeer (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, copyright 2018).

“Exploring God’s Grace” choice 1 and choice 2 require more prep.

Welcoming and Guided Play



Greet the children and parents/caregivers by name and with the words “Grace and peace to you.” Prompt the children to respond with “And also with you.” Explain that the children will hear how much Jesus wants us to forgive each other.

Introduce children to your helper or helpers. Invite children to look at the guided-play activities and pick one to start:

- 1. Making a Gift Envelope**—Explain to the children that later they will be putting something special in the envelopes. Invite them to decorate the envelopes with drawings and designs. You may want the children to make more than one gift envelope if you have a plan for giving extras to family or friends. Save the envelopes for “Exploring God’s Grace” choice 1.
- 2. Reading Books**—Have books on feelings, handling emotions, and getting along with others. Use books like *Bruno's Hat* by Canizales or *What in the World Is Wrong with Gisbert?* by Jochen Weebeer. If possible, have an adult in this center to read to the children and interact with them.
- 3. Counting**—Invite the children to sit in a circle on the floor. Scatter seven small stones on the floor. Lead the group in counting the stones. Show the children a container of many stones. Wonder aloud how many there are. Dump all the stones out and ask the children to help you put them back in the container. There should be lots and lots of stones!

 Use the visual schedule to alert children of changes in the session.



Transitioning to Story Time

When the children are ready, call them to the story corner, singing “Hello, Hello! How Are You?”—**SCM 22**. Repeat words and phrases as seems appropriate. Ask the children to shake hands as they sing and to remember that Jesus loves them.

Hug Tag

M TD MS

Substitute hugging with an elbow bump if you have children who resist hugging.

Begin with one child who is “It.” Others run and try not to be tagged. If you are tagged, you become “frozen.” The only way to become unfrozen and get back in the game is for someone to hug you and say, “Jesus loves you.”

Variation: Someone is “It.” Others run and try not to be tagged. The only way to be safe from being tagged is to hug someone else and both say, “Jesus loves you.” If you are tagged before you can get hugged, you become “It.”

Child of God

MS

Invite the children to stand with you and follow your actions as you lead them in a motion poem adapted from the rhyme “Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear, Turn Around.” Laugh out loud and rejoice in the grace of God!

Child of God, child of grace, turn around. (*turn around in place*)

Child of God, child of grace, touch the ground. (*touch the floor in front of you*)

Child of God, child of grace, reach up high. (*reach arms high above your head*)

Child of God, child of grace, wink one eye. (*wink one eye*)

Child of God, child of grace, climb the stairs. (*use arms and legs to pretend to climb*)

Child of God, child of grace, say your prayers. (*fold hands in front of you*)

Child of God, child of grace, touch your nose. (*touch your nose*)

Child of God, child of grace, touch your toes. (*reach down and touch your toes*)

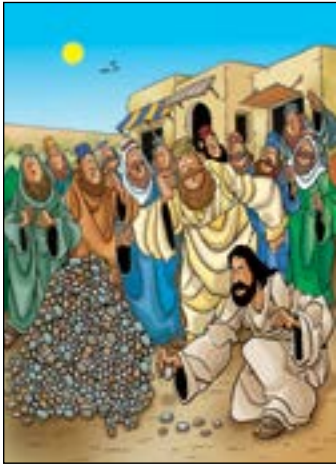
Child of God, child of grace, knock on wood. (*pretend to knock on a door*)

Child of God, child of grace, we are all good! (*hug yourself*)

Child of God, child of grace, turn around. (*turn around in place*)

Child of God, child of grace, sit right down. (*sit down on floor*)

MS Make sure children with mobility issues are included in all activities.



Hearing the Story



Open a Bible to Matthew 18. Comment that we read the Bible to hear stories about all of God's people. Tell the children that today's story is about a story Jesus told about forgiving others.

Read **SCM 4**. Express the emotions of the story in your voice, gestures, and facial expressions. Conclude the story by prompting the children to say, "Amen."

Ask the children what Peter's question was. Ask what Jesus' answer was. You may have to help the children remember "seventy times seven," words that may not be easily understood. Wonder what Jesus meant when he said that. Help the children understand that Jesus wants us to forgive many, many times, more times than we can count.

Display a sheet of newsprint. Tell the children that whenever they hear the words *forgive*, *forgave*, or *forgiving*, they should raise their hands, and you will make a big mark on the paper. Read the story again, omitting italicized questions and pausing to make marks on the paper. There will be seven marks. Have the children count the marks with you. Ask them if Jesus said seven times was enough to forgive someone. Ask them how much we should forgive others. Invite the children to make marks on the newsprint with markers. Encourage them to make many, many marks.

EXPLORING GOD'S GRACE



1. Giving a Gift of Grace



*Before the session, make copies of **GN 1**. Make one for every child and some extras for visitors. Put each child's name on the letter and sign the bottom. (If there are visitors, put their names on a letter as they arrive.) Place the letters in a gift box. Have extra blank letters and envelopes available.*

Open the gift box and tell the children that there is a letter for each of them. Read a letter. Explain that the letter helps them know something amazing and wonderful about God. Comment on how amazing it is that God will always love us no matter what.

Give the children their letters. Allow time for the children to add heart stickers or to draw hearts on their letters. Help them fold the letters and put them in the gift envelopes made in "Guided Play" choice 1. Write their names on the envelopes.

Challenge them to take their letters home and ask someone to read the letter to them often.

If you have extra letters, ask the children to name people to give them to. Write the persons' names on the letters and on the extra envelopes. Help the children sign their name at the bottom. Help the children deliver the gifts of grace.



LG Help children build a firm foundation by telling them the stories that Jesus told and by modeling the behaviors—prayer, study, and service—that put Jesus’ words into action.



2. Counting Forgiveness

F L LD

Place a container of small stones in front of you. If you have seven or more children, count out the small stones and give them to the children. Ask the children to help you count. Give one stone to the first child, two stones to the second, three stones to the third, and so on up to seven.

If you have fewer than seven children, choose numbers between one and seven, giving seven to one child. Encourage the children to remember the number of stones they have. Change the numbers in the questions below to reflect the numbers the children chose.

Then do a question and response with the children:

You: How many times should I forgive someone? One time?
(Child with one stone holds it up.)

Children: No.

You: Should I forgive two times? (Child with two stones holds them up.)

Children: No.

You: Should I forgive three times? (Child with three stones holds them up.)

Children: No. (Continue up to seven.)

You: Then how many times should I forgive someone?

Children: Seventy times seven.

Ask the children how much seventy times seven is. The number doesn’t matter; simply convey the idea that it is a lot. Spill the container of small stones on the floor. Tell them that seventy times seven is more than all the stones on the floor. Ask the children to help count the stones as you put them back in the container.

3. Celebrating Forgiveness

M MS

Play “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus in the Morning”—**SCM 20**. Provide rhythm instruments and streamers. Encourage the children to play the instruments and dance to the music. Suggest movements like extending their arms forward and opening the palms of their hands to represent God giving them a gift.

Explain that, in their dancing, they are celebrating the grace and love of God, a God who forgives us and who invites us to forgive others. What movements could they make with the streamers that represent God’s forgiveness and love? Encourage the children to be creative and free in their movements. Exclaim how glad you are for God’s gift of grace, a love bigger than we can imagine.



Use “wonder” questions that do not force a child to remember facts. Wondering questions help a child think aloud. Answers are neither right nor wrong. They help teach children to speak from their hearts.

4. Coloring Page

C

Hand out copies of **GN 2** and crayons. Invite the children to color **GN 2** and tell you about the story. Engage the children in conversation as they color, using the following wondering questions:

- ▼ I wonder, “How many stones are in the pile?”
- ▼ I wonder, “Where might all of the stones come from?”
- ▼ I wonder, “How did the disciples feel about having to forgive many, many times?”

LOVING AND SERVING GOD

F FA

Have each child put away one toy or object.

Invite the children to sit around a table or on the floor.

Sing “Thank You, Jesus”—**SCM 25**—while you serve the snack.

Encourage the children to remember to both ask for forgiveness when they do something wrong and forgive others when someone hurts their feelings.

Say a closing prayer, inviting the children to repeat after you:

Dear God, /
thank you for Jesus, /
who shows us your ways. /
Help us to be kind and forgiving /
as you would have us be. /
In Jesus’ name, we pray. /
Amen.

As the children leave, bless them: “(Name), be kind and forgiving to others. The grace of God is with you.”



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so that you can provide them with the link to www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads, where they can download coloring pages, *Grace Sightings*, audio stories, and songs (see p. vii).

Dear _____,

You are God's child. All of God's children receive the gift of grace. That means that God will love you no matter what. Sometimes God may not like what you do. But, God has promised to always love you, always forgive you, and always help you to do better.

In grace, with gratitude,



Jesus Calls Us to Forgive



Jesus said to forgive others many, many times!

