

Semicontinuous
Exod. 12:1–14
Ps. 149

Complementary
Ezek. 33:7–11
Ps. 119:33–40

Rom. 13:8–14
Matt. 18:15–20

All Together Now

**Goal for
the Session**

*Tweens will learn more about Jesus' ways of healing conflicts
and his promise to be with us.*

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Matthew 18:15–20

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Mitchell G. Reddish

Even though this passage is primarily concerned with matters of church discipline, the emphasis throughout is on trying to reclaim the offender, not to punish him or her; this is made clear by the context in which Matthew has placed these verses. Preceding this passage is the parable of the Lost Sheep (18:10–14), with its emphasis on the joy that comes from recovering one who has gone astray; following it is Jesus' saying about forgiveness and the parable of the Unforgiving Debtor (18:21–25), which emphasizes the need for unbounded forgiveness.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Charles Hambrick-Stowe

Jesus' saying in verse 18 is susceptible to multiple interpretations. In light of his teaching on life in the church as the locus of God's mission in the world, and this verse's echo of the Lord's Prayer (God's will being done “on earth as it is in heaven”), Jesus could mean this: if we in the church do not forgive and heal, who on earth is going to do it? If the church—no matter how small, even just two or three believers—will agree in Christ and seek prayerfully to do the will of God, then God will respond. The church will really be the church, because Jesus will be present.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Jin S. Kim

In this passage, Jesus seems to assume that there will be conflict among his followers. What makes us Christian is not *whether* or not we fight, disagree, or wound one another, but *how* we go about addressing and resolving those issues. When we enter into membership in Christian community, we bind ourselves to one another with Christ as our head. We are not free *from* each other; we are free *in* each other. In other words, we are most free when we bring the collective wisdom and discernment of the whole diverse body of Christ together. The ministry of reconciliation must be at the heart of any Christian community's mission.

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

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Dale P. Andrews

Scholars remind us that these verses have been called the Rule of Christ because they redefine the goals of confrontation or intervention in seeking to rescue and forgive, to offer care in a spirit of humility. Discipleship in Christ is conditioned by more than the sense of call and sacrifice in ministry to the world. Being in Christ involves living into the difficult discipline or discipleship of fellowship. We seek to care for one another even when injured or offended, which requires discipline in binding and loosing ourselves to repent and to forgive, all sustained in Christ.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Matthew 18:15–20

Focus on Your Teaching

Tweens know conflict with others is inevitable. Whether they’ve experienced arguments with classmates, the end of formerly strong friendships, disagreements with siblings, or confrontations with parents, tweens have no illusions that everyone gets along all the time. They also have no patience for easy platitudes about “loving one another,” even in the church. Christians are people, and tweens see God’s people fight—if not in their own congregations, then in denominational arguments that make headlines. While acknowledging that believing in Jesus doesn’t magically end conflicts, you can help tweens appreciate his teachings as tools for resolving them.

Jesus, open my mind and heart to your ways of working through conflict for everyone’s good and for God’s glory. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ green cloth
- ☐ battery-powered candle
- ☐ Color Pack 3, 27, 28
- ☐ Resource Sheet 1
- ☐ prepared puzzle pieces (see Resource Sheet 1)
- ☐ copies of Resource Sheet 2
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ writing paper
- ☐ pens or pencils
- ☐ 2" x 12" construction paper strips
- ☐ markers, crayons
- ☐ tape or stapler

For Responding

- ☐ option 2: internet-connected devices

■ LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, prepare the materials for Gathering, following the instructions on Resource Sheet 1 (In Christ, We All Fit Together). Display Color Pack 3 in your meeting space. If you are using option 3 in Responding, invite one or two church members to join your group. Ask them to be prepared to talk about specific times they sensed Jesus was present with the congregation.

As you greet learners, take time to make sure learners know each other’s names. Gather the group by playing “Amazing Grace” (Color Pack 27; track 1 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024). Invite tweens to sing along as they arrange the green cloth in the center of your learning space and place the candle on it. Light the candle as a reminder of Jesus’ presence.

Show Color Pack 3, and explain that the English letter “X” looks like the Greek letter *chi*, which is the first letter in the Greek word for “Christ.” Christ is a title for Jesus that means “anointed one.” When we call Jesus the Christ, we proclaim that God anointed—chose—Jesus for a holy purpose. The Greek *chi* is sometimes used as a symbol for Christ.

Lead the opening ritual as given on Resource Sheet 1.

- ✠ This week’s question for discussion: “What’s the dumbest argument you’ve ever had?”
- ✠ This week’s opening prayer:

Lord Jesus, you promise to be with us when we gather in your name. May your Spirit help us grow as your faithful followers. Amen.

Amazing Grace

Amazing grace, how sweet
the sound,
That saved someone like me.
I once was lost but now am
found,
Was blind, but now I see.

Through many dangers,
toils, and snares
I have already come;
'Tis grace that brought me
safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.

When we've been here ten
thousand years
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing
God's praise
Than when we'd first begun.

EXPLORING

Form two teams, A and B. Give these instructions along with writing paper and pens or pencils: Team A will work together to make a list of the three worst ways to handle an argument. Team B will work together to make a list of the three best ways to handle an argument. Try to have teams work in different spaces, so that they will not hear each other's discussions.

After three minutes, call the teams back for a "Family Feud"-style game. Have one contestant from Team B attempt to guess what is on Team A's list, and vice versa. Allow only one guess per contestant; award one point if the guess is on the other team's list, two points if the guess is the number one item on the list. Teammates can suggest answers; ultimately, however, only the contestant can guess.

After the game, ask learners to tell about any disagreements their teams experienced when compiling their lists and how they handled those conflicts. Also talk about any disagreements that arose when teammates were trying to tell their contestants what to guess.

Ask tweens to find Matthew 18:15–17 in their Bibles; assist as needed. Ask for three volunteers to read aloud, one verse each. After the reading, ask:

- ✠ How is Jesus' approach to healing conflict similar to or different from the approaches listed by Team A and Team B in our game?
- ✠ How do you think Jesus' approach to resolving conflicts would work at home and at school?

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Gentiles and Tax Collectors). Ask for volunteers to read aloud the paragraphs. Assign the Bible passages to pairs of students, who can read the verses and report their findings to the whole group. Discuss:

- ✠ What attitudes toward Gentiles and tax collectors did you find in these Bible verses?
- ✠ Keeping these Bible passages in mind, how do you understand the meaning of Jesus' words in Matthew 18:17?

Bring your group's "chain" of names into the congregation's worship space to illustrate Matthew 18:20. Encourage worship planners to provide materials for all worshipers to add their own links to the chain.

Give two strips of construction paper (2" x 12") to each group member. Have learners write their own names on one strip and Jesus' name on the other. Invite them to decorate the strips with markers and crayons. When all are finished, read aloud Matthew 18:18–20. Ask:

- ✠ Why do you think Jesus wants us, his followers, to find ways to work out our disagreements with one another?

Have tweens use tape or a stapler to join the strips together into a paper chain, alternating links with students' names and links with Jesus' name. Display the chain in your classroom as a reminder of Jesus' promise to be with his followers when they gather in his name.

EASY
PREP

Food Option: Amish Friendship Bread takes ten days to make and is meant to be shared. Find recipes online; print and give copies to tweens to try at home to reinforce that building and nurturing relationships takes work and time.

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Act It Out** Challenge small groups of tweens to create a skit in which characters are caught up in an interpersonal conflict. They might have the characters deal with the conflict by applying Jesus' principles to the situation or by ignoring Jesus' principles and coping with the consequences. (As necessary, ask tweens to create a realistic but fictional conflict—not one currently playing itself out in a classmate's life—so as to avoid hurting feelings and making a real conflict worse.)
- 2. Ripped from the Headlines** As they watch news reports, tweens may wonder how Jesus' teachings might make a difference in their community and in the world. Invite learners, individually or in pairs, to look online for stories about conflict. The stories might reflect large-scale political conflict or more personal examples from sports news or pop culture. Have tweens briefly tell the whole group about their chosen stories. Together, wonder in what ways Jesus' teachings might make a difference in these situations.
- 3. I Am There among Them** Help tweens learn about times when members of your congregation have sensed the truth of Jesus' promise in Matthew 18:20. Invite your guest(s) to tell your group about specific times they sensed Jesus was present with the congregation. Alternatively, have tweens visit with church members during coffee hour or at a midweek church event. If available, ask them to use cameras or phones that take videos to conduct "person on the street"-style interviews, recording church members' responses to present to the entire group.

CLOSING

Gather the group. Invite tweens to tell one thing from today's session that they intend to try the next time they find themselves in a conflict.

Reaffirm your gratitude for each learner's presence, and invite them to join you in the following litany prayer. Repeat the leader's line for each learner.

Leader: God, we praise you for (name each learner, in turn). *Thank you for* (briefly name something about the same learner to celebrate, gleaned from the session or from your knowledge of him or her—such as, "for the way she asks good questions," "for his great sense of humor").

Tweens: Praise the Lord!

Sing "I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me" (Color Pack 28; track 11 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024). Lead the closing charge:

Leader: We are ready to live so God can use us.

All: Go with God! Amen!

Extinguish the candle. Say good-bye to each tween by name.

I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me

I'm gonna live so God can
use me
anywhere, Lord, anytime!
I'm gonna live so God can
use me
anywhere, Lord, anytime!

I'm gonna work . . .

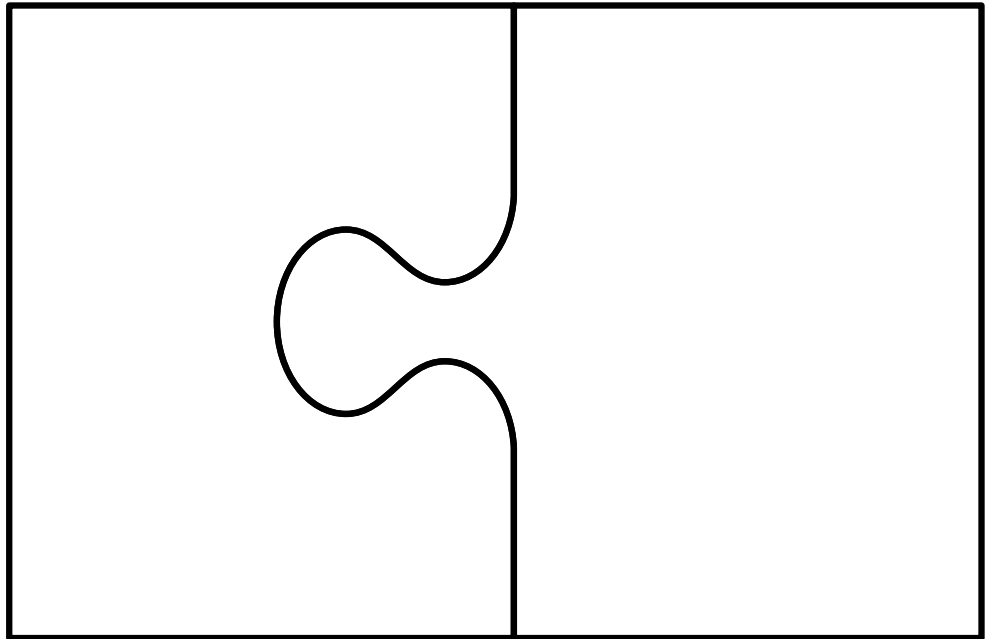
I'm gonna share . . .

I'm gonna care . . .

In Christ, We ALL Fit Together

For the next six sessions (September 10—October 15), use this gathering activity and worship ritual. It will help learners get to know one another better, and introduce the theme of each week's focus text.

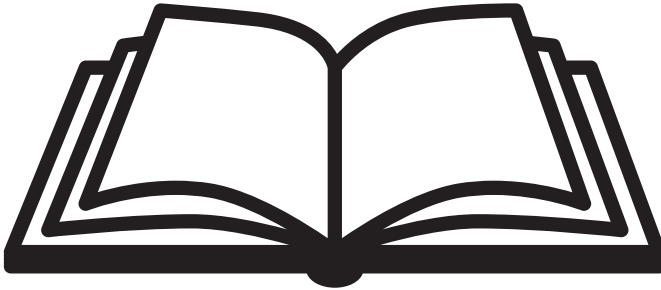
1. Trace the template below to prepare puzzle pieces. Make each pair of interlocking pieces from a different color of card stock or poster board. Prepare enough pairs so each tween will have one piece.



Directions for Each Session (September 10—October 15)

1. As tweens arrive, give each one a prepared puzzle piece.
2. Have learners pair up by connecting puzzle pieces of the same color.
3. Give pairs two minutes to talk about the question for discussion given in Gathering.
5. Join together in this litany, having learners memorize their response:
Leader: Sometimes we're puzzles to ourselves and each other,
but in Christ . . .
Tweens: In Christ, we all fit together!
Leader: Sometimes we puzzle about what God wants us to do,
but in Christ . . .
Tweens: In Christ, we all fit together!
Leader: God fits us together in Jesus; peace be to the pieces of Christ!
6. Exchange handshakes, hugs, or high-fives of peace with each other.
7. Collect the puzzle pieces for use in the sessions through October 15.

Gentiles and Tax Collectors



In the Bible, the word *Gentiles* refers to people who are not Jewish. Gentiles couldn't trace their ancestry back to Abraham's son Isaac. Gentiles didn't follow all the laws that God gave through Moses. Many Jews in Jesus' time did not trust Gentiles. Some Jews even hated Gentiles.

Tax collectors in the area where Jesus lived usually were Jewish. However, they worked for the Roman Empire, whose leaders were Gentiles. They had

permission to collect more money than taxpayers actually owed. They kept the extra as their salary. Some tax collectors made huge profits.

Below are some Bible passages that refer to Gentiles and tax collectors. Put X next to the passages that seem to express negative attitudes toward Gentiles. Put ✓ next to those that seem to express positive attitudes.

☐

Ruth 1:16–18

Ruth, a woman from the land of Moab, pledges loyalty to her Hebrew mother-in-law, Naomi.

☐

Nehemiah 13:1–3

The Jews who return to Palestine after the Babylonian Exile separate themselves from foreigners.

☐

1 Kings 8:41–43

King Solomon prays to dedicate the temple in Jerusalem.

☐

Mark 7:24–30

A Gentile woman begs Jesus to heal her daughter.

☐

Luke 19:1–5, 8

Jesus invites himself to the home of Zacchaeus, a tax collector.

☐

John 4:7–10, 39

Jesus asks a Samaritan woman for a drink.