

Semicontinuous
Exod. 14:19–31
Ps. 114

Complementary
Exod. 15:1b–11, 20–21
Gen. 50:15–21
Ps. 103:(1–7) 8–13
Rom. 14:1–12
Matt. 18:21–35

Fulsome Forgiveness

Goal for the Session

Tweens will recognize, through Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant, the importance of practicing forgiveness.

■ 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

Matthew 18:21–35

Focus on Your Teaching

Grudges, resentments, desire for “payback”—these emotions can be powerful for adults, and even more so for tweens, who are immersed in discovering and defending their identities. To tweens, Jesus’ call to forgive those who sin against us, repeatedly and radically, may sound naive at best, dangerous at worst. When we forgive, however, we can break the past’s power over us. We can grow as faithful Christians and as healthy human beings. Help the tweens in your group define themselves not by how others have wronged them, but by how God in Jesus loves them.

*God, you have shown me immeasurable mercy, through Jesus Christ.
May your Spirit increase in me the mercy I show others. Amen.*

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ green cloth
- ☐ battery-powered candle
- ☐ Color Pack 3, 27, 28
- ☐ prepared puzzle pieces (see Resource Sheet 1, September 10)
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ newsprint
- ☐ Resource Sheet 1
- ☐ copies of Resource Sheet 2
- ☐ pens or pencils
- ☐ markers
- ☐ calculator(s)
- ☐ digital camera (optional)
- ☐ *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024; CD player

For Responding

- ☐ option 1: your congregation’s hymnal or order of worship
- ☐ option 2: copies of Resource Sheet 2, pencils
- ☐ option 3: Internet-connected device

■ LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, prepare seven sheets of newsprint according to the directions on Resource Sheet 1 (Significant Sevens) and post them around your meeting space.

Welcome each learner by name. 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 your learning space and place the candle on it. Light the candle as a reminder of Jesus’ presence.

Looking at Color Pack 3, briefly review the significance of the “X” or *chi* image as a symbol or “shorthand” for Christ. Affirm that, even though we are all different, we are all united in Jesus Christ.

Lead the opening ritual on Resource Sheet 1 from September 10 (In Christ, We All Fit Together).

✠ This week’s question for discussion: “When is the first time you can remember somebody owing you something?”

✠ For this week’s opening prayer, pray the Lord’s Prayer, using the version your church uses in worship.

EXPLORING

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Numbers). Invite learners to complete “Magic Number?” on their own, writing down the answer to each step. When all have finished, amaze the group by announcing that they have all arrived at the same answer—seven. Invite any math-gifted tweens to explain why this trick always works.

For a challenge, remind students that in last session's Bible passage, Jesus gave instructions for handling conflict. Read Matthew 18:15–17. Ask: Who in this parable seems to do the best job of following Jesus' earlier teaching?

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.

If your church worship
service today will focus
on Matthew 18:21–34,
preview the hymns that
will be sung, asking:
Why do you think our
worship planners chose
these hymns/songs for
today's service?

**EASY
PREP**

Comment that the number seven isn't really magic, but it often receives special attention. Challenge the tweens to fill in the blank lists of "Significant Sevens" posted around the meeting space (see Resource Sheet 1). Turn the entire group loose to complete the lists as quickly as possible. For extra fun, consider setting a time limit of seventy-seven seconds! Afterward, check the lists against those on Resource Sheet 1.

Tell how in ancient Judaism, as in many other cultures and religions of that day, the number seven was used as a symbol of completeness and perfection. Ask tweens to find Matthew 18:21–22 in their Bibles. Ask a volunteer to read aloud these verses. Discuss:

- ✂ What does Jesus' answer to Peter's question mean?
- ✂ When is it easy to forgive someone? When is it hard?
- ✂ Why do you think Jesus wants us to forgive others?
- ✂ Do you think Jesus is telling us to "forgive and forget"? Why or why not?
- ✂ Are there some things that can't be forgiven? Why or why not?

Recruit volunteers to play the following roles (all seven, if class size allows; if not, at least the first three): the king, the two slaves, the first slave's wife and child, and two fellow slaves. Tell them you will read Matthew 18:23–34 aloud, pausing at certain points. At those points, the actors are to form a tableau—a frozen, pantomimed scene—to illustrate what has just been read. Option: Ask a volunteer to snap a photo of each tableau to view later. As you read Matthew 18:23–34, pause for a tableau at each of the following points (you may want to mark a Bible or copy of the text beforehand):

- ✂ verse 26: the first slave begs for mercy
- ✂ verse 27: the king forgives the first slave's debt
- ✂ verse 28: the first slave demands payment from the second slave
- ✂ verse 29: the second slave asks for time
- ✂ verse 30: the first slave imprisons the second
- ✂ verse 31: other slaves report to the king
- ✂ verse 34: the king orders the first slave tortured

After the performance, ask:

- ✂ What is Jesus' point in this parable?
- ✂ How do you think God is like the king in Jesus' story? How is God not like the king?
- ✂ When have you been like the first slave? When have you been like the second slave?

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

1. **Worship Connection** To help students see how Jesus' call to forgiveness shapes Christian worship, look together in your congregation's order of worship for a prayer or rite of confession. Look also for hymns and songs about the forgiveness God gives us and the forgiveness God calls us to give others. Choose one hymn or song to sing together.

2. **Brother, Can You Spare a Denarius?** To help students appreciate the sums of money involved in Jesus' parable, ask them to solve the problems on the bottom half of Resource Sheet 2 (Numbers). Have calculators handy. Answers: 1. \$120; 2. \$12,000 (100 denarii = 100 days' wages); 3. \$37,440; 4. \$561,600 (312 days x 15 years) 5. \$5,616,000,000; 6. .000214 percent. Getting the right answers isn't as important as understanding that what the second slave owes the first slave pales in comparison to what the first slave owes the king! We can see the "debts" others owe us, even when they are real and significant, in a new perspective in light of our debt to God.
3. **Forgiveness on Film** To facilitate discussion of forgiveness, show a scene from a popular film that highlights some aspect of forgiveness. Some suggestions: *Spider-Man 3* (Peter Parker forgives the Sandman for killing Uncle Ben—bit.ly/FOWSpidermanForgive); *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Rowley and Greg reconcile—bit.ly/FOWWhimpyKid). If showing a clip isn't possible, invite tweens to tell about movies and television shows they have seen that address forgiveness. To what extent do these films reflect Jesus' teaching? What would Jesus' teaching have us do differently?

CLOSING

Gather learners and invite them to tell one new thought they have about forgiveness as a result of today's session.

This closing may stir strong emotions. Be sensitive to and ready to respond to any need for pastoral care that arises.

Close your time together with a quiet moment of prayer. Play "Music for Meditation" (track 16 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024). Ask tweens to close their eyes and think about someone who has wronged them. Tell them they won't have to name this person aloud. Ask learners to clench their hands as tightly as possible, letting whatever anger and sadness they may feel flow into their fists. Then lead them in this "breath prayer," inspired by Matthew 18:33:

(*inhaling*) "Should we not have mercy . . ."

(*exhaling*) ". . . as God has had mercy on us?"

Repeat the breath prayer several times, instructing learners to gradually unclench their fists with each exhalation.

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 . . .

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.

Significant Sevens

Before the session, prepare seven sheets of newsprint by labeling each sheet with one of the categories listed below (or substitute lists of seven items with which you think your students may be more familiar). On each sheet, write the numbers 1–7 in list format, but do not fill in the answers. Post the newsprint sheets around your meeting space.

Snow White's Seven Dwarfs

1. Grumpy
2. Happy
3. Sleepy
4. Sneezy
5. Bashful
6. Dopey
7. Doc

The Seven Colors of the Spectrum

1. Red
2. Orange
3. Yellow
4. Green
5. Blue
6. Indigo
7. Violet

The Seven Harry Potter Titles: Harry Potter and the . . .

1. *Sorcerer's (or Philosopher's) Stone*
2. *Chamber of Secrets*
3. *Prisoner of Azkaban*
4. *Goblet of Fire*
5. *Order of the Phoenix*
6. *Half-Blood Prince*
7. *Deathly Hallows*

The Seven Original Superheroes of the Justice League Cartoon

1. Superman
2. Batman
3. Wonder Woman
4. The Flash
5. Green Lantern
6. Hawkgirl
7. Martian Manhunter (a.k.a. J'onn J'onzz)

What God Created in Seven Days of Creation

1. Light
2. Sky
3. Dry land (with vegetation) and seas
4. Sun, moon, and stars
5. Sea animals and birds
6. Land animals and human beings
7. God rested

The Seven Deadly Sins

1. Lust
2. Gluttony
3. Greed
4. Sloth
5. Wrath
6. Envy
7. Pride

The Seven New Wonders of the World

1. Chichen Itza (Mexico)
2. "Christ the Redeemer" Statue (Brazil)
3. The Colosseum (Italy)
4. The Taj Mahal (India)
5. The Great Wall of China (China)
6. Petra (Jordan)
7. Machu Picchu (Peru)

Numbers

Magic Number?

1. Pick a number _____
2. Add 10 to it _____
3. Multiply it by 2 _____
4. Subtract 6 _____
5. Divide by 2 _____
6. Subtract your original number _____

Your Answer: _____

Brother, Can You Spare a Denarius?

In Jesus' day, a common laborer earned one denarius a day. The denarius was a Roman coin. To imagine what one denarius would be worth today, complete this calculation:

1. One denarius equals one day's pay:
 $\$15.00/\text{hour} \times 8 \text{ hours (standard workday)} =$
\$ _____ per day
2. How much did the second slave in Jesus' story, Matthew 18:28, owe to the first slave?
\$ _____
3. A worker could earn one talent in 15 years. Let's assume this king worked his servants hard—312 days a year! How much money would a servant earn in 312 days (see 1. above)?
\$ _____
4. One talent = \$ _____
5. The first slave owed the king ten thousand talents.
Ten thousand talents = \$ _____
6. The second slave's debt to the first slave is what percentage of the first slave's debt to the king? _____

