

Forgiveness

Session 5 • Matthew 18:21-35



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*). Make copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew’s Gospel*) and **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: Interpreting Parables*).

ASK: Why is it often so difficult to forgive someone who has offended you? (p. 41)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 41. Stress that forgiveness sometimes comes easily, but it often remains a struggle—even for believers.

IDENTIFY: Direct adults to **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*), pointing out that the study is drawn from Jesus’s fourth major discourse in Matthew’s Gospel. Summarize this content from **Understand the Context** (p. 41) to provide background for this discourse:

- “The immaturity of the disciples led Jesus to teach extensively about relationships. First, He placed a small child in their midst. Referring to the child, Jesus pointed out that the greatest in the kingdom of heaven was the one who, like a child, was characterized by humility. . . . Jesus spoke of ‘little ones,’ by which He was speaking figuratively of those who follow Him.

He gave a stern warning about causing a fellow believer to stumble. The one who caused ‘one of these little ones . . . to fall away’ would be better off suffering a terrible drowning than to face God’s wrath for their actions (vv. 6-9).”

TRANSITION: *Believers are called to demonstrate humility and to care for one another. Those are kingdom values. Another important kingdom value is forgiveness. As we study this session, remember that we should forgive as Jesus forgives. Look for ways to apply that forgiveness in practical ways each day.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Matthew 18:21-22** as the group reflects on the significance of “seven.”

ASK: What do you think is a reasonable number of times to forgive someone who hurts you? (p. 43)

RECAP: Share that the phrase “Peter approached” (v. 21) links Peter’s question about forgiveness to Jesus’s previous teaching about relationships in verses 1-20.

ASK: What kind of response do you think Peter expected from Jesus? (p. 43)

- **(18:21)** Peter’s proposal actually went beyond first-century rabbinic teaching, which held that individuals only needed to forgive repeated offenses three times. Peter more than doubled this total, increasing it to the number of perfection—seven times. Peter likely saw this as a generous and gracious expansion on conventional wisdom. But Jesus’s response didn’t give Peter a new number to count. It gave him a new theology to live out.

PRAY: Emphasize that knowing about forgiveness means nothing without practicing it. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew’s Gospel*) to each adult—or invite them to scan the QR code for the **Explore the Bible Prayer Guide** (p. 11). Lead in a time of prayer, thanking God for His gracious forgiveness and asking Him for help in demonstrating forgiveness without keeping track.

INTRODUCE: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: Interpreting Parables*). Give an overview of the information and encourage them to read and reflect on it during the week in light of the many parables Jesus taught.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Jesus’s parable in Matthew 18:23-27 as the group records in the margin of their DDG what sticks out to them about the kingdom of God from this parable.

EXAMINE: Draw a three-column chart on the board with the following headings: *King*, *King’s Servant*, and *Other Servant*. Encourage adults to work in teams of two or three to

identify characteristics of the king and his servant in verses 23-27. After a few minutes, discuss their insights. Record their responses under the appropriate columns.

INFORM: Emphasize the desperate situation of the servant:

- **(18:23-24)** The king “wanted to settle accounts with his servants.” This means he had made up his mind that it was time for a day of reckoning. The servant—possibly a high official, like a governor or treasurer—was being called in to answer for his actions, along with other servants to the king. As it turned out the servant owed the king “ten thousand talents.” A talent was a measure of weight amounting to between 75 and 100 pounds. “Ten thousand” represents the highest number the Greek language could express in one word. The debt was a huge sum and impossible for the servant to repay. Throughout the parable, Jesus emphasized the servant’s inability to pay the debt.

ASK: How do you see grace at work in these verses? (p. 43)

TRANSITION: *Mercy and compassion are the only reasons the servant wasn’t punished; in no way did he earn it or deserve it. As humans, we deserve to suffer the consequences of our debt to God, but He made a way for us to find forgiveness through Jesus. As Jesus would soon show, that forgiveness should transform our lives.*

READ: Direct the group to read Matthew 18:28-35 silently, picturing the scene as it is described in the passage.

ASK: How much did the second servant owe? How does that contrast with the amount the first servant owed the king? (p. 43)

RECAP: Summarize the following to provide more insight into the debt the second man owed:

- **(18:28-30)** The servant who had been forgiven a huge debt went out from the king's presence and found one of his "fellow servants." *Found* may hint that he was searching for him. A "hundred denarii" was not a small sum since one denarius equaled an average laborer's daily pay. But compared to his own ten thousand talents of debt, it was a paltry sum. "But he wasn't willing" (v. 30) points to the fact that this forgiven servant made the deliberate choice to close his heart to mercy.

ASK: What are some dangers of believers failing to forgive others? (p. 43)

DISCUSS: Allow adults to share their responses. Lead a brief discussion related to the master's response. Remind adults that a believer who refuses to forgive cannot lose their salvation, but it will damage their fellowship with God and others.

FOCUS: Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 18:33 aloud. Explain that this is this week's memory verse and poses a great question to ponder throughout this week.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from this week's Bible passage:

- We are not to put limits on our willingness to forgive.
- We can know that God is compassionate and willing to forgive.
- We are to forgive one another in the way God has forgiven us.

DISCUSS: Challenge adults to consider which statement resonates most deeply with their own struggle to forgive.

ASK: Enlist a volunteer to read aloud the **Apply the Text** question on page 43. Be ready to share your own reasons for not forgiving another person. Stress that forgiveness is required and that relationships suffer when mercy and compassion are missing from the equation.

PRAY: Encourage adults to read and respond silently to the **Apply the Text** questions on page 47. Challenge them to pray for the people they have listed and for the relationships that are suffering from a lack of forgiveness. Close in prayer.

AFTER THE SESSION

Send an email or text to the group this week encouraging them to continue praying about relationships that need forgiveness. If the Lord leads you to forgive someone this week, share that with the group as appropriate. Encourage adults to continue using the **Explore the Bible Prayer Guide** to reflect on this week's passage.