

Forgive Others

MATTHEW 18:21-35

3



GOAL

Youth recall times of being forgiven and forgiving others, and consider the relationship between God forgiving them and them forgiving others.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- AT** Abstract Thinking
- C** Conversation
- CT** Concrete Thinking
- D** Drama
- G** Game
- M** Music
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Holy God, you graciously forgive me of my shortcomings and wrongdoing. Help me offer this forgiveness to others. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Jesus shows us what forgiving others looks like. In his model of prayer, Jesus teaches us—as we pray to be forgiven for our sins—to forgive those who have wronged us (Matthew 6:12). While dying on the cross, he prayed that those who put him there would be forgiven (Luke 23:34). In Jesus, we find a call to forgive one another as an act of faithfulness to God.

Forgiveness does not remove accountability or consequences for one's actions. Forgiveness does not forget the wrong. Forgiveness does, however, refuse to hold onto the wrong or to the desire for revenge. Forgiving one who has wronged us is a practice rooted in the free gift of God's mercy and grace. We forgive because God forgives us.

THE BIBLE STORY

In Matthew 18:21–22, Peter asks Jesus how many times he should forgive someone. “As many as seven times?” Jesus responds, “Not seven times, . . . seventy-seven times.” In other words, too many times to count.

In Matthew 18:23–35, Jesus tells the parable of the unforgiving servant who owes the king money. The amount owed by this servant is roughly 15 years of wages for an ordinary laborer, an astronomical sum. The servant's inability to pay his debt means the king can sell him, his family, and his possessions. The king hears his pleading and forgives the enormous debt. This same servant turns around and treats a fellow slave who owes him money with no sense of the mercy as he had just received.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

Adolescents are learning to process emotions and control behaviors. They can act impulsively, not thinking through consequences. Mistakes are naturally made as they learn how their actions impact others, sometimes in harmful ways. Admitting mistakes is difficult as it makes one vulnerable and open to criticism. Yet, when forgiveness is given, they can learn from the mistake and try again. Likewise, when others hurt them and admit to their mistakes, forgiveness is a way they can help restore relationships.

SESSION PREPARATION

- “Forgiving” (p. 24): Post the sheet of newsprint with the words to the responsive litany from session 1 (p. 6).

Depending on the options you choose:

- “Musical Chairs” (p. 24): Set up chairs, facing outward, in a tight circle.
- “The Gifts of Forgiving” (p. 26): Prepare newsprint by drawing and labeling the four quadrants named.

GETTING STARTED

- ☐ Newsprint and markers

WORD ASSOCIATION

AM CT

Welcome youth as they arrive and invite them to write on newsprint different words associated with forgiveness. Encourage them to cooperate, building upon one another's ideas and words. Gather the group. Ask:

- As you think about forgiving others, what words stand out? Circle them.
- What is challenging about forgiving others?

- ☐ Prepared newsprint with words to the litany from session 1 (p. 6)

FORGIVING

QC

Display the prepared newsprint with the responsive litany and invite the participants to join you in prayer.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

- ☐ Copies of Resource Page 1
- ☐ Pens
- ☐ Smartphones

FORGIVENESS CROSSWORD PUZZLE

CT G

Distribute copies of Resource Page 1 and pens. Have youth complete the crossword puzzle. They may use their smartphones to search for answers.

Answer Key to Forgiveness Crossword

Across:

- 4. Nineveh
- 5. Seven
- 7. Esau
- 8. Beauty and the Beast
- 9. Hiccup
- 11. Cain
- 12. Grinch

Down:

- 1. Frozen
- 2. The Last Jedi
- 3. Wreck It Ralph
- 5. Snape
- 6. Kevin
- 10. Coco

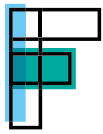
- ☐ Music and music player
- ☐ Chairs arranged in a circle facing out

MUSICAL CHAIRS

AM G X

Set up one less chair than you have players and have players stand in front of chairs facing left. Instruct them to find a seat quickly when the music stops. The person without a chair will tell a story about when they gave or received forgiveness. Share an example from your life before you begin. After the person standing tells their story, have them remove one chair and stand at the side to watch. Play until everyone has the opportunity to share at least one story.

Encourage youth to recognize forgiveness as something we deal with often, either consciously or unconsciously.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or both options.

COMIC STRIPS

A C

Distribute Bibles, paper, and colored pencils. Explain that Jesus often told parables, stories that teach a lesson. In Matthew 18:21–35, Jesus includes details that exaggerate the amount of money one person owes to another in making a point about forgiveness. Have volunteers take turns reading aloud Matthew 18:21–35.

Working individually or in pairs, have youth retell the Scripture passage as a comic strip. They may begin by drawing boxes on their paper, filling in the boxes with characters and actions from the story. Invite volunteers to show their comic strips. Discuss:

➡ How does this parable reflect God's forgiveness of us?

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- ☐ Bibles
 - ☐ Paper
 - ☐ Colored pencils



The slavery assumed in this parable was not chattel slavery, nor a permanent state of slavery, as in the pre-Civil War United States. Though an exploitative economic system, in this biblical setting, slavery was primarily a way of working off debt.

ACTING IT OUT

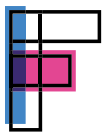
D AT

Explain that Jesus often told parables, stories that teach a lesson. In Matthew 18:21–35, Jesus includes details that exaggerate the amount of money one person owes to another in making a point about forgiveness. Have volunteers take turns reading aloud the Bible story.

Form groups of three or four to develop a modernized role play of the Bible story, putting themselves in the place of owing another a large debt of some kind: money, forgiveness, gratitude, etc. Have groups present their story. Discuss:

- ➡ What is the effect of forgiveness on each character in your story?
- ➡ How does forgiveness differ for larger or smaller debts? Why?
- ➡ How does this parable reflect God's forgiveness of us?

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- ☐ Bibles



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or more options.

STORIES OF FORGIVENESS

C

Form two groups. Have each group read one of the stories on Resource Page 2 and show the YouTube videos suggested. Gather as a large group and discuss:

- ➡ In each story, who was forgiven? How was forgiveness shown?
- ➡ Why did the communities forgive the people who hurt them?
- ➡ Does forgiveness mean forgetting or not holding someone accountable? How so?
- ➡ How do these stories reflect God's forgiveness?

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- ☐ Copies of Resource Page 2
 - ☐ Internet-connected devices or smartphones

☐ Internet-connected device

THE ACT OF FORGIVENESS

T C

South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu and his daughter Mpho cowrote a book on the process of forgiving called *The Book of Forgiving: The Fourfold Path for Healing Ourselves and Our World*. They describe the value that forgiving others has for oneself. Show “The Act of Forgiveness—The Today Show 3/8/2014” (bit.ly/FMActOfForgiveness, 3:34). Discuss:

- ➔ Are people who forgive extraordinary or ordinary? Why?
- ➔ What effect does forgiveness have on the person who has been hurt or treated wrongly?
- ➔ “Human life would be totally impossible without forgiveness.” What are your thoughts on this quotation?

☐ Internet-connected device

HOW TO FORGIVE

AT T C

Show the YouTube video “How to Forgive” (bit.ly/FMHowToForgive, 3:34). Discuss:

- ➔ The video says, “We must remember how the other person got there. . . . Every irritating fault of another person has long history behind it.” What does this mean? Do you agree? Why?
- ➔ “We must forgive because someday . . . we will need to be forgiven.” Do you agree? Why?
- ➔ How hard is it for you to say, “I’m sorry”?
- ➔ How hard is it for you to say, “I forgive you”?



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

☐ Prepared newsprint
☐ Markers

THE GIFTS OF FORGIVING

C

With a marker, draw a vertical line and a horizontal line on a blank sheet of newsprint, creating four quadrants. Title the quadrants “Gifts of being forgiven by God,” “Gifts of forgiving someone else,” “Gifts of being forgiven by someone,” and “Gifts of forgiving myself.”

Remind youth that forgiveness is a gift from God. When one person forgives another, or even themselves, they give a gift to the one receiving forgiveness and to the one offering forgiveness. Display prepared newsprint. Have youth identify gifts, graces, and results that come from forgiving and being forgiven. Write these in the labeled quadrants.

Discuss:

- ➔ What insights have you learned about giving and receiving forgiveness?

☐ Index cards
☐ Pens
☐ Trash can
☐ Music player with meditative music (optional)

RIPPING IT UP

QC AM

Distribute index cards and pens. Encourage youth to find a space in the room away from others. Have them write a sentence on an index card about a person or a situation in their life that needs their forgiveness. Encourage them not to include people they are not ready to forgive. They may use additional cards to write about multiple situations. Play meditative music while youth write.

Tell youth that they will destroy their index cards as an act of forgiveness. Invite them to come to the center of the room, one by one, rip up their index cards into small pieces, and throw them into the trash can. As they destroy their cards, encourage them to pray for the courage to forgive others.

FORGIVING ANOTHER

CT

Distribute index cards and pens. Encourage youth to find a space in the room away from others. Have them think of instances when they needed to forgive another person and write a statement of forgiveness for each instance. Use this pattern: “I forgive [Name] for [the incident].” Encourage them to talk with God about recognizing the need to forgive.

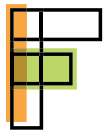
On the other side of the index card, encourage youth to make a statement about forgiveness. They may quote a Bible verse (such as Matthew 18:21–22 or Luke 11:4) or use their smartphones to look up other quotations about forgiveness. Gather the group. Invite them to share their forgiveness quotations. Discuss:

➔ How does learning about the practice of forgiveness open you to forgiving others?

- ☐ Index cards
- ☐ Pens
- ☐ Smartphones



Like everyone, youth may have people they are not ready to forgive. Encourage them to write instances where they are ready to forgive.



FOLLOWING JESUS

SUMMARIZING THE SESSION

C

Read or summarize these two paragraphs to the youth and allow any responses:

Forgiving others is an active choice that is made repeatedly, throughout life. Even if you forgive and move past a particular transgression, you will have another opportunity to practice forgiveness again.

Here is the good news: God’s grace is offered over and over again. There is nothing you can do that is outside the possibility of God to forgive. There is nothing anyone else can do that is outside the possibility of God to forgive. As you seek to follow Jesus, God will give you the grace and the strength to forgive, as you have been forgiven. Knowing that God’s grace is freely given to you, offer forgiveness to one who has wronged you. Let go of the hurt and don’t let it control you.

A BREATH PRAYER OF FORGIVENESS

QC

Engage youth in a simple prayer practice, using their breath and words to pray. Invite a moment of silence. Say:

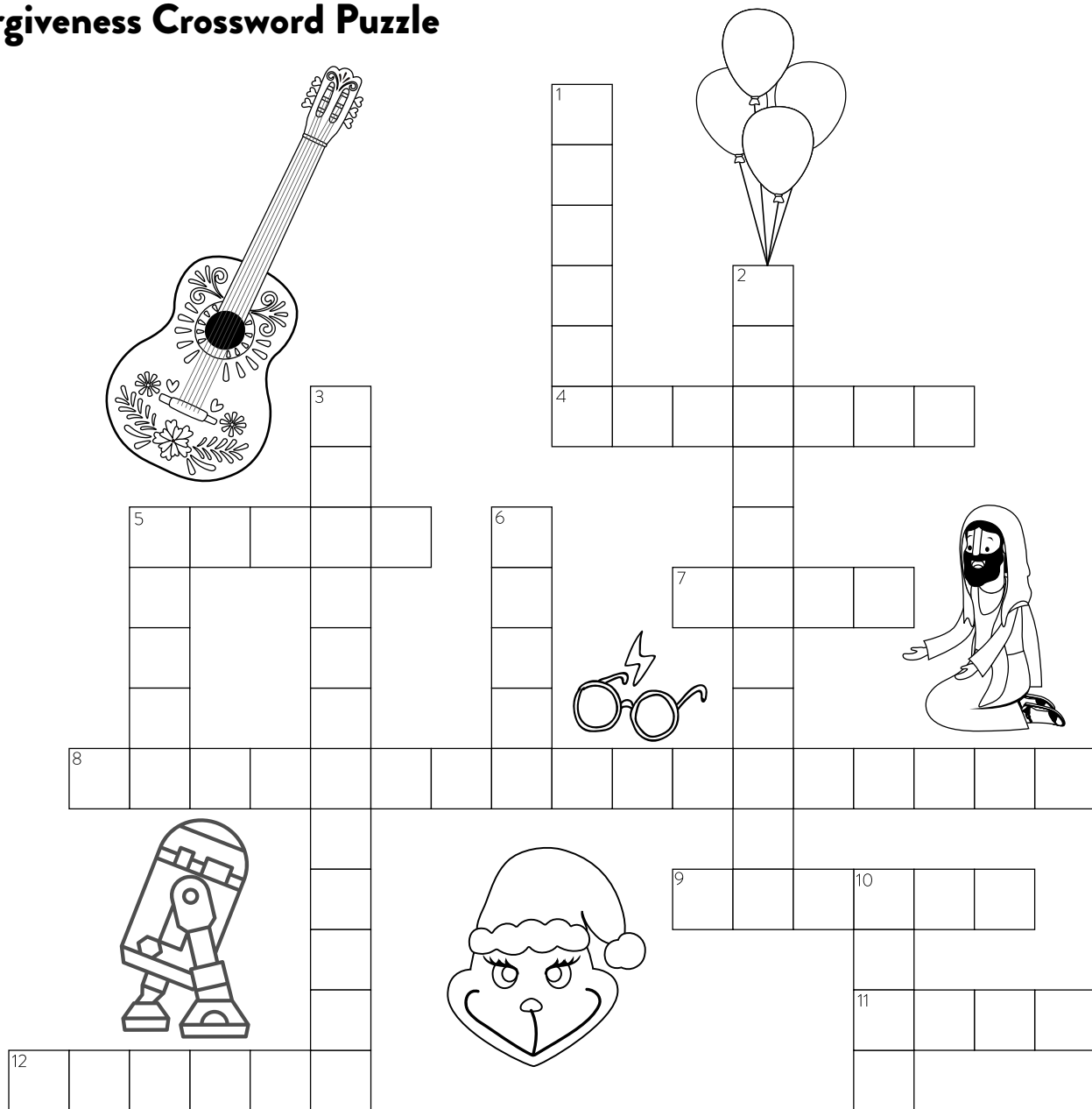
Breathe in: “God forgives me.”

Breathe out: “I forgive you.”

Pray for those whom you need to forgive and for the grace to forgive others.

Repeat.

Forgiveness Crossword Puzzle



ACROSS

- In the book of Jonah, the king of what city asked forgiveness of God?
- In Matthew, how many times did Peter suggest we forgive someone who has wronged us?
- Jacob sought forgiveness from this brother after stealing his birthright.
- In which Disney movie does Belle learn to forgive the person who held her captive? (4 words)
- In *How to Train Your Dragon*, Toothless has to forgive this trainer for injuring him.
- Which son of Adam and Eve needed forgiveness after killing his brother?
- The Whos forgive this character for trying to take Christmas away.

DOWN

- In this Disney film, Anna must seek forgiveness for almost marrying Hans.
- In this *Star Wars* movie, Rey and former enemy Kylo Ren work together to destroy Snoke (3 words).
- In what 2012 Disney movie does Venellope von Schweetz have to forgive the title character for almost ruining her video game? (3 words)
- Harry Potter forgave this professor and eventually named a son after him.
- In the movie *UP*, Russell has to forgive Carl for abandoning a bird with this name.
- In what 2017 Disney movie does a young guitar player learn to forgive his family?

Stories of Forgiveness

West Nickel Mines School

On October 2, 2006, Charles Carl Roberts IV entered the West Nickel Mines School in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. In this one-room schoolhouse, Amish students were gathered for lessons. Roberts took several people hostage and shot eight girls (ages 6–13), killing five. Then he committed suicide.

Within a few hours, members of this Amish community went to the Roberts home and to the homes of other family members to console them and offer their forgiveness. The grandfather of one of the victims told the surviving children they should not think evil of Roberts. Another Amish neighbor held Roberts' father while he cried for an hour. About 30 members of the Amish community later attended Roberts' funeral to stand in solidarity with his family. In the weeks that followed, the Amish people set up a charitable fund for the Roberts' family.

Roberts' widow later wrote a letter to the Amish community, thanking them for their compassion, and said they believe that compassion is changing the world.

Show the YouTube video "10 Years after Nickel Mines: The Road to Hope, Faith and Forgiveness" (bit.ly/FMNickelMines, 2:54).

Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church

On June 17, 2015, Dylann Roof entered the Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina. He was warmly welcomed into their Wednesday night Bible study that had just begun. A short time later, he opened fire on the group, killing nine people, including Reverend Clementa Pinckney, who was both the pastor and a state senator. Pinckney had sat next to Roof during the Bible study and talked with him about Scripture. Prior to the event and during the confrontation, Roof made clear his affiliation with white supremacist ideology. He was arrested the next day.

The Emmanuel AME Church is one of the oldest Black churches in the United States. It has long been a center for organizing civil rights events. Relatives of those who had been murdered appeared at Roof's bond hearing. They testified to their unspeakable loss, but also extended their forgiveness, despite Roof's lack of remorse or regret. The church has since endured criticism because of the community's forgiveness of Roof.

Show the YouTube video "Shooting Victim's Kin: I Forgive You" (bit.ly/FMCharlestonMurder, 2:35).

