



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—with 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
(MM) 2019-2020

Stories, Colors & More
(SCM) i-iv, 4, 15, 25

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

e-book or story audio
(see p. vii)

purple cloth

candle

set of seven small items
for each child

Responding

Celebrating

balloons, (optional:
bubbles)

Praying

worship bulletin
(optional)

Offering

copies of **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1

Extra

copies of **GN 2**;
popcorn, small crackers,
o-shaped cereal, or
other small snack

GATHERING IN GOD'S GRACE

Post 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.

Before the session, find seven items for each child: crayons, pencils, paper clips, or any small item will do.

“Celebrating God’s Grace” and “Extra Activity” require more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

Greet the children by name and with the words “The grace of Christ be with you.” Prompt the children to respond with the same words.

Invite the children to help set the scene. On a table, place a purple cloth, a Bible, and a candle to signify the light of Christ. Tell the children that this is the fourth Sunday in Lent, a time to think about how Jesus wants us to live. Explain that today you will be learning about forgiveness.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities. Suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing.

Give each child a set of seven items. See how many ways the children can add the items to make the total equal seven ($1+1+1+1+1+1+1$, $3+4$, $2+5$, and so forth). Once the children have had time to make their items add up to seven, wonder together how much more all of the sevens make together. Demonstrate how seven in one set is seven, or $7 \times 1 = 7$; seven in two sets, or $7 \times 2 = 14$; and so forth.

Singing



Play and sing “Thank You, Jesus”—MM 30; SCM 25. Encourage children to dance and clap to the beat.

Praying



Turn on the candle as a reminder of Jesus’ presence with us. Invite the children to stand in a circle and take two or three deep breaths. Encourage them to feel God with them. Invite the children to repeat your words and actions as you pray:

Dear God, (*bow heads and fold hands*) /
thank you for loving us. (*cross arms to give yourself a hug*) /
Help us to listen, (*cup hand to ear*) /
to forgive, (*shake hands with a neighbor*) /
to serve, (*hold hands in front of you*) /
and to follow you. (*walk in place*) /
Amen. /



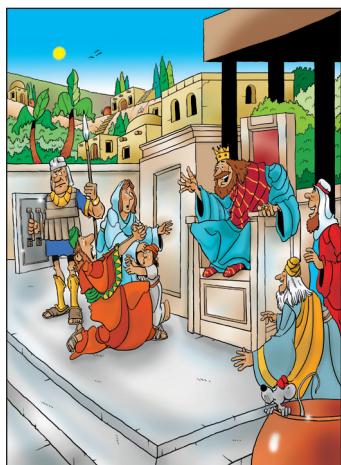
Preparing to Hear the Story

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Invite the children to think about a time someone made them angry. Then have them think about a time when they may have hurt someone's feelings and made them feel sad. Suggest that sometimes we feel angry or hurt because of the way another person treats us, and that sometimes we may hurt or anger someone.

Tell the children that Jesus told his disciples a story about the importance of forgiving others. Write the word *forgive* on newsprint and ask the children to count the number of letters in the word (*seven*). Invite them to listen for the word *seven* in the story and what it means to forgive someone.

LG *Forgiving others is a form of generosity as is accepting forgiveness. By nurturing this skill, children are given the ability to strengthen relationships and inspire others.*



Check for understanding about the word *debt*. Explain, if necessary, that a debt is something one person owes another, such as money, if one person borrowed money from another.

Hearing the Story

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Invite a child to find Matthew 18 in the Bible. Place the open Bible on the worship center. Read **SCM 4** or listen to the story audio. Use your voice, expressions, and feelings to make the story more engaging. Conclude by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt children to say, "Thanks be to God."

Read the story again or listen to the story audio. If you are reading, consider adjusting the volume of your voice. Use a soft voice when saying the word *small*, a normal level for *medium*, and a loud voice for *enormous*. Invite the children to repeat these words and actions in your retelling of the story.

Reflecting on God's Grace

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Wonder together why forgiveness is important to Jesus:

- ➥ I wonder, "Why was the king willing to forgive the servant's enormous debt?"
- ➥ I wonder, "How did the servant feel when he was forgiven his debt?"
- ➥ I wonder, "Why did the first servant refuse to forgive the man who owed him money?"
- ➥ I wonder, "How did the servant feel when he went to jail?"

Draw the children's attention to the numbers in the story. In ancient times, people thought the number *seven* meant "complete" or "perfect." Numbers that could be divided by seven had a similar meaning.

Peter says that forgiving someone seven times is "just right." Jesus says that is not enough. Jesus says to forgive more than 77 times, or "over and over again," or "more than you can count."



Wonder together how hard it would be to forgive someone over and over again. Ask them why they think Jesus would want us to forgive so many times.

Make the connection between grace and forgiveness. Comment that God's grace is a gift to us, much like the king offered grace, or forgiveness, when the servant owed so much. We offer grace to others when we forgive them for mistakes they have made.

Singing

Play and sing "God Forgives"—**MM 4; SCM 15**. Turn off the candle.

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and the time available.



FA B

Celebrating God's Grace

Tell the children that Jesus asks us to forgive others. Hand out balloons and markers, and ask the children to write their initials on the balloons. Be mindful of children with latex allergies and have bubbles available for them. Begin by asking the children to think of a time when someone made them angry. Have them blow all the energy it takes to be angry into the balloon and pinch the end closed. Ask them to say, "I forgive you," and let the balloon go. Wonder what it feels like to let go of being angry. If time allows, have the children find their balloon and repeat the activity, asking about times when others made them sad, afraid, or lonely, or did something mean.

B *Make sure to play the games with the children. They will love it when you join the fun!*

Praying God's Grace

Jesus teaches that we can be assured of God's forgiveness. In congregational worship, we regularly ask for that forgiveness when we pray the unison prayer of confession. Help the children make a prayer for forgiveness that can be used by your worship leaders.

On mural paper, begin the prayer by writing:

Holy God, we know you forgive us, so we ask that you will forgive us when . . .

Invite the children to name times when people might want God to forgive them, and write them on the sheet of newsprint. Remind the children that this is a prayer for everyone to pray together, so they don't need to mention names of specific people. Set aside for "Loving and Serving God" and say this prayer in your closing ritual.



Offering God's Grace

F B LD MS

As a way to offer forgiveness to others, children will play a game practicing forgiveness. Hand out copies of **GN 1**. Read the words in the speech bubbles together. Tell them that these are all actions that hurt another person or their feelings. Ask them how they feel when one of these things happens to them. Ask them what they do when this happens. Suggest that, when we are hurt, we can tell the person that their action hurt us and offer forgiveness.

Have the children cut apart the cards and roll a piece of tape to stick to the back of each card. Tell the children they will play a game to practice offering forgiveness. Use the following directions for the game:

- Form pairs. One person picks up one of the speech bubbles and places it on the other person.
- The person with the bubble on them begins by saying, "That hurt me."
- The other person responds, "I'm sorry."
- The first person says, "I forgive you."
- Both people give a high five.
- Repeat with the other person placing the speech bubble on their partner.

Have the children find a new partner and repeat the game with a new speech bubble. Keep switching partners until all six speech bubbles have been used. If you have a small number of children, they can partner with the same person again.

B *Children with behavioral issues (and even some without) may struggle with a long list of complicated rules. Keep guidelines broad and simple, such as: try your best, respect others, be polite.*



Extra Activity

FA C F

Place a large bowl of popcorn or o-shaped cereals on a large table. Give each child a copy of **GN 2**. Have them read the first line together, asking the question. Using a paper cup, give each child a cupful of snacks and ask them to count out seven pieces onto the plate on their paper. Invite the class to respond with the second line in unison. Then have the children continue adding snacks to their plate until they reach seventy-seven. Add more snacks as needed to reach seventy-seven.

Remark that it is a **LARGE** number! Enjoy the snack and celebrate that God forgives us even more than seventy-seven times!



Ages 5-7

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Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so you can send the Grace Sightings link, or invite them to visit gracesightings.org. Remind the parents and caregivers about the e-book and story audio (see p. vii).

LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Ask the children to help clean the space.

Gather in a circle and wonder together how offering forgiveness to others would be a helpful practice during Lent.

If the children helped to write a prayer of confession in “Praying God’s Grace,” pray it together. Conclude with an assurance of God’s forgiveness, saying, “God hears our prayers and loves us no matter what. Friends, believe the good news: in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Amen.”

Bless each child as they leave, saying, “(Name), just as God has forgiven you, go in grace and forgive others.”

I took
something
of yours.

I said
angry words
to you.

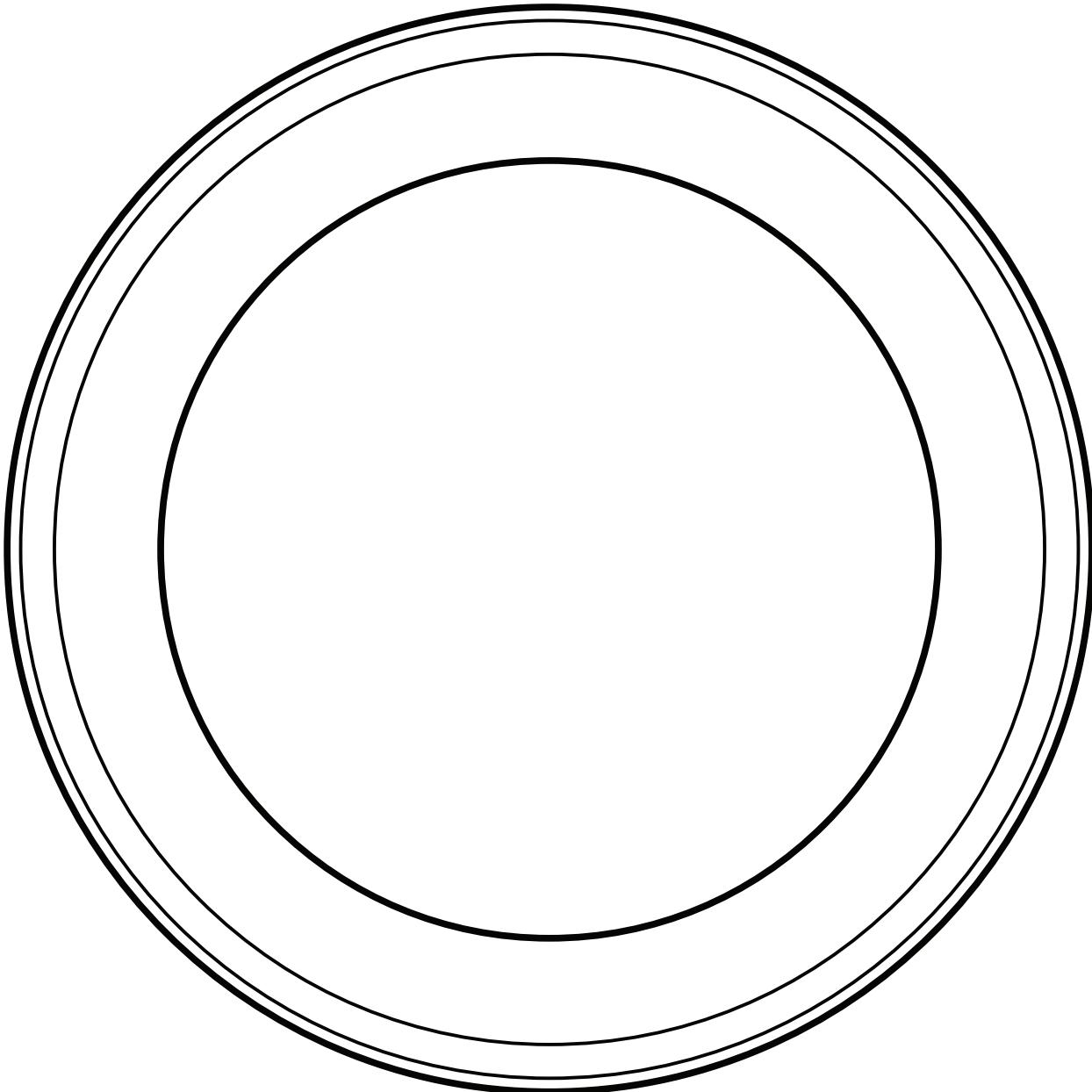
I told you
a lie.

I left you
out of a
game.

I pushed or
shoved you.

I was mean
to you.

7 Times?



77 Times!

