



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—without 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

copies of **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1–2

several calculators

Responding

Claiming

SCM 4a, 4b, 4c

Celebrating

SCM 24

Praying

worship bulletin

Extra

copies of **GN 3**;
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, **LG** **T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

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

Welcoming and Preparing

LG **LD** **A**

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. Ask for several volunteers to practice today’s Scripture passage.

Distribute copies of **GN 1** and **GN 2**. Have calculators available, if children would like to use them. Introduce the children to the numbers in the story by solving the math problems. Work with younger children using a calculator to help them solve the problems.

The answer to **GN 1** is 7, regardless of the initial number. Suggest the children try it with various numbers, even large ones!

GN 2 answers:

- ▼ 1. 1 denarius is \$58.
- ▼ 2. 1 talent is 5,475 denarii (1 denarius x 365 days x 15 years) or \$317,550 (\$58 x 365 days x 15 years).
- ▼ 3. Ten thousand talents is 54,750,000 denarii (10,000 x 5,475 denarii), or \$3,175,500,000 (10,000 x \$317,550)!

Singing

MS

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

Praying

MS

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

C LG

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.

Jesus told his disciples a story about the importance of forgiving others. Wonder together what it means to be forgiven and what it means to forgive someone. Ask the children what words or feelings would describe each.

LG Look for opportunities for the children to express generosity. Offer ways to practice leadership, like passing out items or helping others.



Hearing the Story

L

Invite a child to find Matthew 18 in the Bible. Ask for volunteers to read Matthew 18:21–35. Conclude the reading by saying, “Word of wisdom, Word of grace,” and prompt the children to say, “Thanks be to God.” Place the open Bible on the worship center.

Read a retelling of the story using **SCM 4** 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

C

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 divisible 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 for the time available.

Claiming God’s Grace



*Before the session, cut apart stones on **SCM 4a**, **SCM 4b**, and **SCM 4c**.*

Recall that Jesus’ story told us that the king not only forgave all that the servant owed but was unhappy when the servant did not do the same for another. Comment that the story is about God’s great forgiveness of us, but it is also about God’s desire that we forgive others. Do the following activity to practice forgiveness.

Place the stones from **SCM 4a**, **SCM 4b**, and **SCM 4c** in a pile on one side of the room. Tell the children that each stone has something written on it that we might do that hurts another person. Have the children take turns running to the stones, picking one up, bringing it back, handing it to the next person in line, and moving to the back of the line. The next person does the same until everyone has a stone. Have the children take turns reading the stones aloud. Ask them how this action would make someone feel. Ask them what someone might want to do in response. Comment that often, when we are hurt, we respond by wanting to hurt that person back or another person. Sometimes our hurt comes out as anger.

Invite the children to walk around pretending the stone is heavy and feeling the weight of the stone and the feelings it might give someone.

Then tell the children that they will practice offering forgiveness. Have them take turns going to the person who gave them the stone and say, “This made me (*express a feeling—sad, hurt, angry, left out, or so forth*). I forgive you. I’m not going to carry this stone with me anymore.”



Tell the children that part of forgiveness is letting it go and feeling free from the weight of that hurt (whether the other person expresses they are sorry or not). Encourage the children to get rid of the “hurt” by tearing up the stone, crumpling the stone, stepping on the stone, tossing the stone in the trash, or whatever a child would like to do to let it go.

After the activity, ask the children what they learned about forgiveness from the activity. Talk together about how hard it is to forgive sometimes, how it feels to forgive, and how it feels to be forgiven.

F *Notice and listen carefully to children’s concerns about inclusion and exclusion. Discuss different aspects of fair and unfair situations, helping children to form strong ideas of fairness.*

Celebrating God’s Grace



Ask the group to look at the candle on the table. Remind them that we turn the candle on as a reminder of Jesus’ presence and love for us. Ask them how forgiving others is a reminder of Jesus’ light. Remind them that we offer grace to others when we forgive them. You could also say that we offer Jesus’ light to others when we forgive.

Sing “Jesus Bids Us Shine”—**MM 23; SCM 24**—to celebrate Jesus’ call to forgive and to be a light for those who feel sad and hurt. Invite the children to come up with movements for the song. For example: you can raise your hands and wiggle your fingers whenever you sing the word *shine*, or you can point to others and then point to yourself while swaying from one side to another whenever you sing “You in your small corner, and I in mine.” Play and sing again, celebrating God’s forgiveness and knowing that we can forgive and be forgiven.



Praying God’s Grace



Before the session, obtain a worship bulletin that includes a prayer of confession and words of assurance. Write the prayer opening shown on page 36 on a sheet of newsprint.

Jesus teaches that we can be assured of God’s forgiveness. Tell the children that, in congregational worship, we regularly ask for forgiveness when we pray a prayer of confession together. We are then assured of God’s forgiveness by words that remind us of God’s love through Jesus. Consider showing the children a worship bulletin and read what is said in the prayer of confession and the words of assurance. Point out that the prayer of confession is said by all so the things we ask for forgiveness are things all of us might relate to or have done. Often, there is a prayer of silent confession as well. This is a time for each person to confess and ask for forgiveness.



Help the children write a prayer of confession. Begin with this prayer opening:

Holy God, we know you are loving and gracious and forgive us when we have done something wrong. Please forgive us when we have . . .

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.



Extra Activity



Place a large bowl of popcorn, small crackers, o-shaped cereal, or other small snacks on a large table. Give each child a copy of **GN 3** and a paper plate. Ask a volunteer to read the first line. Give each child a handful of snacks on their paper and ask them to count out seven pieces onto their plate. 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.

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



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."

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:

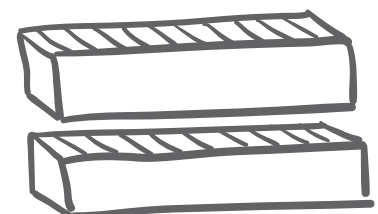
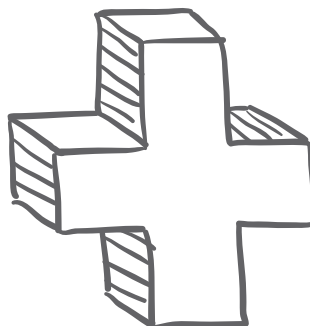
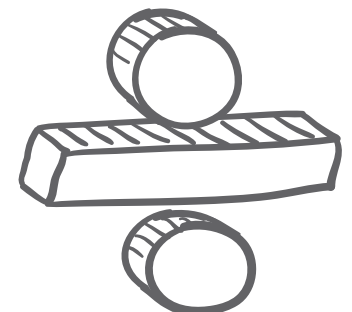
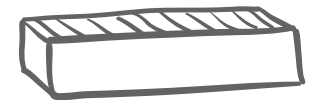
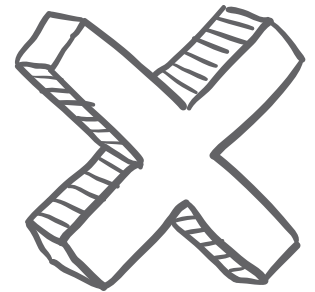
+10

×2

–6

÷2

–





In Jesus' day, a common laborer earned one *denarius*—a Roman silver coin—a day. We can't really determine what one denarius would be worth today, but let's assume an hourly minimum wage of \$7.25 and a standard eight-hour workday as a starting point for figuring it out.

1. $\$7.25/\text{hour} \times 8 \text{ hours} = \$$ _____ a day. This would be what 1 denarius is worth.

2. A worker could earn one *talent* in 15 years.

1 denarius \times 365 days \times 15 years = _____ denarii. This is what 1 talent is worth in denarii.

Multiply \$_____ (1 denarius) \times 365 days \times 15 years to find out how much a talent is worth in dollars. \$_____

3. Ten thousand talents = _____ denarii,

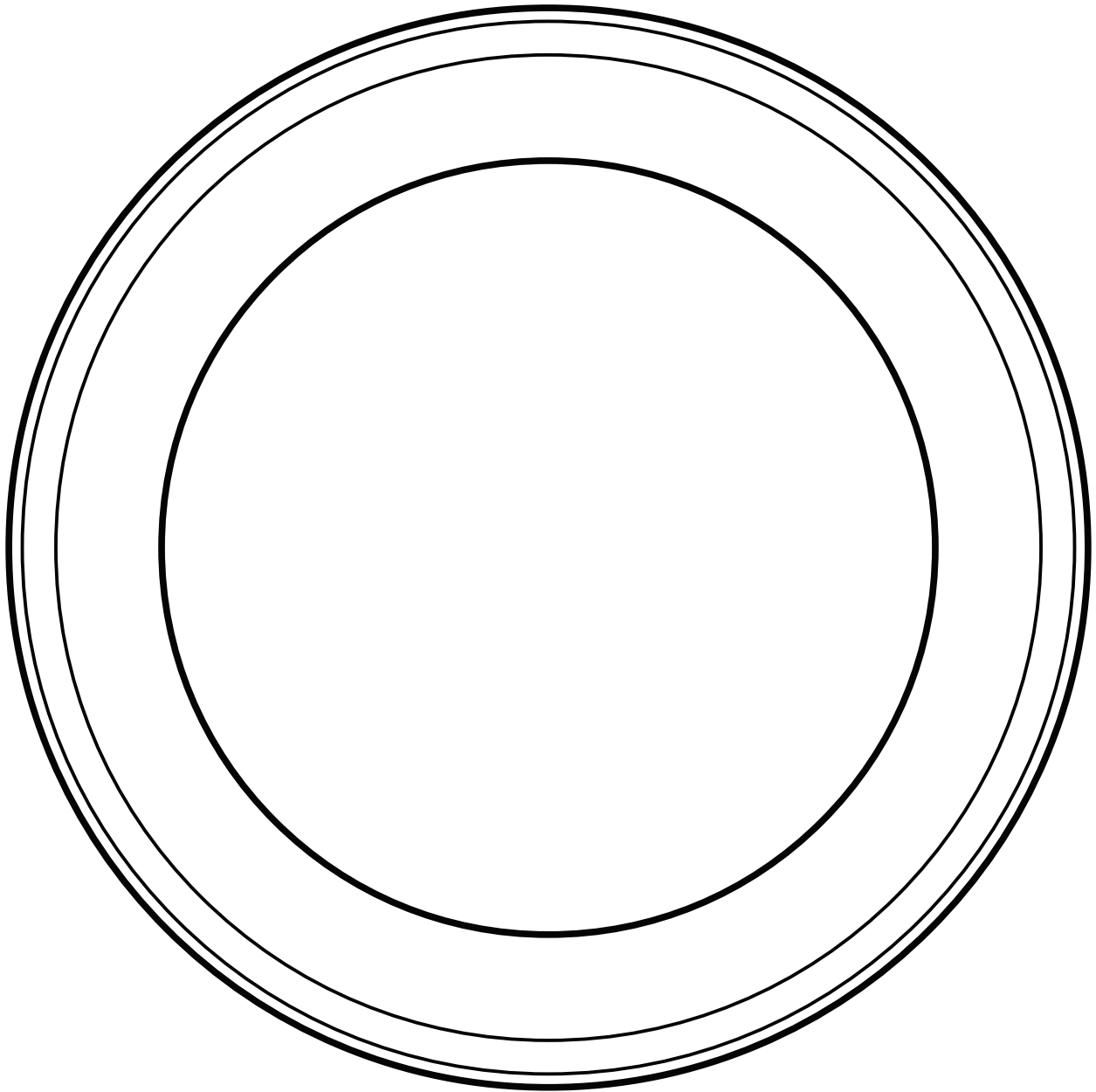
or $10,000 \times$ _____ (1 talent),

or \$_____, $10,000 \times \$$ _____ (1 talent in dollars).

If someone owed you that much money and didn't pay you back, could you forgive them? Would you? Why?



7 Times?



77 Times!

