

JESUS AND FORGIVENESS

Lesson 2: Forgive To Be Forgiven

What we want students to learn: That God will not forgive us unless we forgive others.

What we want students to do with what they've learned: To identify anyone in their lives to whom they need to extend forgiveness, and to commit to forgiving him or her.

Scripture Focus: Matthew 18:21-35

Supporting Scripture: Matthew 6:14-15, Mark 11:25

Overview: We don't like to think about it, but Jesus is really clear about one thing: God's willingness to forgive our sins is tied to our willingness to forgive others. It's a bit of a theological brain bender (after all we are saved by grace through faith and not by our own works, right?). But when you encounter Jesus' words in the Bible, there really is no equivocation. In the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, and elsewhere, Jesus says that to be forgiven, we must extend forgiveness. This is the heart of this study, and is an important lesson for our students to learn. They will be challenged to seek out people to whom they have not forgiven, and extend mercy and grace.

Teacher Prep Video

The *Jesus And Forgiveness* Teacher Prep Videos are short videos designed to help you grasp the main points of the lessons as you prepare to teach.

To access your "*Jesus And Forgiveness* Lesson 2 Teacher Prep Video," click on the URL below.

- <https://youthministry360.com/jesus-and-forgiveness-teacher-prep-videos>

Bible Background

The Bible Background is designed to help you provide some context for the Scripture you'll be studying. The Details gives you background info for each book, The Setting informs you what's happening in and around the passage, and The Main Point gives you an overview of how the passage will be used in the lesson.

- **What do we mean by "context"?** In every ym360 Bible study lesson, you'll notice we make a point to encourage you to provide the context for the passages you study. By "context" we mean at the very least helping students know who wrote the book, when it was written, and why it was written.
- **What's The Big Deal?** When we teach the Bible without giving context, students don't get a "big picture" understanding of the story of the Bible. But this view is vital to grasping the story of God's plan of redemption for humankind. As you teach, use the Bible Background to help summarize the context.

The Details

Matthew

- **Author:** Matthew, a former tax collector, was a disciple of Jesus and a firsthand witness to the stories he relates in his gospel.
- **Time frame:** Most people hold to Matthew's gospel being written in the late 50's or 60's AD, though there are some who think it was written after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.
- **Purpose:** Matthew was writing to a primarily Jewish audience to convince them that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah. But he was probably aware of a Gentile audience, as his gospel makes the case that the saving truth of Christ is for all nations.

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The Setting

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant comes shortly after some pretty big moments in Matthew's Gospel narrative. In Matthew 16, we see Peter confess Jesus as the Christ. In Matthew 17, we see Jesus transfigured in front of His most beloved disciples. These brief snapshots, and several more like them, lead up to Jesus' telling of the parable. All of this occurs in the time leading up to Jesus' triumphant entry just a week before His crucifixion.

The Main Point

The main point of this lesson is simple in its directness, though somewhat more complex in its application. Jesus unequivocally said that we would not be forgiven unless we forgive others. We like to believe in "cheap grace," a phrase coined by the famous theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. This is grace that doesn't cost us anything. But Jesus talks about a different kind of grace here. Jesus urges us to extend the very same brand of grace we receive from God.

If we are believers, will God withhold forgiveness if we do not forgive others? This is the right question, but the answer may best be found coming at it from a different angle. The question might be best asked like this: "Can someone who is unwilling to forgive others truly have been transformed by saving faith in God?" Though God alone knows the answer with complete confidence, it seems like the answer would be "no." If people are unwilling to show forgiveness, it would seem to be a mark that they have not been truly saved by Christ and therefore would not know the forgiveness God offers. So, Jesus' teaching here seems to speak less about our ability to earn or assure God's forgiveness based on our actions, and more about the state of our heart and whether or not we've been transformed by faith in Christ and His work on the cross.

Lesson Plan

The Lesson Plan contains three elements: An introductory activity called The Lead In; the Bible study section called The Main Event; an application-focused segment called The Last Word.

The Lead In

- **Goal:** To help your students see that to accomplish or achieve certain things, specific steps or processes have to happen.
- **Set-Up:** None needed.

FIRST, remind your students that this is the second lesson in a four-lesson look at forgiveness. Remind them that you're going to go a little deeper in what it means to be forgiven and to forgive others. But first, explain to students that you're going to ask them a few questions that look at certain processes or paths that lead to some specific outcomes. Have students help you break down what these processes or paths look like.

There's no absolute right answer for these, so to speak. You'll know if your students are on track or not. Allow them to discuss each of the following questions, and maybe even add a few of your own. Ask something like:

- **To win an MVP trophy, what do you have to do?**
- **To get into college, what do you have to do?**
- **To win a gymnastics or cheerleading competition, what has to happen?**
- **What do you have to do to get a good grade on a test?**
- **To have that special someone join you as a date for the prom, what has to happen?**
- **If you want to borrow the car for the weekend, do you have to make sure you do anything first?**
- **If you want a scholarship to play college sports, what do you have to do first?**

THEN, when they've discussed each one, lead them in a brief discussion. Ask:

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- **What is true in each of these situations?**
 - Answer: To get a certain thing, or realize a specific outcome, you have to do or achieve some specific tasks. You don't get a college scholarship in football because you're a nice guy. It just doesn't happen. You have to be a highly skilled athlete, which in turn requires a ton of commitment.
- **What's the most rewarding thing you've ever achieved or accomplished?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **It might seem at first that it would be awesome to have some of these achievements without having to work on them, doesn't it? But why would this not be that awesome at all?**
 - Answer: Because it would cheapen the accomplishment. If everyone could win a gymnastics competition regardless of whether or not they actually knew gymnastics, it wouldn't be a special achievement.

FINALLY, transition to the Main Event by explaining to your students that whether we like it or not, Jesus seems to imply that forgiveness works this way too. Say something like:

- **We don't like to hear it. But we're about to see Jesus put something of a condition on our forgiveness. We're about to learn that the Bible is clear: for you to be forgiven, you have to follow a certain course of action laid out by God. Let's take a closer look.**

The Main Event

- **Goal:** To help your students understand that God will not forgive us unless we forgive others.
- **Set Up:** None needed.

FIRST, take a moment and review last week's lesson. Ask if anyone can remember what you studied and if anything specific stands out to them. You may use the following bullet points to help if need be:

- **The forgiveness we are to extend to others comes from the forgiveness that originates in Christ.**
- **We need to be more aware of how we see the concept of forgiveness at work in our lives.**

THEN, when you've finished, explain to students that you'll be looking at a passage from Matthew 18. While they're finding the chapter, help provide some context for what you're about to study by referencing the Details and the Setting sections of the Bible Background. When students have found the chapter, read or have a student read Matthew 18:21-25. Then, lead students in a discussion by asking something similar to the following:

- **You might not pick this up at first glance, but Peter was actually trying to show off a bit in his question. In Jewish culture at that time, forgiving someone seven times would have been extravagant. Peter might have expected to hear Jesus say, "Wow. That's awesome Peter. Seven times is a lot. Well done." What was Jesus saying to Peter in His response?**
 - Answer: It pretty much blew Peter out of the water. Jesus was basically saying, "Look how incredibly amazing and overwhelming my standard for mercy and love is."
- **Do you think Jesus was literally saying that we should forgive someone 77 times? So, on the 78th time we're off the hook? (No) What point do you think He was trying to make?**
 - Answer: As Christ followers, we have to forgive people a lot. We have to go way beyond our expectations in how we show forgiveness to others.
- **Summarize what's happening in verses 23-25.**

Make sure before moving on that you help students understand the MASSIVE nature of this debt. Say something like:

- **10,000 talents is an astronomical sum. The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Zondervan) has this to say about the amount owed: "Some recent estimates suggest a dollar value of twelve million; but with inflation and fluctuating precious metal prices, this could be over a billion dollars in today's currency." Whoa! So, we need to understand right away that this man owed a debt he could never, ever, ever hope to repay. Nothing he could do, not even selling himself and his family into slavery could even come close to paying this debt.**

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NEXT, have a student read verses 26-32. Then, ask:

- **Summarize what just happened.**
- **OK, let's do a quick comparison. How much did we say the servant owed to the Master? (10,000 talents, the equivalent to millions perhaps a billion dollars.) What was the amount the second servant owed the first servant? (a hundred denarii) Can you guess which one is the smaller debt?**
 - o Answer: The denarii is the smaller debt. In fact, a hundred denarii is about a hundred day's wages for a laborer in this time period. So, it wasn't nothing, but compared to what the first servant owed the master, it's insignificant.
- **Why is the servant's response to the second servant so appalling?**
 - o Answer: He had just been forgiven in insurmountable debt. He and his family had been spared. And here he is treating someone who owed him far less money in such a terrible way.
- **How do you feel about the first servant? What kind of person does he seem to be?**
 - o Answers will vary.

THEN, complete the parable by reading verses 32-35. Then, ask:

- **Why was the master so upset at the servant?**
 - o Answer: Because he showed such wickedness to his fellow servant after being showed such kindness by the master.
- **Let's put Jesus' words into perspective. Jesus wasn't saying that God would literally punish us and throw us in jail if we didn't forgive others. A parable is a story that makes a point. What point was Jesus trying to make?**
 - o Answer: Taken at face value, Jesus is saying that if we do not forgive others, we shouldn't expect God to forgive us. If we're unmerciful with others, we should expect God to be unmerciful with us.

NEXT, explain that this isn't the only place where the Bible says this, far from it. Read or have two students read Matthew 6:14-15 and Mark 11:25. When you finish, ask:

- **How does this make you feel?**
 - o Answers will vary.
- **Does this feel like God is placing a condition on your forgiveness? Does it feel like you have to do something to be forgiven of your sins?**
 - o Answers will vary.
- **In Romans 10:9 Paul says, "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.' In Ephesians 2:8-9 he says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast." These verses say that salvation, i.e., forgiveness of our sin debt, is through the work of Christ and not anything we do. How does Jesus' words about forgiveness seem to contradict these verses?**
 - o Answers will vary. But it's OK if students say that the condition Jesus makes seems to put a human-centered, works-driven angle on salvation.

Help students see that while this seems like it could be a contradiction, we know that the Paul wouldn't contradict Jesus' words; God's Word doesn't contradict itself. Explain that there is a way to look at this that makes perfect sense. Say something like:

- **When people are truly transformed by a saving relationship with Christ, they are a new creation. The mercy and love that flowed out of God is alive in them as a result. So, if people can live their lives being completely unmerciful, totally harsh, and totally unforgiving, we might be inclined to ask if this person truly had ever been transformed by faith in Christ. While this is a question only God knows the answer to, it's a valid way of thinking about Jesus' teaching on forgiveness. The heart of the matter is this: if you have known the overwhelming mercy and grace of God, you will in turn show that forgiveness to others. It won't always be easy, and you may not do it perfectly. But as a child of God, you will be forgiving. Someone who is not forgiving is not a child of God, and therefore can't have experienced God's forgiveness.**

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Make sure students understand this distinction.

FINALLY, remind students of main thrust of the lesson. Say something like this:

- **The point this parable makes is quite simple: as people who have known the overwhelming, all-encompassing forgiveness of God, we absolutely, positively cannot hold other people's wrongs against them. And it doesn't matter how horrible the things they've done are. Just like the servant who owed the unpayable debt, God wiped away all of our sins. And Jesus was clear: He expects us to do the same to others, no matter how costly it is for us to do so.**

Make sure no one has any questions, then move to wrap up the lesson with the Last Word.

The Last Word

- **Goal:** To help students identify anyone in their lives to whom they need to extend forgiveness, and to commit to forgiving him or her.
- **Set-Up:** You'll need to print one copy of the "Last Word Activity Sheet" (located in your Lesson 2 folder) for each student. You'll also need to have something for students to write with.

FIRST, explain to students that the key to the truth they've learned today is to personalize it. Remind them that it's one thing to know they are called to do something, but it's another thing to actually do it. (If you have a story where you forgave someone of a significant wrong, it would be a great idea to share.)

THEN, distribute to each student the "Last Word Activity Sheet." Students who were present for Lesson 1 might recognize the overall look of the sheet. Remind students that in Lesson 1 you had them think of times where they had forgiven someone or had been forgiven by someone. Explain that today, you're going to challenge them to be a little more specific.

Instruct students to look at the silhouettes on their paper. Have them take a moment and think of anyone in their lives whom they have not forgiven. Explain to students that this can be a painful thing for some of them. Challenge them to do it anyway. Encourage them to truly evaluate their hearts and be honest with themselves. If there is someone they have not forgive and need to, challenge them to write that person's initials on one of the silhouettes. Some of your students may have more than one. This is fine. The point is to allow them the chance to face this head on. Allow students a moment to process this.

NEXT, inform students that you're going to lead them in a time of prayer. You're going to pray that God will lead each of you to really look within and be honest about any grudges you're holding. Inform students that in the middle of your prayer you're going to allow a time of silence. Explain that this is a time for them to pray to God, asking the Holy Spirit to help them find the strength to forgive this person, or these people. Once you've set this up, pray for your students.

FINALLY, when you've finished the prayer, close the lesson by encouraging your students and by empathizing with them. Say something like:

- **Forgiveness is not easy. And for some of us, the wrong that has been committed against may seem unforgiveable. But here's the deal: When you forgive someone, you not only act in a Christ-like way, you free yourself from the power that wrong has over you. You're essentially saying, "I will not be held back by the pain this is causing me. I am in control of my life. And with God's help, I will choose to forgive." Forgiveness may not happen all at once. For some**

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people it can be a process that takes some time. But what we learned today is that if we love God and believe in Him, we don't have a choice. We have to be people who extend forgiveness to others.

Make sure students know that you are there for them if they need someone to talk to. Then, if no one has any questions or observations, wrap up the lesson.

- **Don't forget to distribute the devotions to your students this week. If you're printing them, have them available for students as you wrap up class. If you're texting a link, posting them on Facebook, or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.**
- **Use the Social Media guide to stay in touch with students via text or Twitter, and to encourage them to follow through with reading their devotions and with being mindful of the choices they make during the week.**

We Want To Hear From You . . .

- Do you have questions about a lesson?
- Something that worked particularly well you want to share?
- Something that didn't work you want to bring up?

We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns, at **feedback@youthministry360.com**.