

BASIC BIBLE THEMES

SESSION 5: FORGIVENESS

TEACHER

Background Scripture: Matthew 18:15-17; 21-35

Main Ideas:

- Jesus' main purpose in coming to earth was to procure salvation for all who believe, salvation that would result from God forgiving us of our sins.
- How do we move beyond the desire for judgment and condemnation to a more Christlike expression of forgiveness and grace?
- Jesus shows us three major understandings: (1) In relating people to people, we must recognize equality. (2) In relating people to the law, we must recognize priority. (3) In relating people to God, we must recognize liability.

Learning Goals:

- To examine Jesus' teaching on forgiveness.
- To recognize how important forgiveness is in our lives.

1. Engage Interest

Begin this discussion of Jesus' teaching on forgiveness by putting the words "I'm sorry" on display. Then, ask the adults in your group to respond to these questions:

- How many times did you say "I'm sorry" during the past week?
- How many times did you say "I forgive you" during the past week?

Presentation Option

Open a discussion of forgiveness with the following questions:

- What are some of the events in life that can cause either a grudge to be held or forgiveness extended?
- What are some situations in families that can cause either a grudge to be held or forgiveness extended?
- Why do you think these things occur?

2. Explore the Word

A. Invite the adults to respond individually to the following true/false statements based on Matthew 18:21-35. After they have had time to choose a response to every statement, read the Scripture passage aloud and check their answers against it.

True or False?

For each statement below, circle "T" if you think the statement is true, or circle "F" if you believe the statement is false.

- T F 1. Peter was in favor of forgiveness, but only up to a point.
- T F 2. Jesus said our forgiveness must be limited and conditional.

- T F 3. Jesus said we should forgive only those people who ask to be forgiven.
- T F 4. Jesus told a parable to illustrate that those who are not forgiving prove they have never personally experienced God's forgiveness.
- T F 5. Jesus' teaching means we must forgive even a person who has wronged us and severely hurt us.
- T F 6. The unforgiving servant in Jesus' parable did not really appreciate that he had been forgiven.
- T F 7. Unforgiveness does not bring divine judgment.
- T F 8. Unforgiveness springs from selfishness—what "I" want and what is best for "me."
- T F 9. We can forgive others because God has forgiven us.
- T F 10. For the Christian, forgiveness is not meant to be an attitude and a style of life, but is just an isolated action.

Answers: [1] True, v. 21; [2] False, v. 22; [3] False, v. 22; [4] True, v. 35 [see also 1 John 2:9-11]; [5] True, v. 22 [see also Matthew 6:14-15]; [6] True, vv. 27-28; [7] False, v. 34; [8] True, v. 28; [9] True, v. 33; [10] False, implied in v. 22.)

After you have reviewed the answers with the adults, ask several volunteers to put into their own words their understanding of Jesus' teaching on forgiveness.

B. Ask the adults to consider the following scenario and questions:

- Imagine that a member of our church violated one of the rules of membership. What do you think would be the best course of action?

After all participants have had a chance to add to this discussion, direct the group's attention to Matthew 18:15-17.

- What are Jesus' "guidelines" for forgiving an errant church member?
- How do the ideas we discussed above line up with Jesus' teaching?

Presentation Option

If yours is a creative group, ask them to write a "modern" version of Jesus' parable in Matthew 18:23-35. This new version should describe the same incidents, using present day language and contemporary situations, terms, people, and amounts of money.

After they have written the updated version, ask several volunteers to act it out as a dramatic reading.

3. Examine Life

A. Invite the group to suggest examples of casual forgiveness from their own experiences during the past week. After several participants have shared, ask the group:

- Thinking about the nature of the forgiveness asked for and extended in the situations you have mentioned, how do you feel about saying "I'm sorry" in such situations?
- How do you feel about people who say "I'm sorry" to you in such situations?
- What do you think Jesus would say to a person who says "I'm sorry" with no genuine feeling of sorrow or regret?

B. Invite the group to think about places in which more than casual forgiveness is needed.

- Can you name a situation where only genuine forgiveness can break the impasse between two people? (Be careful not to reveal confidential information here.)
- In your opinion, whose responsibility is it to offer forgiveness first?

- Does the Holy Spirit bring to your mind a situation in which you should offer forgiveness to someone else?

Presentation Option

Divide the participants into three groups. Ask each group to review one of the following sections of the Session Content: The Equality of People, The Priority of People, and The Liability of People. As they read their section, invite the members of each group to look for answers to these questions:

- What is the most important idea in this section?
- What is the most “quotable quote” in this section?
- With what in this section do we disagree?
- What in this section do we have a hard time understanding?

After sufficient time for thorough discussion by the small groups, reassemble and share the insights with the entire group.

4. Exercise Your Faith

In closing, invite the adults to consider these questions privately:

- Is there someone I have wronged from whom I need to ask forgiveness?
- Is there someone who has wronged me whom I need to forgive, even if that person has never asked for forgiveness?

Challenge the adults to be alert to opportunities to put Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness into practice during the coming week. Close with prayer, asking for the Holy Spirit to remind us of the need to forgive.

Presentation Option

Invite several volunteers to share with the group how God’s forgiveness affected their lives and their willingness to forgive others. Close with the Lord’s Prayer.