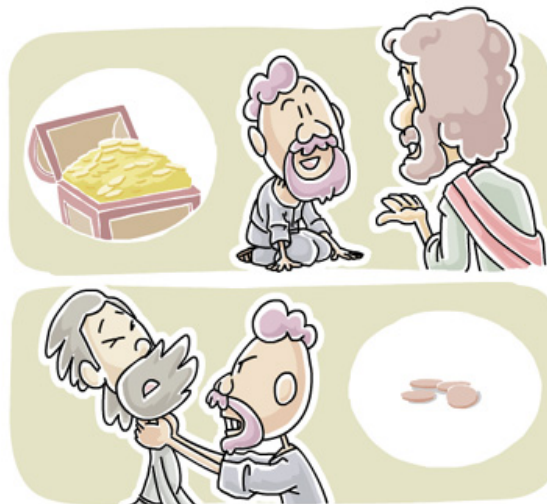

“God Wants Me to Forgive *Everyone*?”

Sunday School Lesson on the Unforgiving
Servant in Matthew 18:21-35



What is mercy? The concept can seem foreign or abstract to children, until it is put in relative terms, like getting a time-out pardon. It is important to communicate to youngsters that forgiveness is a huge component of our relationship with God. As we have gratitude to our Heavenly Father for His grace, we want to impart that upon one another, as well. This Sunday school lesson contains ideas for sharing the parable of the unmerciful student with children, emphasizing why we are to forgive others and appreciate God’s forgiveness.

Lesson focus: This discusses the parable of the unmerciful servant, but the main emphasis should be focused on the idea of forgiveness. It is important to forgive others because we recognize that God has granted us forgiveness. It isn’t always easy, but we demonstrate gratitude for God’s gift of mercy when we extend that to others around us.

Passage: Matthew 18:21-35

Target Audience: Kindergarten-6th grade (or whoever you might have around!)

Materials Needed: Construction paper, decorative materials, glue, scissors, markers, pencils, erasers, pipe cleaners, staples, stickers, Bible (all optional, depending which activities you choose to use—except for the Bible, you need that for sure).

- You can watch a [demonstration of this object lesson](#) message on our [YouTube channel](#).
- We add new [Bible lessons](#), [children’s sermons](#), and [Sunday School craft ideas](#) every week based on the current church calendar reading schedule.
- See more teaching ideas on the [theme of forgiving others](#).



Introduction Activities and Teaching Game Suggestions for the Bible Lesson

Lesson Opening: This lesson focuses on mercy and forgiveness. We forgive others not just once or even seventy times, but countless times, recognizing what God has done for us. In fact, demonstrating mercy to others can actually be freeing to us, because grudges can weigh us down, but giving others mercy and love releases us.

Here are some activities to get kids thinking...(select the best ones for your audience and age group):

- How many times? When Jesus told Peter to forgive “70 x 7 times”, he was indicating an infinite number. How big is that number? Have children count out 70 of something (cereal pieces, candy, stickers, etc.) to consider the magnitude of that number.
- Grudges are heavy burdens... set out a small obstacle course or relay race. Have students take turns going through the course with and without a backpack “burden.” It’s much easier to go without a heavy load!
- Erase it! Talk about how forgiveness erases sins...look at several sizes and types of erasers, and review how they can take away marks on paper or white board.
- Look at pictures of infamous “villains”, whether fictional or from history. What would it be like if they were let off without punishment? This may seem bizarre or unfair, but it’s what happens when God grants us mercy!

Explain that today we’ll look at a Gospel passage where Jesus told a parable about someone who did not forgive another person. As we go through, we’ll talk about how important it is for us to forgive other people, and to appreciate God’s mercy upon us.

Ask: Have you ever deserved a punishment, and gotten out of it? How did you feel?



Sunday School Lesson (Matthew 18:21-35)

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

Bible Lesson: As always, how you choose to experience the story will vary according to the ages and abilities of your children (and how many are participating). This passage lends itself nicely to dramatic presentation, whether through puppets, skits, or mime-acting. Remind students of previous conversations surrounding the idea of forgiveness or conflict resolution. In today's lesson, Jesus will tell a story to emphasize why it is important for us to grant mercy to one another.

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. -Matthew 18:21-22

In this Bible passage, Peter asks Jesus if there is a forgiveness "quota" or a limit to how many times we are required to forgive others. Maybe he was trying to get out of forgiving someone, or he was hoping if he forgave just a few times, he could justify revenge or writing someone off. The number seven was seen as whole or complete...Jesus surprises Peter by telling him that he should actually forgive someone seventy times (or 77 times) seven...this did not limit the forgiveness to 490, though, but was representing an infinite amount of forgiveness offerings.

Ask: Have you ever had to forgive someone? Was it challenging? Why?

Jesus told a story to remind people why forgiveness is so important:

"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

26 "At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' 27 The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. -Matthew 18:23-27

Wow...that sounds pretty nice, right? The king forgave the man's huge debt and let him go completely free and clear! Do you think you would be relieved if you were let off when you should be punished? Probably so! But guess what? This man was not too grateful. Rather than



living in peace with others, he found a friend who owe him just a little bit, and did not demonstrate mercy...

*“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins.^[i] He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. **29** ‘His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’ **30** ‘But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. **31** When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. -Matthew 18:28-31*

Does this seem fair? Probably not! And the king didn’t think it seemed too fair either. Although he had previously shown the man a great deal of mercy, this time around, he was not so fortunate:

“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.’ ³³ ‘Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ ³⁴ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. ³⁵ ‘This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.’ -Matthew 18:32-35

Ask: Why do you think Jesus gave this parable? What does it mean for us? Remind children that we know God forgives us no matter what...but He also wants us to show grace to others.

Now, sometimes it is hard for us to forgive one another. There might be time when people do really mean things to you, and you have to be careful about allowing them to hurt you again and again. You might forgive, but still remember how they acted. God can help us with that. We can go to Him in prayer, acknowledging His work in our lives and asking for His help when forgiving other people. It isn’t always easy, but it’s part of our duties as God’s children!

Close with a prayer thanking God for His abundant mercy and forgiveness. Ask for His help in being merciful to those around us, even when forgiveness can be challenging.

Crafts: “Forgiveness erases wrong” heart card; “mercy breaks the chains” handcuffs; “More than seventy times” collage.



Follow up/Additional Activities

- Practice a memory verse with “forgiveness flower”, writing a portion of the verse on “petals” of paper and arranging them in order around a pipe cleaner stem.
- Make a “compassion poster” with pictures or examples of forgiveness and mercy.
- Have students identify someone who has done something against them. Discuss how they can forgive that person, even if only in their heart.



“Have Mercy!” Bible Craft Ideas for Forgiving Others

The lesson for the parable of the unmerciful servant focuses on how we offer mercy to one another. We want to impart to students the importance of forgiveness, and how it breaks the chains of discontent and wipes our slates clean. These crafts emphasize the “infinite number” of times we should forgive, and also remind children that mercy can set us free and erase the wrongs that we sometimes do.



Bible Verses or Craft Captions to Consider...

“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

²² Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

-Matthew 18:21-22

Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. -Hebrews 4:16

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. -Matthew 6:14-15

Forgiveness breaks our chains!

Mercy...it erases sin!

Forgive others...as God forgives You.

More than Seventy Times...Forgive!

More Teaching Helps

- You can watch a [demonstration video](#) of these crafts on our [YouTube page](#).
- We add new [Bible lessons](#), [children’s sermons](#), and [Sunday School craft ideas](#) every week based on the current church calendar reading schedule.



Craft one: “Seventy and then Some”

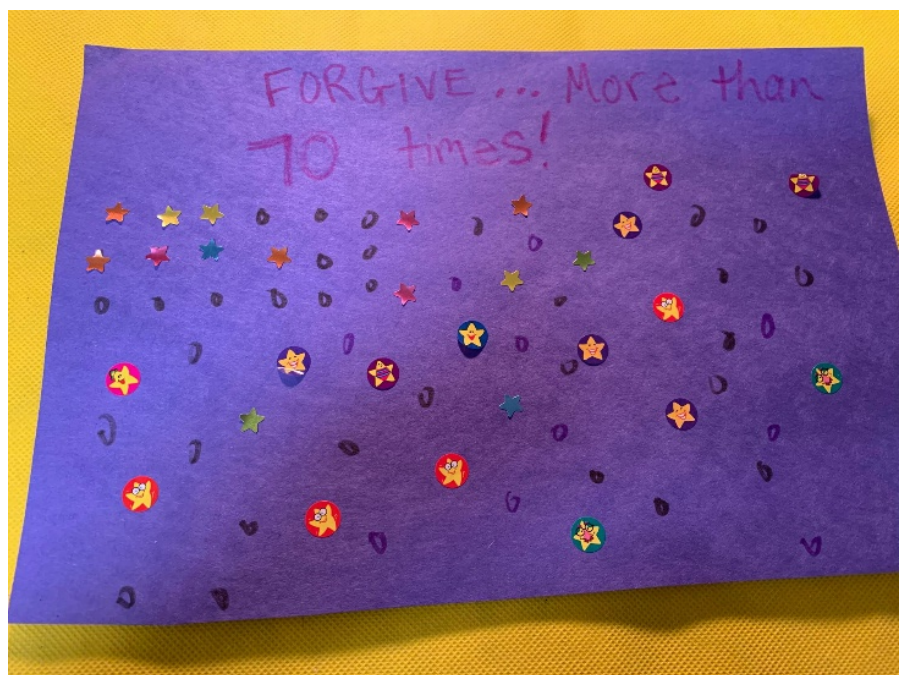
You will need:

- Stickers or other small decorative items
- Glue or tape
- Construction paper
- Markers or crayons
- Verse caption or extra decoration (optional)



Procedure:

1. Decorate the paper with a verse caption depicting the number “70” in some sense.
2. Practice counting (or use up time!) by counting to seventy: use small candies, stickers, tick marks, dots, or other decorations to count up to seventy on the construction paper.
3. Remind students that we are to forgive people not just 70 or 490 times, but again and again. That’s what God does for us!
4. Add a string or pipe cleaner if you’d like to make this into a decoration.



Craft Two: “Forgiveness Erases Wrong” Heart

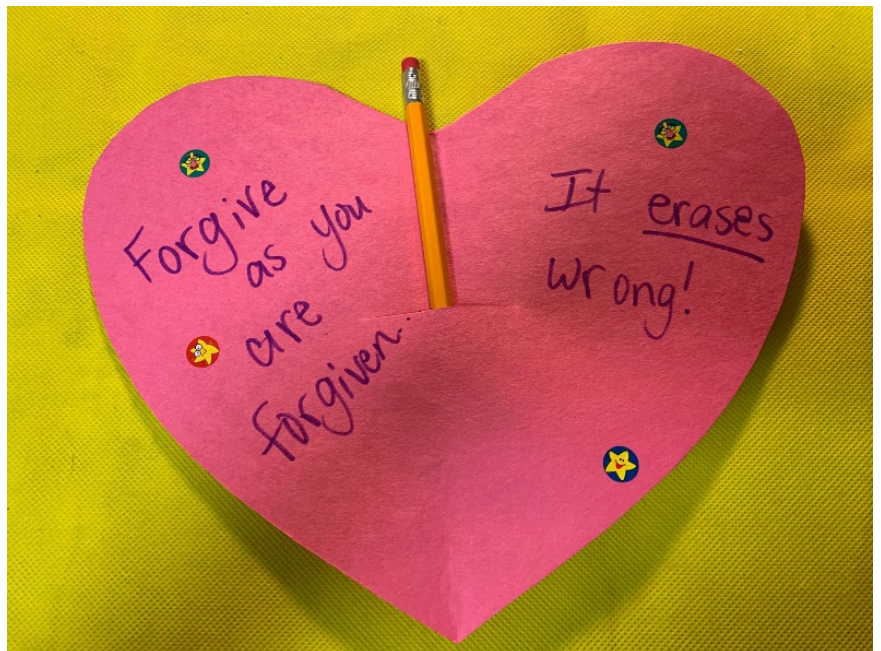
You will need:

- Glue and/or tape
- Construction paper or cardstock
- Scissors
- Caption or verse (Optional)
- Markers or crayons
- Pencils with erasers
- Extra decorations (optional)



Procedure:

1. Cut the paper into a heart shape.
2. Decorate the heart with verses, stickers, colors, or other items as desired.
3. Cut a slit in the back of the heart, and insert a pencil with eraser.
4. Give the heart away as a gift, or attach a hanger to use as a reminder that forgiveness “erases” sins!



Craft Three: “Set Free Handcuffs”

You will need:

- Paper, cut into strips
- Pipe cleaners
- Aluminum foil
- Stapler
- Scissors
- Markers or crayons



Procedure:

1. Decorate the paper strips if desired, adding a verse or caption.
2. Staple the paper strips together to make a “chain” link.
3. Add pipe cleaner “cuffs” on each side.
4. Add aluminum foil to embellish wherever preferred.
5. Demonstrate how to wear and then “break” the handcuffs, just like forgiveness breaks our chains!





These craft ideas were prepared by [Kristin Schmidt](#), who serves at the Epiphany Lutheran Church in Castle Rock, CO. She has shared her teaching gifts through *Ministry-To-Children* since 2014 and now serves as our lead curriculum writer.

Kristin has a professional background in elementary and pre-school education. A graduate of Biola University, she holds a Master of Education and will receive the Master of Theology degree from Concordia University, Irvine, California, in May 2020. Kristin grew up in southern California and lived the past 10 years in Georgia. She is a long-distance runner and voracious reader.

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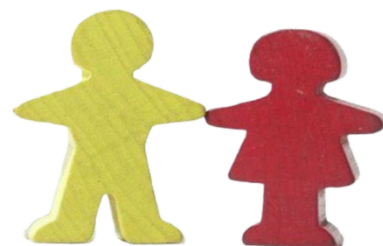
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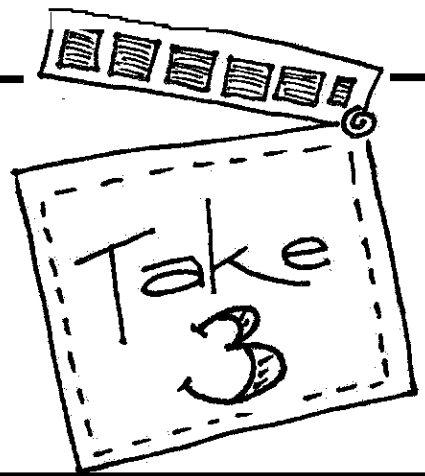
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