

Forgiven Series

Lesson 1—Great Debt: A Parable of Jesus

OVERVIEW

Bible Passages: Matthew 18:21-35

Key Verse: Colossians 3:13—“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

Items Needed: *A slip of paper, a rubber band and a nail for each student.*

BEFORE CLASS

Preparation: *Your preparation will determine what direction your class will go.*

- Consider the forgiveness you have experienced in Christ.
- Consider times in your life when you have been hurt and have needed to forgive others.
- Consider the depth of forgiveness that your life exhibits on a daily basis.
- Study and prepare your lesson so that you are familiar with the teaching outline.
- Contact students who missed Sunday School last week.
- Pray for each student by name.

CONTACT 1-2-3 SYSTEM

The first time a student is absent, give them a call. Following the second absence, send them a postcard. The third week they are absent, pay them a visit.

Think about it: What does it say to a student when they miss multiple weeks in a row and are never contacted? It says, “It really doesn’t matter if you’re here or not.”

Small things communicate great messages. Let the three “small” things above communicate that you care and miss your students when they are absent.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Room Makeover

SAY: Let's dream for a minute. Let's say that you won a contest and you're going to be given a certain amount of money to redecorate your room at home. *What would you get? What would you need? What would you want?* (Every time the students give you an item, write it down below and have them help you assign an estimated cost.)

| Item | Cost | Item | Cost |
|------|------|------|------|
|------|------|------|------|

Discussion

SAY: I said that you were given a certain amount of money to redecorate your room but I didn't tell you how much. Now you know—you've been given \$7.00. (*Add up the costs of all the items above and tell them how much they are in debt.*)

- *How does it feel to be in debt?*
- *How would you feel if you owed \$100,000—more than you could pay?*
 - *Then how would you feel if your debt was forgiven?*

SAY: Today we're going to take a look at what Jesus had to say about forgiveness and we'll learn that Jesus forgave our un-payable debt and that we should forgive others, just as he forgave us.

BIBLE LESSON—How Far Does Forgiveness Go?

Situations

SAY: I'm going to call off several situations and I want you to tell me whether they are *Easy*, *Difficult*, or *Impossible* to forgive:

- You have a best friend who lies to you. You confront him or her about it and he or she lies again to cover it up—*Easy*, *Difficult*, or *Impossible* to forgive.
- You've been dating someone for two months and you find out that he or she has been cheating on you—*Easy*, *Difficult*, or *Impossible* to forgive.
- You and another student both get detention for cheating although you're innocent. You get in trouble because the other student made it look like you cheated too—*Easy*, *Difficult*, or *Impossible* to forgive.
- Your best friend and a new friend of his or hers go to a party together and intentionally don't invite you—*Easy*, *Difficult*, or *Impossible* to forgive.
- You overhear someone who is supposed to be a good friend of yours making fun of you with another group of students—*Easy*, *Difficult*, or *Impossible* to forgive.
- A student breaks into your locker at school and steals your new iPod. You know he did it although you can't prove it, but he claims the iPod is his—*Easy*, *Difficult*, or *Impossible* to forgive.
- Another student is drinking and driving and kills your best friend—*Easy*, *Difficult*, or *Impossible* to forgive.
- A fellow-employee, who is jealous of you, gets you fired after accusing you of stealing money out of the cash register—*Easy*, *Difficult*, or *Impossible* to forgive.
- Your best friends at church have started hanging around each other and never have any time for you. Every time you come around they seemed to whisper and run off. You're hurt and lonely. You used to love coming to church. Now you dread it because of the way they're acting—*Easy*, *Difficult*, or *Impossible* to forgive.
- Your best friend's little sister, for the sake of attention, falsely accuses you of molesting her. Now the police are at your door, your best friend says he or she will never talk to you again, and your parents say they don't know what to believe—*Easy*, *Difficult*, or *Impossible* to forgive.

Questions

- *How realistic are these situations?*
- *Do you think they would all "work out" in the end?*
- *What if you forgave someone and they did the same thing to you again? How many times would you continue to forgive them?*

Illustration

SAY: Imagine that a student walks up to you in the hallway of your school, hits you in the face and then walks off. *What if this person did that to you every day? How many days would you forgive someone for hitting you in the face?* (Students will likely say they would probably hit back the first time, certainly the second time. You might feel the same way.)

Bible Passage

Let a volunteer read Matthew 18:21-22.

- *What question did Peter ask? (How often should I forgive?)*

SAY: Jewish custom required someone to forgive a repeated sin three times. The fourth time, forgiveness was no longer given. Peter, believing he had learned from Jesus' earlier teachings, must have considered himself to be a forgiving person because he was willing to forgive his brother up to seven times. That's over twice as much as the custom required. But Jesus said we must forgive "seventy times seven." Jesus' point was not that a person should forgive a literal "seventy times seven," or 490 times, but that forgiveness cannot be limited.

SAY: Before we go any further, let me take care of two misconceptions about forgiveness.

Misconception #1—That forgiveness says, "Oh, that's okay." Or, "It's really not that bad." Or, "Don't worry about it." This is *NOT* forgiveness and this misunderstood "forgiveness" many times cheapens the severity of someone's sin.

KEY: True forgiveness is much stronger—**True Forgiveness says,** *"What you did was wrong—you know it, I know and God knows it, but I'm not God to sit on His throne and be your judge. Therefore I give you into God's hands for Him to deal with you according to His justice and mercy. He can deal with you in whatever way He sees fit—It's out of my hands now. I hold no grudge against you. Your business is now with God."*

SAY: Listen to what Peter says about what Jesus did when He was mistreated.

Let a volunteer read 1 Peter 2:23.

Misconception #2—That after forgiveness everything goes back to being the way it was before. If a person betrayed your trust, forgiveness doesn't mean that immediately go back to trusting them again. If a friend hurts you, although you forgive them, you may choose not to be best friends with them anymore. Obviously, if someone tried to hurt or rape you, you'd never put yourself in that situation again. Forgiveness commits a person and situation into God's hands, but forgiveness isn't stupid and it doesn't mean that there aren't still consequences for the action.

For example:

- If someone was drinking and driving and killed a family member, both you and God can forgive them, but they'll still have to stand trial for their actions.
- If someone molests you, you can forgive them, but this doesn't mean that you don't need to seek legal action against them.
- If someone tries to rape you, you can forgive them, but this doesn't mean that you don't need to report it to the police.

BIBLE LESSON—A Parable of Jesus

Let a volunteer read Matthew 18:22-34.

SAY: In this story the servant owes the king ten thousand talents. A talent equaled 5,000 denarii and a denarius, which was an average worker's daily wage, equaled about \$40. In other words, this servant owes about 20 billion dollars.

- *Why do you think Jesus assigned such a huge debt to the servant?* (He wanted to emphasize the huge nature of our sin-debt.)

SAY: The king calls the servant in and wants payment and plans to sell him and his wife and his children into slavery, though this would have barely even scratched the surface of this debt. However the servant pleads with him, "Be patient with me and I'll pay back everything."

- *How long do you think it would have taken the servant to pay off this debt?* (At the average daily wage of that time he would have to work 136,987 years without spending a dime to pay this off. That's 1,826 lifetimes at the average age of 75.—This debt is unpayable. Humanly, without a miracle, there is no way that he would ever be able to pay it off, but the king forgives him anyway.)

- *When the king forgave this debt, who paid for it?* (Debts don't just go away. When the king forgave this debt it cost him 20 billion dollars. It came out of the king's pocket. Forgiveness, likewise, is never free, but the price for our sins was paid by Jesus.)

- *How would you feel if you were just forgiven a 20 billion dollar debt?* (Instead of rejoicing and being glad, the servant goes out and finds another servant who owes him a hundred denarii—that's \$4,000, and begins to choke him saying, "Pay back what you owe." He's acting like he's not forgiven at all and that he still needs to get as much money as he can. He who was forgiven 20 billion dollars is trying to collect \$4,000.)

SAY: The second servant uses the exact same words as the first, "Be patient with me and I'll pay back everything." The only difference is—this servant could have easily paid off this debt, but instead of forgiving him, the first servant throws him in prison until he pays it back. But how is he supposed to pay it back if he's in prison? There is no logic in this, just vengeance.

- *How would you feel if it just cost you 20 billion dollars to forgive a servant's debt and then you hear about him beating up on and throwing another servant in prison over \$4,000?*
- *What did the king do? (He threw the first servant in prison to be tortured until he could pay back everything.)*
- *Is this fair? What would you have done if you were the king?*
- *What did it cost God to pay the price for your sins? (It cost Jesus' life. That's the only way your "unpayable" debt of sin could be paid. You could never pay it on your own.)*
- *How do you think it seems to God when after He has forgiven you for everything, that you don't forgive another?*
- *If we see our forgiveness the way Jesus described it, how should that affect the way we forgive others who wrong us?*

KEY VERSE

Let a volunteer read Matthew 18:35.

SAY: Jesus wanted his disciples to understand how important forgiveness was, but to really understand this verse, it's important to understand both what it is saying and what it is not saying.

- *Is Jesus saying here that if you don't forgive others that you'll lose your own salvation and go to hell? (No, but if you don't forgive others you'll put yourself in a prison of bitterness where you will experience emotional torture because you haven't let go of the situation and placed it in God's hands where it belongs.)*

Read Romans 8:38-39.

SAY: God never wants you to be unsure about whether or not you would spend eternity in heaven. When you give your life to Jesus, your life with Him is sealed for eternity. Your salvation is secure.

Let a volunteer read Colossians 3:13.

Let a volunteer read Ephesians 4:32.

- *In both of these verses why did Paul say you should forgive? (Because God forgave you.)*

SAY: God wants you to live a life of forgiveness and if you are unwilling to forgive, it might be because you don't realize how much and what it cost for God to forgive you.

WRAP IT UP

Final Thoughts

Give each student a pen and a slip of paper. Ask them to take a moment to think about people that have hurt them that they might not have forgiven. Tell them to write that person's initials on the paper. They may have more than one person too.

SAY: I want you to say a prayer of forgiveness for each person on your paper—something like, “God, I forgive this person for what he or she did to me. I commit him or her to your care.” You may not feel like forgiving but you can still choose to forgive and sometimes you have to forgive someone several times depending on how deeply they hurt you.

Give each student a nail and a rubber band. Tell them to wrap the slip of paper around the nail and use the rubber band to hold it in place.

SAY: This nail is to remind you that you can forgive others because God in Jesus forgave you. Take it and put it somewhere and anytime someone hurts you, put their initials on the paper, wrap it up and commit that person into the hands of the only One who can righteously judge.

Prayer Time

List prayer requests below and on the back of this page and pray for your students throughout the week. *Ask if any of your students want to pray today.*

Ideas for this lesson were taken in part from:

- (1) Lifetrak 5.3 Sunday School curriculum, “Following the Conductor,” Nashville: Lifeway, Spring 2005.
- (2) Student Life Bible Study Curriculum, “Life Of Christ: Why Forgive?” Birmingham, AL: Student Life Publishing, 2004.