

BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

Will You Forgive?
Matthew 18:15-35

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

Leaders' Responsibilities:

Important: Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a Unit of sessions needs to have access to the "Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study". That information is often provided at the beginning of that Unit of sessions. The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.
2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)
3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

Prior to this Coming Session:

Gathering Time Leader:

Bible Study Leader:

You will need pencils and paper for each participant. Include the small children. They will not participate in the activity but need to feel that they, too, are a part of the session. The smaller ones should have crayons for safety sake and for easier colouring. Ensure

©2001-2010, Eternal Interactive, LLC, All Rights Reserved. www.homechurchonline.com

2

Will You Forgive? – 06-19-09-en

Unless otherwise noted, scripture taken from the Holy Bible, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. All rights reserved throughout the world. Used by permission of International Bible Society.

that they have something solid under their work to make drawing easier and some kind of protection over the floor to avoid mishaps. Have the older preschoolers and younger children draw a picture of themselves sharing something “good” with a friend.

Bring a good dictionary to class with the page marked for the word “discipline”.

During the session, you will ask a member to read Matthew 18:21-35 (parable of the unmerciful servant) from ***The Message*** or another modern version of the Bible.

(It would be well to make that assignment during the week previous to this session so that the reader can practice.)

Worship Time Leader:

Music Sources:

Just When I Need Him Most, *The Worship Hymnal*, #160; CCLI #65855 Public Domain
Holy Ground, *The Worship Hymnal*, #72; CCLI # 21198

1

Copy this section for the Gathering Time leader.

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)

Will You Forgive?

Focal Text

Matthew 18:15-35

Background Text

Matthew 17-18

Main Idea

God's will is that we seek reconciliation with and grant forgiveness to people whom we feel have wronged us.

Question to Explore

What is the name of the person God wants you to forgive today?

Teaching Aim

To lead participants to identify whom God wants them to forgive and do it.

Gathering together:

Sing **Just When I Need Him Most.**

First thoughts:

An old hymn written sometime in the early 1800's will focus our minds on our topic today. How do we learn to forgive one another and live in harmony with one another? The answer resides in the title of the hymn "*Cast Thy Burden on the Lord.*" The old fashioned words and terminology remind us that people in all ages have faced the problems we face today.

Cast thy burden on the Lord,
Lean thou only on His Word;
Ever will He be thy stay,
Tho' the heav'ns shall melt away.

Ever in the raging storm,

Thou shalt see His cheering form;
Hear His pledge of coming aid:
“It is I, be not afraid.”

Cast thy burden at His feet;
Linger near His mercy seat;
He will lead thee by the hand
Gently to the better land.

He will gird thee by His power,
In the weary, fainting hour;
Lean thou strong upon His Word;
Cast thy burden on the Lord.

Words by George Rawson, 1807-1889

Closing the Gathering Time:

How do we learn to forgive one another and live in harmony with one another? This question is serious and profound. We must not take it lightly. Each of us has this problem. Our Bible study and worship time today should help us to answer this question that every one of us must face and answer.

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

2

Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

Note to the Bible Study Leader: Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

Teacher Preparation

Will You Forgive?

Focal Text

Matthew 18:15-35

Background Text

Matthew 17-18

Main Idea

God’s will is that we seek reconciliation with and grant forgiveness to people whom we feel have wronged us.

Question to Explore

What is the name of the person God wants you to forgive today?

Teaching Aim

To lead participants to identify whom God wants them to forgive and do it.

Introduction to your personal study:

My husband read me a story of forgiveness during the Second World War. In November 1940 a German blitz on the helpless town of Penrith, England, completely destroyed the centre of this ancient city where tradition has it that Lady Godiva once galloped unclad through the streets to force her husband to reduce taxes.

Two words are chiselled into the ruins of Coventry Cathedral in Penrith, “Father, Forgive.” After viewing the scene, Rolf Stromberg said, “It is one the most refreshing testaments to the [rugged determination] of man and his vision for a better future”.

Jesus was enduring the ruin of the cross when He uttered, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do”. He knew that forgiveness was necessary for a better future.

Background:

Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study**”, found at the beginning of this Unit. Whoever downloaded this session for you should have that material for you, as well.

This passage on forgiveness follows a group of parables about lostness. Christ’s desire is to find those who are lost from God and restore them to a right relationship with him. Forgiveness is all about restoring people to right relationships with each other and with God.

Focusing on the Meaning:

Seeking Reconciliation 18:15-20

15-17 Jesus indicates in these few verses the need for Christians to live together in harmony and genuine fellowship. The effect of wrong or strained relationships takes a toll on the whole church body. In fact, relationships are so important that if I have something against you, I can’t even worship properly. Here Jesus outlines a three-step process for reconciling brothers who are at odds.

In step one, the person who feels wronged should go to his brother in Christ and confront him privately with the problem. This is quite the opposite of the gossip and slander that often occurs when situations are not dealt with discreetly. These two alone should talk through the situation and try to work out an agreeable solution to their differences. Very often problems can be worked out just by meeting and airing the issue.

If that is not successful, the second step is for the offended person to invite two or three Christian brothers or sisters to participate in the negotiation. These can be witnesses to the attitudes and motives on each side of the dispute. Their job is to try to bring about reconciliation.

If even this step fails, Jesus taught that the matter should be brought before the entire congregation. Always the goal is restoration of the relationship between the two parties. It is never to make an example of someone, or to humiliate him or her. Ultimately, if the third step fails to bring about harmony, the onus is on the congregation to exclude the one who is at fault from further close fellowship with the church. In reality, by refusing to try to work out his differences with his Christian brother, he has excluded himself from fellowship with the church.

This last step of exclusion sounds very unkind, but it is just an acknowledgement of what has already taken place in that person’s heart.

When the text says ‘treat him as a pagan’, it means we should treat him as any other person who needs to know Christ as Saviour. Other versions use the term “Gentile” or “unbeliever”. The concept remains the same. We should love him or her and share Christ’s plan of eternal salvation with that person in an attempt to restore him or her to the fellowship.

Note -- Teaching suggestion for the group leader: Though the pronoun “him” refers to both sexes in such an obvious context as you see above, sometimes the impact on the listener becomes more personal and forceful when the teacher uses both terms, “him and/or her”. Try it!

Although this passage does not speak directly to family conflict, the same principles apply. It is necessary to personally confront the family member with whom there is a conflict, not in anger, but in love. Very often conflict happens because of misunderstanding. Talking it over between the two parties can clarify the issues. If this approach is unsuccessful, it is wise to call upon Christian counsellors to mediate the difficulty.

18-20 These verses indicate that the same authority in discipline given to the apostles is now available to the whole congregation as a local church body. The church has a responsibility to accept anyone who has been accepted by God already; likewise, the church has a responsibility to reject those who have already been rejected (by their own volition). God approves in advance the actions taken by a church that is acting totally under the direction of Jesus Christ.

Verses 19-20 emphasize what was said in verse 18. Any disciplinary action should be taken only under divine guidance sought in corporate prayer. There is tremendous authority in agreeing together in prayer, which naturally involves total commitment to Christ’s purpose.

To forgive or not? 18:21-35

21-22 Peter probably thought he was being quite generous in his willingness to forgive up to seven times, since the rabbis taught that three times was adequate. However, Christ taught that forgiveness is actually limitless. That is what he meant by using the large number. There is no need to keep track of how many times someone has offended us (check 1 Corinthians 13:5).

This parable illustrates the power that forgiveness has in the lives of the offended and the offender.

23-26 The king discovers as he was going over his bookkeeping records that one of his servants owed him an incredible sum of money. By today’s standards, it would be approximately ten million dollars! The king orders that the servant, his family, and possessions be sold in order to recover some of the loss. The servant begs the king to reconsider his actions, claiming that, given the opportunity, he would pay off the debt.

Of course, it is ludicrous to think that he could possibly pay such a great sum in his lifetime. Amazingly, the king felt sorry for this man. He completely cancelled out the great debt, and set him free.

27-30 As the servant left the king, he met a fellow servant who owed him a small amount of money- approximately twenty dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded payment, refusing to listen to the man's pleas – which was exactly what he had said himself to the king earlier. He insisted on having the man sent to prison until he could pay off the debt. He had the legal right to have the man thrown in prison, but he had no moral right to do so.

31-34 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were very angry. They went immediately to the king and reported the incident. The king was infuriated. Recalling the first servant, he rebuked him for his unkind and unforgiving behaviour toward his fellowman. Angrily, he had the unjust servant thrown into jail until he could pay off his original debt.

35 This verse seems to suggest that God is unwilling to forgive us if we do not forgive others. It is not really that God is unwilling to forgive. A person who has an unforgiving spirit himself or herself, is incapable of receiving God's forgiveness. We reveal the true nature of our hearts by the way we treat others.

No forgiveness that we might show towards anyone is comparable to what God has forgiven us. We are all in debt to God ten million plus. Yet He has freely and completely forgiven us. It is not because we deserve forgiveness in any way. God loves us and deals with us graciously. How dare we not forgive others the twenty-dollar debts they have incurred against us?

Your Goal as Leader of this Bible Study:

As Christians, have we been guilty of accepting the great forgiveness of our loving Heavenly Father, but been unwilling to forgive our brothers the little offences that have occurred? Perhaps the offences have not been slight. Perhaps they have been life-changing hurts. Just the same, our obligation is to forgive. Even when the offender is not sorry for what has happened, or when there might never be a chance for reconciliation, we need to forgive. Forgiveness is given on the basis of grace- it is not earned, but granted. You can forgive by grace—God forgave us long before we even knew to ask Him. Mark Twain is reported to have said, "Forgiveness is the fragrance the violet gives, on the heel that crushes it".(Source unknown).

Forgiveness is a powerful thing. Lack of forgiveness is also very powerful. It has consumed and destroyed many lives. If we refuse to forgive, we can become prisoners of our own bitter unforgiving spirits. That bitter spirit and negative feeling affects all our other relationships. The choice to forgive is a healing, vital choice for every Christian.

For Personal Reflection:

©2001-2010, Eternal Interactive, LLC, All Rights Reserved. www.homechurchonline.com

9

Will You Forgive? – 06-19-09-en

Unless otherwise noted, scripture taken from the Holy Bible, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. All rights reserved throughout the world. Used by permission of International Bible Society.

What have I learned from this study?

What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?

What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?

Bible Study Plan (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

Will You Forgive?

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.

Focal Text

Matthew 18:15-35

Background Text

Matthew 17-18

Main Idea

God's will is that we seek reconciliation with and grant forgiveness to people whom we feel have wronged us.

Question to Explore

What is the name of the person God wants you to forgive today?

Teaching Aim

To lead participants to identify whom God wants them to forgive and do it.

Connect with Life:

As group members arrive, ask them to think back to a situation in their lives that was very difficult to forgive. They needn't share out loud, but ask them to record their feelings on a piece of paper. Put the papers aside for later use. Assure them that no one else will ever see what they write.

Guide the Study:

Have someone read Matthew 18:15-20.

Encourage members to outline the three-step process given in Scripture for dealing with offences that arise within the church family. Wait for questions or suggestions regarding that process that leads to resolution, forgiveness, and restoration.

Challenge the group to see that this same process can work within personal family life.

Discuss the concept of discipline. (focus on the primary goal of learning rather than punishment).

Open the dictionary that you brought to the word “discipline” or the printed definition that you made. Have a member read the complete definition of the word “discipline”.

Suggest this: Discipline basically means to disciple someone. And a disciple is a learner and follower. It is the same term and the same meaning that is used throughout the New Testament in reference to the disciples (followers and learners) of Jesus.

Ask: How is excluding someone from fellowship just acknowledging publicly what has already occurred in that person’s heart?

Encourage group members to share their understanding of what is meant by ‘agreeing in prayer’ in verses 19-20.

Have someone read aloud the entire parable of the unmerciful servant verses 21-35 in a modern version such as *The Message*. Ask them to read it with feeling. **(It would be well to make that assignment during the week previous to this session so that the reader could practice.)**

Seek an answer to this: “Why did Peter use the number seven in this case?”

Look for an answer from the group: “What was the significance to Jesus’ audience of the number 77 which Jesus used in answer to his question?”

Discuss the statement: ‘Although the servant had a legal right to action against his brother, he had no moral right.’

Invite a brief discussion on this subject: “What does it mean to forgive someone?”

Invite someone to read Isaiah 43:25 aloud.

Guide members to understand that forgiveness is the restoration of the offender to his former place of fellowship and favour.

Summarize the idea by saying: It is the removal of barriers that hinder a relationship. Help them see that God’s forgiveness has nothing to do with our merit.

Ask: “Are Christians obligated to forgive?”

Follow up with this: What are the consequences when we choose not to forgive? Perhaps someone in the group can relate a personal incidence of the tragic consequence when we choose not to forgive.

Call upon the group to retrieve the notes they made earlier on a situation that involved forgiveness in their own lives.

Urge members to consider whether they have truly forgiven the person(s) who have deeply hurt them.

Now state: You will probably wish to destroy the notes you made. However, please don't forget what you wrote or postpone the forgiveness you need to make.

Encourage Application:

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the Youth!!! Take Ten page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

Have a time of prayer for understanding and commitment to do what God would have us do—genuinely forgive because of grace alone.

Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time. Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

Youth!!! Take Ten

Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

Will You Forgive? **Matthew 18:15-35**

A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

Learning to Forgive with Mind, Heart, and Action —All Three or None at All!

Lack of forgiveness is at the heart of broken relationships on every level. Nations war with one another over injuries suffered in years past. Spouses fail to enjoy the love which should be theirs because they hold grudges for past wrongs. Learning to forgive begins as a young child learns to say “I’m sorry” and “I forgive you”. Youth are good at holding grudges. Teachers may seem unfair; bullies can make life miserable; a good friend steals your sweetheart. These are all reasons for unforgiveness. They are also reasons for forgiveness. Most teachers do not mean to be unfair. Bullies have their own issues of poor self-esteem and lack of love. Looking at two sides of most issues helps us know that we can forgive. Start on the small things; it will be easier when the big issues come in life.

Pray together that you will be able to forgive those who have wronged you. Remember that Jesus taught his disciples (that’s us) to pray ***“Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us”*** (Matthew 6:12).

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***Will You Forgive?***
Matthew 18:15-35**Beginning the Service:**

Sing **Holy Ground**.

Lead the group in praying the Lord's prayer.

Say: ***"Pray then, in this way;***

***Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name.
Thy Kingdom come
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil,
For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen"***

Matthew 5: 9-13

Offering:**Praying for the World:**

Don and Edith Kennedy ministered to university students for over thirty-one years in the country of Mexico. Pastors, church leaders, and missionaries have come out of that ministry. Many Mexicans have been trained by them to continue the ministry. Yet the number of universities and university students continues to grow. The Kennedys have recently retired. Fortunately, Mexican leaders will continue their work. Much remains to be done.

Think about it: How do we reach 2½ million students for Christ on 3,000 university, college, and technical campuses across the vast nation of Mexico? Pray.

Sharing Guide:

This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.

Psalms 133:1-3

Introduction:

***“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.
It is like the precious oil upon the head.
Coming down upon the beard.
Coming down upon the edge of his robes.
It is like the dew of Hermon,
Coming down upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the Lord commanded the blessing – life forever.”***

Forgiveness has always been the subject matter of Christian teaching and belief. Christ's words from the cross resonate across the ages. ***“And when they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. But Jesus was saying, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.’”*** (Luke 23:33-34)

Always the example of Jesus is before us. Jesus, the innocent lamb of God was crucified. Yet in the midst of the suffering, He said, ***“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”***

As he taught his disciples to pray he indicated the importance of forgiveness.

***“Pray then, in this way;
Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name.
Thy Kingdom come
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.***

***And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil,
For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen”***

Today, many disciplines emphasize the importance of forgiveness. Psychologists study forgiveness as a means of achieving emotional health. Health and wellness experts emphasize its benefit for physical health. Diplomats and world leaders stress the importance for forgiveness and reconciliation in order for countries torn by inner as well as outer conflict to heal.

Yet, for most of us, forgiveness is a struggle too big to contemplate. We have been abandoned or abused by parents; cast away by spouses; fired or downsized by companies to which we had given great loyalty; betrayed by government leaders; disappointed by friends and too often, disillusioned by fellow Christians.

We trudge along, bearing the pain of these wounds and carrying the load of unforgiveness. We forget for periods of time; we go ahead with new jobs, new relationships and new church families, but the core of unforgiveness causes bitterness in our soul.

Psalm 133 talks of a better way. ***“Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!”***

Certainly, the Psalm must be referring to the kind of understanding and forgiveness and healing that we have examined in the passage in Matthew.

First, we are told to go privately to a Christian brother and speak with him/her about the incident in question. If he/she does not listen, take a trusted friend or two with you to discuss the matter. Finally, gather the church to join you in seeking reconciliation.

This admonition certainly speaks to home churches. In fact, these three processes may be compressed into one single incident. We may assume that in a larger, traditional church a group representative of the church may fulfill the third approach. But in a home church, the whole group will be involved because in a small group a disagreement between two members will cause the whole group to suffer. It will, in fact, render the witness, fellowship, and work of the body helpless. When we resolve our differences it is a wonderful time of teaching children that adults who love the Lord may work together in unity. They will be able to say with the Psalmist, ***“Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.”***

The Matthew passage continues to emphasize the importance of forgiveness when Peter asked Jesus if he should forgive a brother as many as seven times. Jesus replies, ***“I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”*** (Matthew 18:21). Jesus here seems to refer to the ongoing nature of forgiveness. We have struggled in the past with feeling that we must forgive, once for all, and get on with our lives. Modern thought, from both secular and religious leaders, helps us understand that forgiveness is a process. It may truly involve a deliberate decision to forgive

“seventy times seven”. In the past we may have thought of Jesus’ command to forgive over and over as referring to distinct trespasses or wrongs. But it surely must also refer to those ongoing experiences with pain which come from betrayal by parent, spouse, friend, or fellow Christian. We easily identify with the reality that we may feel we have worked through an issue and have extended, by the grace of God, forgiveness to one who may not have asked for forgiveness or who may not acknowledge any sin against us. Yet, all too often feelings of unforgiveness surface again. Forgiveness is not the evening out of a score to be settled. Forgiveness is the gift we give to one who may not ever have asked for forgiveness or who might throw our gift of forgiveness back in our face if we confronted them.

Let us return to the Psalms passage. **“Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.”** We are then given a word picture of an anointing of oil which flows down over the head, the beard and the robe—a holy moment. We further picture the morning dew on the mountains – the mountains of Zion. Again we realize the holy aspect of harmonious living which is so dependent on forgiveness. Finally, we are told that the Lord has commanded the blessing – life forever for those who have learned to live in harmony.

What may we say then, about forgiveness?

It is good and pleasing to the Lord and is related to the blessing of eternal life. Forgiveness of those who have hurt us on earth prepares us for life with God in eternity.

Forgiveness is an ongoing process. Deep pain cannot be eradicated in most circumstances by a single, emotional time of prayer and supplication.

Forgiveness is something we learn to do. Children see adults expressing and experiencing forgiveness. They learn to forgive the slights and disappointments of childhood by the careful example and teaching of those who are entrusted with their spiritual growth.

Teens live beyond the disappointment of first love, friendships betrayed, and failed heroes. They learn to see the genuine efforts of adults in their world to live with integrity while beginning to understand that they are only human.

Young adults dream of a future and find that future to be more difficult to attain than they imagined. Middle adults are disappointed by children, jobs and friendships. Older adults may be abandoned by children, set aside by employers to whom they have given faithful service and left out of worship and church activities to which they have committed much of their lives.

Call to Commitment:

Forgiveness is needed all along life's journey. No wonder Jesus expressed it as a daily need along with our petition for daily bread. "Help me, Lord, to have the food I need for the day and help me forgive those who this day will disappoint me."

May it be so, Lord Jesus.

Concluding the Service:

(As appropriate in the room in which you meet):

Say: Please stand as I read God's blessing on us for this day:

"(Finally,) Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32)

Say: Go now in God's grace; his peace in your hearts, and his forgiveness in your every thought and deed.