**Live in Community**



Small Group Study

**Volume Overview**

**Recognize Sin**

Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! ([2 Corinthians 5:17](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.2Co5.17))

*The Bible has a lot to say about sin and forgiveness. It acknowledges the deep brokenness of this world and our individual life. It is only by understanding the depth of human sin that we can understand the remarkable work of God’s forgiveness. Because of His forgiveness, we escape the eternal consequence of our sin and can rightly respond to the call to live a holy life. We learn to receive forgiveness, put off sin, and show forgiveness to those who have sinned against us. We learn to pursue holiness in the midst of the world’s brokenness.*

**Session Overview**

**Show Forgiveness**

**Biblical Encounter:** The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant ([Matthew 18:21–35](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mt18.21-35))

**Outcome:** Reflect God’s mercy toward your sin as you deal with those who wrong you.

*In this session, we’ll see the absurdity of wanting to experience God’s mercy in our life without extending it to people around us. Through a parable, Jesus made it pretty plain that it just doesn’t work that way. We can’t receive forgiveness from God and then be unwilling to forgive people who have hurt us. This is a difficult teaching from Jesus, but with His help, it’s one we can learn to live out.*

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| First time leading *Live* for Adults? Check out the [Facilitator Guide](https://0b769b0ed3569ef9d18b-f88d8272f61086866d50d048b43ef630.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/sites/biblengagementproject/Listen_Facilitator_Guide.pdf). |

To access session content and videos from a computer, visit: [BibleEngagementProject.com/downloads](https://bibleengagementproject.com/downloads)

**Engage**

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| **QUESTION**  What are some examples of other things we like to receive, but may be slow to give to others? |

Growing up, many of us may have experienced the pain of sibling rivalry. Siblings love each other, but also experience a lot of tension and competition. We also probably heard—and expressed—a lot of very insincere apologies that didn’t really help us to learn forgiveness. As we grew up, this challenge grew with us. But Jesus’ teachings are often a wake-up call. They’re sometimes like a bucket of cold water to the face.

Jesus isn’t trying to make our life more difficult. But He knows that living a life of unforgiveness is costly, and He wants to save us from it. Forgiving others will take courage, and more than a little help from the Holy Spirit, but learning to forgive is an area of life where we could all use some help.

**Watch**

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: How has receiving God’s forgiveness impacted your willingness to forgive others?



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**Consider What the Bible Says**

In this story, Peter asked Jesus a question. It’s likely that the other disciples were there too since they were present when the chapter began. Many times, Jesus answered people’s questions with one of His own, but not here. Jesus answered Peter directly. However, He didn’t tell Peter and any others present what they were probably hoping to hear, which also wasn’t uncommon for Jesus’ conversations.

It’s clear from the question that Peter wanted to find out when it was okay to stop offering forgiveness. He probably wondered if he could forgive someone a few times and then never again. Jesus responded with exactly what Peter (and we) needed to hear.

**(Un)Limited Forgiveness**

Read [Matthew 18:21–22](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mt18.21-22).

Jesus made it clear that seven times wasn’t enough. Instead, Jesus took Peter’s suggested seven times, and made it multiple times greater! Jesus wasn’t actually saying that there’s a limit. His point was that the disciples, and we, must keep on forgiving. It’s a hard thing for us to hear, especially when we’ve been deeply hurt by someone. But the rest of the story offers a powerful case for unlimited forgiveness.

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| **QUESTION**  Why do you think the disciples wanted Jesus to talk about forgiveness? |

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| **QUESTION**  How do you think the disciples reacted when they heard Jesus’ response to Peter’s question? |

**God Forgives Generously**

Read [Matthew 18:23–27](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mt18.23-27).

Jesus expanded on His response about forgiveness with another story. This time He talked about a servant who owed a great debt that his master generously forgave. Jesus told His hearers from the beginning that this story was to illustrate God’s kingdom, so the master in the story represents God.

We have heard about God’s forgiveness so often that it may have lost its punch, but it shouldn’t. It’s outside human nature to behave this way when it comes to forgiving others, but that’s the point. It’s not at all outside God’s nature to be merciful and to forgive us. He sets the standard that He wants us to live by. It’s worth noticing as well that the servant in this story offered nothing in exchange for this forgiveness. He only asked for patience to repay. Yet, the debt seemed far too large for that to be possible.

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| **QUESTION**  As you think about this Bible story so far, what is it about Jesus’ teaching that strikes you the most? |

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| **QUESTION**  In what way do you think that the disciples’ understanding of forgiveness may have already begun to shift at this point? |

**Unforgiveness Is Evil**

Read [Matthew 18:28–30](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mt18.28-30).

Jesus was masterful at throwing curveballs. He threw a big one with the dark, violent twist in His story. He knew what He was doing though. He was forcing His disciples (and us) to think about the unfairness of someone who would act this way. When you’ve been forgiven of so much, how can you not forgive someone else of so little? It seems so obviously wrong and evil.

Again, this was the effect Jesus wanted. He meant for it to be obviously evil not to forgive others when we’ve been generously forgiven. This servant had received mercy—which meant he didn’t get what he deserved—but then he refused to extend that same mercy to someone else.

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| **QUESTION**  Why do you think Peter and the other disciples needed this advice from Jesus? |

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| **QUESTION**  Have you ever been in a similar situation—knowing you should forgive, but really struggling to do so? Share briefly about the situation if you are comfortable doing so. |

**Receiving What We Give to Others**

Read [Matthew 18:31–35](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mt18.31-35).

Now, Jesus brought it all home. He showed us that this whole story isn’t about others, but about us. We are the ones with the opposite nature from God. He is quick to be merciful, and we are so very slow at times. Shockingly, even when we have already experienced His mercy and grace, we can be so stingy about sharing it with others.

Peter was looking for a loophole, but Jesus sewed it shut. He taught the disciples that if they withheld forgiveness, it would be withheld from them. It is one of the most direct teachings Jesus gave. And it’s one we can’t afford to ignore.

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| **QUESTION**  Have you ever witnessed a positive change in someone’s behavior toward others through mercy and forgiveness? What stands out to you about the change you observed? |

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| **QUESTION**  If you could ask Peter or the other disciples anything about this discussion with Jesus, what would it be? |

**Did You Know?**

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| *In the first century, it was not uncommon for individuals to sell themselves into slavery for a predetermined time period to cover a debt. This slavery wasn’t the same as modern slavery since this action was willingly done by the person. These volunteers also held significant rights, similar to a paid worker, just without the availability to come and go as they pleased. They couldn’t be abused or mistreated, and the slave would again be free either upon the completion of the allotted time or the death of the master. Yet, involuntary slavery also occurred. In severe instances, when a debt was beyond one’s ability to repay, an individual—as well as their immediate family—could be forcibly sold into slavery by governing authorities. In that case, most rights were forfeited and they would, in a sense, become property.* |

**Reflect**

**Reflect God’s mercy toward your sin as you deal with those who wrong you.**

First, take a moment to reflect on how God’s mercy has impacted you. How has it helped you to understand His love for you and His desire to forgive you? Now, allow yourself to take the drastic turn that Jesus created for us in the story, and evaluate how well you’re reflecting His mercy toward those who’ve wronged you.

It’s important to remember that we can forgive people who have wronged us without allowing them fully into our life. There’s a difference between extending forgiveness and continuing to give someone the chance to hurt us and those we love.

So, how many times should we forgive others? Is there a limit? Well, Jesus taught that to receive forgiveness we must be willing to extend it. This is one of the hallmarks of the Christian faith. After all, Jesus could have answered Peter’s question with one of His own: How many times do you want God to forgive you?

**Listen to God**

Let’s pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

**Personal Reflection Questions**

*Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.*

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| **QUESTION**  What part of Jesus’ story has impacted you the most? |

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| **QUESTION**  How is the Holy Spirit speaking to you about forgiveness right now? |

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| **QUESTION**  In what ways are you struggling to reflect God’s mercy toward those who have wronged you? |

**Activate**

One of the great challenges with reflecting God’s mercy and offering forgiveness to others is that they aren’t required to ask for it in order for us to give it. Forgiving isn’t about the other person. It’s about us. If you’re struggling to forgive and move on, it isn’t harming those who have wronged you. It’s harming you.

**Challenge**

Think about someone you need to forgive. Who is that person(s)? Forgiving them isn’t going to be easy, but remember *you* will be one of the main beneficiaries. You are going to feel waves of relief even if you don’t tell them or they don’t recognize they even need it. You will feel God’s mercy and peace in new and surprising ways as you are obedient to Jesus.

Then consider if you need to establish boundaries to keep the person from hurting you again. If so, talking about the situation with a counselor, pastor, or trusted friend may help you know how to best move forward in relationship with this person.

**Prayer Requests**

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| Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week. |

Learning to forgive usually isn’t a moment; it’s a process. We love for things to be one-and-done, but that isn’t always how the Holy Spirit works in us. That doesn’t mean we can’t take some meaningful steps now and continue to grow as we walk further through life with Jesus. To help you in this process, some personal devotions have been provided for you to continue to learn about forgiveness through God’s Word.

**Live on Your Own**

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| *Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.* |

**Day 1: The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant**

Read [Matthew 18:21–35](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mt18.21-35).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven’t already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

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| **QUESTION**  What is God saying to you about reflecting His mercy and forgiveness toward those who have wronged you? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 2: Jesus Forgave His Enemies**

Read [Luke 23:26–34](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk23.26-34).

The only thing more powerful than Jesus’ teaching is how He lived. He didn’t only tell people they needed extreme forgiveness, but He also showed it. One of the most shocking parts of this passage is that He was in the middle of suffering horrendously to the point of death when He forgave His executors. That shows us forgiveness isn’t only for situations in the past.

Moments like these can be defeating for us and make us think we could *never* be like Jesus. Remember, when Jesus returned to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to live within us. On our own we could never show that kind of forgiveness, but we are not alone. We have God’s Spirit in us, and He will help us do far more than we ever could on our own.

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| **QUESTION**  It’s impossible to fully comprehend Jesus’ suffering on the Cross, but take a moment to imagine what you would have done or said to those who betrayed you in a similar situation. |

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| **QUESTION**  How does it challenge you to realize Jesus didn’t only forgive, but He was quick to forgive? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 3: Experience Forgiveness**

Read [1 John 1:5–10](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.1Jn1.5-10).

In this session’s Bible story about forgiveness, someone who experienced God’s abundant mercy and forgiveness asked if he was required to do the same thing for others ([Matthew 18:21](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mt18.21)). What seemed so clear in a story wasn’t as clear to Peter and the disciples in real life. But Jesus’ story helped them realize how much God had forgiven them.

Take some time and allow God’s Spirit to search your heart. What do you need to ask forgiveness for? Let it sink in that God *will* forgive you. You can receive His forgiveness today. And with Jesus’ example guiding you, instead of withholding mercy, you can learn to forgive more freely.

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| **QUESTION**  What is God showing you about your own heart and life that is leading you to repentance? |

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| **QUESTION**  How can you best receive God’s mercy? Are you fully able to forgive yourself as God forgives you? Ask God to help you do so if you need to. |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 4: Delighting in Forgiveness**

Read [Micah 7:18–20](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mic7.18-20).

Micah’s opening question is worth pondering: “Where is another God like you?” There isn’t one anywhere. God delights in showing His love through mercy. Think about that. You may not be an expert on ancient religions—and you don’t need to be—but who has ever heard of anyone even claiming that other gods are *delighted* after offering forgiveness?

Can that be said of us? Do we show love through forgiving like God does? Remember, forgiveness and extending mercy doesn’t set others free. It sets *us* free. Their freedom can’t be found in us forgiving them, but it may lead them to the One who can bring them freedom through Him.

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| **QUESTION**  Who is someone you know who seems to forgive others with ease? How are you inspired to change by thinking about their godly example? |

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| **QUESTION**  How can you find more joy in forgiveness? What do you need to ask God to do in your heart to begin this kind of change? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 5: The Lord’s Representatives**

Read [Colossians 3:12–17](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Col3.12-17).

Reflecting God’s mercy is a mission to accept. Paul tells us to do everything as representatives of Jesus (verse [17](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Col3.17)). Our goal is to help others come to life-changing faith in Jesus, and our witness can impact that. We can’t get around the fact that being merciful does not come naturally to humans. But it is so like Christ.

There are few ways in which we could be a more powerful witness than to genuinely forgive someone when they know they don’t deserve it. Mercy brings God’s people together into a community that can only be created by God. Living in community with others God’s way is so different, and so beautiful, that the world will not be able to ignore it even if they don’t like it.

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| **QUESTION**  How does being merciful and forgiving set us apart from the world? |

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| **QUESTION**  How can you help your church, and the greater community of Christians around you, better become what Paul describes in the passage—a faith family that is clothed with love, mercy, and kindness? |