Preschool–Grade 6

The Unforgiving Servant

Sunday School Lesson for 3rd to 5th Grade, 45–60 minutes

Main point: Forgive because you are forgiven. God has forgiven us far more than anyone will ever owe us.
Bible passage: Matthew 18:21–35. Read it before class.
Memory verse: "Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." *Matthew 18:22 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each child (or one for every two children), a whiteboard or large paper, a marker, and one take-home sheet for each child.
Before class: write the memory verse on the board. On the other side, draw two columns: "The servant owed the king" and "The fellowservant owed the servant."

1. Opening game: How Long to Pay? (5–10 minutes)

Say: "Pretend you earn one dollar a day for chores." Ask: *How long to pay back 5 dollars? 100 dollars? A million dollars?* Let kids work it out (5 days; 100 days; about 2,700 years!). Say: "Some debts you could pay. Some debts you could never pay, not in your whole life. Today Jesus tells a story about both."

2. Bible story: Seventy Times Seven (15 minutes)

Kids open their Bibles to Matthew 18. When you reach a **Look up** line, a child finds the verse and reads it out loud. Tell the rest in your own words.

Peter's question. Look up Matthew 18:21. Peter asked, "How **oft**" (how many times) should he forgive his brother, "till seven times?" **Look up Matthew 18:22.** Jesus answered, "Until seventy times seven." Say: "Jesus did not give Peter a number to count up to and then stop. Keep on forgiving." Then Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is **likened** (is like) a king who would take account of his servants (18:23).

The giant debt. Look up Matthew 18:24–25. One servant owed **ten thousand talents**. A talent was a huge amount of money; this was a debt he could never pay. "He had not to pay," so his lord commanded that he, his wife, his children and all he had be sold. **Look up Matthew 18:26–27.** The servant fell down and **worshipped** him (bowed down low before him), saying, "Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." The lord was **moved with compassion**, **loosed** him (set him free), and forgave him the whole debt.

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The little debt. Look up Matthew 18:28. The same servant went out and found a **fellowservant** who owed him **an hundred pence**. A penny was a worker's pay for one day (Matthew 20:2). The servant laid hands on him and said, "Pay me that thou owest." **Look up Matthew 18:29–30.** The fellowservant fell down and begged with the very same words, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." But he **would not**. He cast him into prison till he should pay the debt. Write both debts in the two columns on the board.

The king finds out. Look up Matthew 18:31–33. The other servants were very sorry and told their lord. He called the servant: "O thou **wicked** servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou **desiredst** me" (because you asked me). "Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?" **Look up Matthew 18:35.** Jesus said: "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their **trespasses**" (the wrongs they do). Say: "Jesus means it. If we will not forgive from our hearts, God will not forgive us. He says the same in Matthew 6:14–15."

3. Questions to ask (10 minutes)

Thinking questions (no single right answer; let kids talk)

1. Look at the two columns. Why was it so wrong for the servant not to forgive the little debt?
2. The fellowservant used the same words the servant had used (18:26, 18:29). Why do you think the servant did not show the same mercy he had been shown?
3. What does it mean to forgive "from your hearts" (18:35), and not just say the words?
4. Why is it hard to forgive someone who keeps doing the same wrong thing?
5. Who is someone you need to forgive this week?

Recall questions

1. How many times did Peter suggest? *(Seven, Matthew 18:21)*
2. How much did the servant owe the king? *(Ten thousand talents, 18:24)*
3. Where did the servant put his fellowservant? *(Into prison, 18:30)*

4. Memory verse: Erase a Word (5 minutes)

Explain the old words: **saith** means said, **thee** means you, **until seven times** means only seven times, and **seventy times seven** means keep on forgiving without keeping count. Read the verse on the board together. Erase two words and read it again. Keep erasing two words at a time until the board is empty and the class can say it alone. Then kids say it to a partner.

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5. What this means for us (5 minutes)

Say: "The servant owed a debt he could never pay. Our sin is like that. Jesus taught us to pray, 'And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors' (Matthew 6:12, KJV). God loves you. The Bible says: 'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). That means all of us have done wrong, and none of us is as good as God. Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, which means God came to earth as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). How do we obey the gospel? 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' (Acts 2:38, KJV) To **repent** means to turn away from sin; our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are **buried with Jesus in baptism**, all the way under the water, in Jesus' name. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we come up to live a new life (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). And God fills us with the **Holy Ghost**, and we speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives the words (Acts 2:4). The Bible calls this being born again (John 3:5). When God has forgiven us that much, we forgive others too."
Pray with the kids, and encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor about being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost. Never pressure a child.
This week: forgive one person from your heart, even if it's the second or third time. And say "I'm sorry" when you do wrong.

6. Activity: Bible Look-Up Race (10–15 minutes)

Kids work in pairs with one Bible. Read a reference and a question. The first pair to find the verse and read the answer out loud wins the point.

1. Matthew 18:21: Who asked how often to forgive? *(Peter)*
2. Matthew 18:22: What number did Jesus say? *(Seventy times seven)*
3. Matthew 18:24: How much did the servant owe? *(Ten thousand talents)*
4. Matthew 18:27: What was the lord moved with? *(Compassion)*
5. Matthew 18:28: How much did the fellowservant owe? *(An hundred pence)*
6. Matthew 18:30: Where did the servant cast him? *(Into prison)*
7. Matthew 18:31: Who told the lord what was done? *(The fellowservants)*
8. Matthew 18:35: Where must we forgive from? *(From our hearts)*

7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You for loving us and coming to save us in Jesus. You forgive a debt we could never pay. Help us forgive others from our hearts, again and again, without keeping count. In Jesus' name, amen."

Teacher note: this lesson leaves out the tormentors (Matthew 18:34) and reads 18:35 plainly. Forgiving does not mean keeping a secret or staying where you get hurt. If a child tells you someone is hurting them, get help from your pastor and the right people.

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