Preschool–Grade 6

The Unforgiving Servant

Sunday School Lesson for Preteens (Ages 11–12), 45–60 minutes

Main point: Forgiven people forgive. God has forgiven us a debt we could never pay, so we forgive others from our hearts.
Bible passage: Matthew 18:21–35. Students read it out loud themselves.
Memory verse: "Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." *Matthew 18:22 (KJV)* and "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." *Ephesians 4:32 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each student, paper or a notebook and a pen for each student, a whiteboard and a marker, and one take-home sheet for each student.
Before class: read Matthew 18:21–35, Matthew 6:12–15 and Ephesians 4:32. Write both memory verses on the board. Decide who reads which verses.

1. Opening game: Keeping Score (5–10 minutes)

Read each situation and let students vote with a thumb up (easy to forgive), a thumb down (hard) or sideways (not sure): 1) A friend forgets your birthday. 2) Your sister reads your private notes. 3) A classmate says something mean about you, then says sorry. 4) The same classmate does it again the next week. After each, ask: *Does it get harder the second time? Why do people keep score?* Say: "Peter asked Jesus how many times he had to forgive. Today we read Jesus' answer and the story He told."

2. Bible story: Students Read It (15 minutes)

Read out loud: Matthew 18:21–35. Students take turns, a verse or two each. Old words in this passage:

- **how oft** (18:21): how many times
- **likened unto** (18:23): is like; **take account of**: settle what they owed
- **talents** (18:24): a huge amount of money; **forasmuch as he had not to pay** (18:25): because he had no way to pay
- **worshipped him** (18:26): bowed down low before him; **have patience with me**: give me time
- **moved with compassion, and loosed him** (18:27): he felt for him, wanted to help, and set him free
- **fellowservants** (18:28): other servants of the same lord; **pence**: small coins, a penny was a day's pay (Matthew 20:2)
- **besought** (18:29): begged; **desiredst me** (18:32): asked me
- **wroth** (18:34): very angry; **trespasses** (18:35): the wrongs people do

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Look closer. Point out these details with the class:

- **The size of the debts.** Ten thousand talents was more than the servant could ever pay: "he had not to pay" (Matthew 18:25). An hundred pence was about a hundred days' pay (Matthew 20:2): real money, but small next to the first debt.
- **The same words.** Read 18:26 and 18:29 side by side. The fellowservant begged with almost the same words the servant had just used. The servant had been shown compassion and still "would not" (18:30).
- **The king's question.** "Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?" (18:33). Being forgiven is supposed to change how we treat others.
- **Jesus means it.** "If ye from your hearts forgive not" (18:35) is serious. Jesus said the same after His model prayer: "But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:15). Our Father is the one God, who came to us in Jesus (1 Timothy 3:16).

3. Questions to ask (15 minutes)

1. Why did Peter pick seven (18:21)? What does Jesus' answer (18:22) show about keeping score?
2. How is our sin like the debt of ten thousand talents? (Read Matthew 6:12.)
3. The servant had been forgiven so much, yet he "would not" forgive a little (18:30). What do you think made him act that way?
4. What is the difference between saying "I forgive you" and forgiving "from your hearts" (18:35)?
5. Does forgiving mean pretending the wrong didn't happen, or letting someone keep hurting you? (No: forgiving lets go of getting even. If someone is hurting you, tell a parent, pastor or teacher.)
6. Who is one person you need to forgive?

4. Memory verse (5 minutes)

Old words: **saith** means said, **thee** means you, and **seventy times seven** means keep on forgiving without keeping count. In Ephesians 4:32, **tenderhearted** means gentle and caring, and **for Christ's sake** means because of what Jesus did.
Read both verses together. Then students cover one phrase at a time and quiz a partner. Say Matthew 18:22 this week; keep working on Ephesians 4:32 next week too.

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5. What this means for us (5–10 minutes)

Say: "We all owe a debt we can't pay. God loves you, and 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, God who came as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, KJV). We obey the gospel the way Peter preached it: '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) We **repent**, turning from sin, and our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are buried with Jesus by baptism in His name, all the way under the water. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we rise to walk in newness of life, a brand-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 utterance, which means as He gives the words (Acts 2:4). Jesus called this being born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5). People who have been forgiven that much forgive others."
Pray with the students, 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.

6. Activity: Journal (10 minutes)

Each student writes privately. No one has to share. Write these three prompts on the board:

1. What has God forgiven me, or what does He want to forgive me?
2. Who is one person I am keeping score with, and what would forgiving them from my heart look like?
3. Write a short prayer asking God to help you forgive the way you have been forgiven.
   If there is time, invite a few volunteers to share one sentence.

This week: read Matthew 18:21–35 again at home, and pray Matthew 6:12 each day. Forgive the person you wrote about in question 2.

7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You for loving us and coming to save us in Jesus. You forgive a debt we could never pay. Make us tenderhearted, and help us forgive one another from our hearts, without keeping score. In Jesus' name, amen."

Teacher note: read the whole passage as Jesus told it, including 18:34 ("delivered him to the tormentors") and 18:35. Don't add details Jesus did not give. If a student shares that someone is hurting them, forgiveness never means keeping it secret: get help from your pastor and the right people.

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