

Forgiving Difficult Things

Quarter 8 • Lesson 8

Focus on Character Development

1. *Connecting:* Do an activity and watch an object lesson about forgiving difficult things.
2. *Teaching:* Hear how Jesus helped Stephen forgive (Acts 6—7; Ephesians 4:31–32).
3. *Responding:* Take steps to begin forgiving someone.

SUPPLIES

- Bible
- Onion
- Jug of water
- Salt
- Towel or rags

Optional Supplies:

- *The Action Bible*, pages 669–670
- *The Action Bible*, image of the stoning of Stephen
- Pencils
- Memory Verse Poster
- Student Pages

Teacher Devotion

*Be kind and compassionate to one another,
forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

Ephesians 4:32

Living in this fallen world, we have all experienced hurt due to others' choices. When we have been deeply hurt by someone, it is difficult to forgive. It can be extremely hard to let go of our right to punish someone who has betrayed us or hurt us physically or emotionally. But God calls us to forgive each other as Christ forgave us.

Think about any hurts you have not fully entrusted to God. Remember, forgiveness is often a process, not a quick decision. Invite God to soften your heart as you take these steps:

1. Remember that you have been forgiven much. As you understand how great a debt He paid for you, more grace and forgiveness towards others will fill you.
2. Acknowledge that what happened to you was wrong. Think through what happened and how it made you feel. When you recognize these feelings, you can begin the process of releasing them to God.

3. Let go of your desire for revenge. God is the Judge and the giver of justice. He can be trusted to bring justice to any situation, either in this life or in eternity.

4. Receive God's healing and focus on what is good. As you release your pain to God, you can begin to receive His healing and move toward what is good in your life.

Family Connection: Tell families that this week their children will learn about forgiving hard things. Encourage them to share about times when they forgave someone and what the results were in their own lives.

LESSON TIME

1. Connecting: Do an activity and watch an object lesson about forgiving difficult things.

As your children arrive, encourage them to share how they served someone since the last class. Be ready to share an example of a time last week when you served or were served because someone loved Jesus.

- **This week we will learn about forgiveness. What does it mean to forgive?**

Allow 2–3 children to share their ideas before sharing the information below.

To forgive is to release a hurt or offense that was done to us. It is like erasing the sting of the pain from the injury or offense. It acknowledges that a wrong was done, but it means we let God determine the consequences for that wrong. It does not mean that what happened to us is right. But it does mean that we choose to let go of the anger and bitterness for that wrong.

Explain that you will ask the children a question that includes 2 options. You will point to one side of your space for each option. They will move to the side that represents their answer.

- **Is it easier to forgive someone who borrowed your pencil without asking and accidentally broke it,** (point to one side of your space) **or someone who stole your pencil and broke it on purpose** (point to the other side of your space)?

Give the children time to move to a side. Most of the children will probably choose the same side. Ask 1–2 children to explain why they chose that side. Repeat this for the next 2 questions.

- **Is it easier to forgive someone who stole your food, or someone who stole your younger sister's food?**
- **Is it easier to forgive someone who lied about being rich, or someone who lied and blamed you for something and, as a result, you were physically beaten?**

Gather the class together and ask them to sit in a circle to talk more about forgiveness.

- **Who can share about a time when it was easy for you to forgive?**

Allow children to share. Consider sharing an example from your own life.

Show the onion to the children. Begin peeling the onion. Pass it around the circle and ask the children to each peel away a little of the onion. They should peel just a small amount of one of the layers and then pass it to the next child. As the onion is passed, share the following information.

Now think about a time when it was difficult for you to forgive. Maybe you have forgiven that person, and maybe you have not.

Sometimes forgiving people is easier than other times. When something wrong was done to us, it can affect us for a long time! Everyone smell your fingers. They smell strongly of onion. Even when we wash our hands, they may still smell like onions. The pain we experience when someone hurts us can stay with us just like that onion smell. It can be a burden that keeps us from enjoying the good things in our lives.

Today, we will talk about how to forgive people who hurt us. God wants to set us free so that we no longer carry the burden of that pain. He wants to wash away the “smell” of the pain. We will learn that we can forgive even very hard things. Today’s Bible story will show us how one man forgave some people who did something horrible to him.

Set aside what is left of the onion to use in part 3 of the lesson.

2. Teaching: Hear how Jesus helped Stephen forgive (Acts 6—7; Ephesians 4:31–32).

Read the story below, or tell it in your own words.

Optional: If you are using *The Action Bible*, have your children to read the story on pages 669–670 before you tell the story below. If possible, share the image from *The Action Bible*.

This true story happened a few years after Jesus had returned to heaven. Jesus’ followers were telling everyone they met in Jerusalem about Him. Some who heard the good news accepted it, but some did not believe it at all. In fact, some people became really angry.

Stephen was a man who loved Jesus. He loved and served God’s people, including the widows in the church. The Bible says he was filled with the Holy Spirit. God gave him the power to do miracles. He told everyone about Jesus. Even when people did not agree with him, Stephen continued telling everyone about Jesus because he knew the power of Jesus’ love. Of course, that made those people even angrier.

Those who were angry convinced some men to tell lies about Stephen. They claimed that he said bad things about God. Stephen was arrested and dragged before the Jewish religious court. Lies, lies, and more lies were told about him. Then an amazing thing happened. When the angry men looked at Stephen, his face was shining brightly, like the face of an angel.

Stephen gave a powerful speech to the court, telling them the truth about God. The angry members of the court had heard enough. Then Stephen looked up to heaven and saw God’s glory. He said, “Look, I see heaven open, and Jesus is standing at God’s right hand.”

At that point Stephen’s enemies covered their ears and began shouting. They grabbed Stephen and dragged him out of the city. They threw stones at him to kill him. Just before he died, Stephen prayed and asked Jesus to forgive the people who were throwing the stones. Stephen said, “Jesus, do not hold this wrong against these people.”

Pause for several seconds for children to think about this serious story before moving on to the discussion questions.

- **Who can remind us what it means to forgive?**

If needed, remind children that to forgive is to release a hurt or offense that was done to us. It means to cancel the debt or erase the wrong done—to not hold it against the other person.

- **What did Stephen ask God to do about the wrong done to him?**

He asked God to not hold it against them.

- **How do you think he was able to do this?**

Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit, who helped him to live, and even die, for Jesus.

Stephen forgave those men for lying about him, hurting him, and killing him. That must have been very, very hard! With God's help, Stephen offered forgiveness to the people who were killing him. Stephen knew that Jesus had forgiven him for a debt that was even greater than what these men were doing to him, so he wanted to forgive those who were hurting him. With God's help, we can also forgive hard things. Listen to what God says about how to live.

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Ephesians 4:31–32

When we do not forgive the people who have hurt us, we keep anger and bitterness in our hearts. Unforgiveness is like a poison that continues to hurt our minds, hearts, and bodies. It is like the smell of the onion that stays on our hands even after we wash them.

But when we forgive others, our hearts soften, and we can begin to experience God's healing. His love begins to wash the pain from our lives. The person who did something bad to us no longer has power over our feelings.

I will read a list of some effects of unforgiveness. As I do, make tight fists with your hands. Holding on to unforgiveness is like living with your fists clenched. It is tiring and can hurt after awhile.

- Feelings of bitterness and hatred
- Loss of friends and other relationships
- Difficulty thinking clearly and making good decisions
- Sickness and disease

Now I will read a list of some effects of forgiving someone who has hurt you. As I do, release your fists and relax your fingers. Forgiving someone releases the anger and emotional pain, similar to the way relaxing your hands releases the physical pain.

- Feelings of freedom and joy
- Healthy body
- Increased ability to think clearly and make good decisions
- Healthier relationships

I will read a couple of stories about children who have been hurt badly by other people. After each, turn to your neighbour and briefly talk about how unforgiveness and forgiveness might affect that child.

Child 1: A boy's mother is dying of AIDS. When he is out in the village, people call him terrible names, and no one will be his friend.

- What may happen if he does not forgive?
- What may happen in his life if he forgives the villagers?

Child 2: A man followed a girl to the well when she was alone. He threw her to the ground and hurt her. Now she feels dirty and helpless.

- What may happen if she does not forgive?
- What may happen in her life if she forgives the man?

These children had some horrible things done to them. It is very, very hard to forgive someone who has done something horrible to you. But Jesus wants to help you forgive so that you are set free and will not have those bad effects of unforgiveness any longer.

3. Responding: Take steps to begin forgiving someone.

If you are using the Memory Verse Poster, show it to the students. The Bible tells us that every person does things that are wrong. We all sin, and that separates us from God. But God loves us so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, to pay the price for our sin so we can be released from the debt we owe God. He wants us to forgive others just as He has forgiven us. Listen again to these verses we heard earlier today:

*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander,
along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another,
forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

Ephesians 4:31–32

Jesus loves you and wants to help you forgive those who have hurt you. I will read some statements about forgiveness. As I do, we will pass the onion around again. This time spend a moment smelling it. Notice how the onion affects your hands, nose, and eyes.

Teacher Tip: If any children express interest or have questions about receiving forgiveness from God, talk with them after class. If students are interested in learning more about Jesus and what it means to follow him, you can download the Salvation Path below and share it with them.

Begin to pass the onion around the class again as you read the following statements.

When you forgive someone, it does not mean that you must pretend the person did not hurt you.

When you forgive someone, it is okay to not want to be close to that person. If you have been physically or sexually abused, please tell a trusted adult, such as a parent or me.

Teacher Tip: Some of the children will still be forced to stay in relationships with the people who have hurt them, simply because the offenders are people in their families or people close to their families. If this is the case, do what you safely can to bring change to the situation so that the child is safe.

When you forgive someone, it does not mean that what the person did to you was right. No! It was very wrong.

When you forgive someone, it means you will not seek revenge. God will bring justice to that person in this life or in eternity. But this is God's responsibility, not yours!

When someone has hurt you, it can feel like holding that onion up to your nose and eyes. Your hands smell. Your nose stings from the strong odour. Your eyes water. It affects you. It can make you cry. It is hard! But Jesus wants to set you free from the sting of that pain. It begins with washing away the pain by releasing it to God.

Teacher Tip: Forgiveness can be difficult when a hurt is deep. Do not expect immediate responses from the children. It is hard to forgive. Maybe this lesson will only plant the idea of forgiveness. Jesus will help the children to forgive when the time is right.

Set out the salt and water. Demonstrate how to wet your hands, rub them with salt, and then rinse them. Tell the children that doing this will help remove the onion smell from their hands.

When you forgive, the poison of hate and anger begins to leave your heart and mind. You will become more emotionally healthy. You may even become physically healthier.

Jesus will help you forgive, but forgiveness is often a process or journey. It can be very hard to forgive. Jesus will give you strength and courage if you ask Him to help you.

Sometimes when you ask Jesus to help you forgive, you are just beginning the process. You start by forgiving a little bit, and each time you ask Jesus to help you forgive, you will forgive a little more. You will let go of a little more of your pain and anger.

One day you will wake up knowing that, with Jesus' help, you have completely forgiven the person who hurt you.

Allow the children time to silently pray or think about people they need to forgive. They may need to start with something small like forgiving a friend who was rude to them. More painful things may be more difficult and may take more time. When they are ready to begin the forgiveness process, they can come up and wash their hands with salt.

Washing your hands with salt does not totally remove all the smell of the onion, but it makes it much less strong than it was. The smell probably does not make you cry now. In the same way, God can help you forgive the person who hurt you, and the pain will begin to fade. There may still be times it comes to mind or causes you pain, but you can ask God to help you again and He will. The pain can be washed away a bit more each time.

Optional: If you are using Student Pages, there is space for children to respond by writing as they forgive.

Close class by praying this blessing from Ephesians 4:31–32 over the children:

Blessing: Jesus loves you. May He give you the strength and courage to get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger. May He strongly support you as you forgive those who have hurt you.

Lead the children in singing this quarter's song, if possible.

"My Lighthouse" by Rend Collective: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HA8VtUPgqTc>