

Do Not Be Bitter: Forgive!

Quarter 10 • Lesson 4

Focus on Spiritual Formation

1. *Connecting:* Play a tag game about the effects of not forgiving.
2. *Teaching:* Learn the effects of not forgiving and hear what Jesus taught about forgiveness (Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 18:15, 21–22; Ephesians 4:31–32).
3. *Responding:* Do an activity to let go of bitterness and forgive.

SUPPLIES

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

Optional Supplies:

- Memory Verse Poster
- Paper
- Pencils
- Student Pages

Teacher Devotion

*Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people,
but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.*

Leviticus 19:18

We have all been angry when wronged. And sometimes we sit with that anger and stir it over and over like a pot of stew. While it is okay to recognize when a wrong has been done, God does not want us to hold on to a grudge. He knows that doing so will hurt us even more than it does the other person. This is why He told His people to not hold a grudge. Instead He wants love to be what characterizes our relationships.

Think of a wrong that has been done to you recently or sometime in the past. Do you return to that wrong and stir the anger or resentment you felt? If so, allow God to wash your heart from this. If it is allowed to stay in your heart, it will act like a poison of bitterness that ends up flavouring all of your life. Ask God to show you anything that is causing bitterness in your heart. Give those wounds to Him—the gentle Healer. You can trust Him with your heart and with the other person.

Family Connection: Let your children's families know that this is the final lesson in the unit on forgiveness. The children will learn that they do not have to let bitterness grow after a wrong done.

LESSON TIME

1. Connecting: Play a tag game about the effects of not forgiving.

Gather the children together to play a game of tag. Ask for 2 volunteers. One will be “Anger” and the other will be “Forgiveness.”

We will play a game of tag. Our first volunteer is “Anger” and the second is “Forgiveness.” You do not want to be tagged by “Anger” because if you are, then you must stand frozen. You cannot move. You must stay in place!

“Forgiveness” will try to tag “Anger.” When “Forgiveness” tags “Anger,” “Forgiveness” can point to someone who is frozen and you will be free to run around again.

“Anger” will try to not be tagged by “Forgiveness.”

Play for about 5 minutes. Then gather the class and have them sit down to talk about the game.

Over the past few weeks we have learned about forgiveness.

- **Who can tell us what forgiveness is?**

Yes! Forgiveness is choosing to let go of a hurt or offense that was done to us. It is letting go of the anger and bitterness in our hearts because of that wrong. For Christians, it is choosing to trust God with the pain and with the consequences for the wrong that was done.

Being angry with someone and remaining angry instead of forgiving him is similar to our game of tag. Anger holds us in place and prevents us from being able to move on with life. We are stuck and cannot escape the pain and hurt that the person caused us.

We may think we are hurting the people who hurt us when we hold on to our anger and refuse to forgive. But we are only causing ourselves more pain by refusing to forgive. When we do not forgive those who have hurt us, we can become bitter. Holding on to anger and refusing to forgive others can even make us sick!

Everyone think of something bitter to eat. Now make a face to show how you feel when you eat that bitter thing. Look around at each other’s faces. Do you want to go through life looking like that? No! We do not want the poison of bitterness making us look like that!

2. Teaching: Learn the effects of not forgiving and hear what Jesus taught about forgiveness (Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 18:15, 21–22; Ephesians 4:31–32).

Ask the children to stand in the middle of your teaching space. Point to one side and say that it represents “Forgiveness.” Point to the other side and say that it represents “Unforgiveness.” Explain that you will read a list of physical and emotional symptoms. If the children think that the symptom might come from forgiveness, they will move to the “Forgiveness” side. If they think that the symptom might come from unforgiveness, they will move to the “Unforgiveness” side.

Pause after each symptom so the children can move. Tell them the correct answer. Then read the next symptom. You can read some or all of the symptoms listed, depending on time.

Teacher Tip: Many Christian and non-Christian doctors agree about the serious and even deadly physical and emotional health effects of unforgiveness. Medical books even list unforgiveness as a disease! While not everyone experiences all these symptoms, holding on to unforgiveness increases a person's chances of experiencing these negative symptoms.

Feelings of bitterness and hatred (Unforgiveness)

Less able to fight sickness (Unforgiveness)

More able to think clearly and make good decisions (Forgiveness)

Loss of friends and other relationships (Unforgiveness)

Good sleep (Forgiveness)

Frequent or constant anxiety (Unforgiveness)

Feelings of freedom and joy (Forgiveness)

Healthier relationships (Forgiveness)

Feeling depression or hopelessness (Unforgiveness)

Congratulate the children for their answers and ask them to sit down.

Forgiving others can help you to be healthier and make you feel better mentally and emotionally. Forgiving others can also help you to be free from the pain, anger, bitterness, and sadness you have felt.

God understands your pain, anger, and sadness. He knows that not forgiving hurts your heart, your body, your emotions, and your relationships. God knows that refusing to forgive others can keep you from having a relationship with Him. It is important to guard your heart from things like anger and bitterness that come from not forgiving. Listen to what God says about guarding your heart:

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

Proverbs 4:23

Forgiveness is very important! Sometimes if a wrong done to you continues to happen you may think that you do not have to forgive. But listen to what Jesus taught His disciples about forgiveness.

If your brother or sister sins against you, go to them. Tell them what they did wrong. Keep it between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them back...Peter came to Jesus. He asked, "Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but 77 times."

Matthew 18:15, 21–22

Lead the children in clapping their hands 77 times. If you lose track of the number of claps, that is okay. The point is that 77 is a big number, and it is hard to keep track when counting that high. Ask children to be quiet before continuing.

It is hard to keep track when we count to 77. Jesus did not mean that we should forgive someone 77 times and after that we never have to forgive her again. Instead, Jesus meant that there is no limit to the number of times He wants us to forgive others.

Jesus tells us that we should forgive over and over again. But forgiving does not mean it is okay for the people who are hurting us to continue to mistreat us. Remember that forgiving means we recognize that what happened is wrong, but we trust God with our pain and hurt. We trust God to bring justice to the situation, either now or in the future. We let go of the anger and bitterness so they do not poison us.

If you are in a situation where you are being hurt, you should do what you can to make yourself safe. When you forgive someone, it does not mean that person should be allowed to continue to hurt you. If you are facing abuse or violence, please let me or another trusted adult know so we can help you.

Teacher Tip: If any of the children are in situations in which a wrong against them continues, this concept of forgiving over and over may make it seem like God is saying it is okay for the abuse to continue. Let them know that God does not want them to be abused. Tell them you are available to talk after class if they have questions about forgiving when the wrong continues. Bring these situations to the attention of your leaders.

When you sin against God and ask Him for forgiveness, He forgives you every time. In the same way, you should forgive others every time they sin against you.

If you are using the Memory Verse Poster, show it to the students. Ask children to listen carefully as you read a Bible passage about forgiveness. If possible, read it 2 times:

*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

This passage lists negative words—bad things that we should get rid of. Then it lists positive words—good things that we should do or be.

- **What are some of the bad things we should get rid of?**

Children may answer bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, and slander. Explain that brawling means fighting. Slander means saying bad or mean things about someone.

- **What are some of the good things we should be?**

Children may answer kind, compassionate, and forgiving.

According to this verse, God is our example for forgiveness. While we were still sinners, He showed kindness and compassion on us by sending His Son to die for us. God offers us forgiveness!

3. Responding: Do an activity to let go of bitterness and forgive.

Ask the children to sit in a circle. Show them the onion. 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.

If you do not have an onion available, talk with the children about what it is like to peel an onion. Ask them to think about what it feels like and what it smells like. How does the onion affect their eyes and nose and hands?

Teacher Tip: An onion was used to represent unforgiveness during a previous quarter's lesson. Therefore, some children may be familiar with this comparison. That is okay! This lesson gives those children a chance to grow in their understanding of unforgiveness and its negative effect on their lives.

Make sure every child has had a turn peeling the onion before you ask the next question. If you do not have an onion to pass around, ask the children how they think their fingers would smell.

- **Smell your fingers. What do they smell like?**
- **How do you think not forgiving is like the onion smell on your fingers?**

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.

When we do not forgive people who hurt us, we may feel anger or bitterness. We may think about how we want to hurt those people in return. It is like the onion smell that will never go away!

When we do not forgive, we keep anger and bitterness in our hearts. This becomes 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. God can help you forgive the person who hurt you. He does not want hurt and anger to eat away at you and cause you more pain.

Begin to pass the onion around the class again. As children pass the onion, ask each of them to think of someone she needs to forgive.

Teacher Tip: Do not pressure the children to respond. Trust and pray that God is working deeply in their hearts. Forgiveness is best done in response to God from the heart, not just outward motions. If any children are not yet ready to forgive, let them sit quietly. Tell them you are praying for them—and do so this week!

Set out the salt and water. If you have a large class, set up 2 or more water bowls for hand washing. 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. Invite children to come up and wash their hands as a symbol that God is washing the pain and bitterness of not forgiving from their lives.

Optional Supplies

Give paper and pencils to the children. The children can draw symbols to represent people they are choosing to forgive.

If you are using the Student Pages, there is space for children to draw symbols of people they are choosing to forgive.

End of Option

While the children are washing their hands, say the following:

When we passed the onion around, you were able to peel off a layer, but there were layers underneath. Forgiveness is like that. It often happens in layers. You may go through the steps of forgiving someone and releasing that pain and bitterness. Then a few days or weeks later, the thoughts and pain come back to you and you may wonder why. Forgiveness usually takes time. It like peeling another layer of onion off. This may be part of the reason that Jesus told us to forgive so many times. He knew that deep pain often takes time to heal. He knew that there would be layers to forgiveness. But He is always ready to help you with each layer of forgiveness you need to peel back.

After all of the children who want to wash their hands have done so, close class by speaking the following blessing based on Ephesians 4:31–32 over the children.

Blessing: God loves you and wants you to experience the freedom of forgiveness. He wants to wash the smell of bitterness and anger from your heart. May you ask Him to help you forgive those who hurt you. May He fill you instead with kindness and compassion.

Lead the children in singing this quarter's song, if possible. "A Thousand Hallelujahs" by Brooke Ligertwood: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DeS49pSXDts>