

The Unmerciful Servant

BIBLE PASSAGE: Matthew 18:21-35

MAIN POINT: God shows mercy to us so that we will show mercy to others.

KEY PASSAGE: Mark 6:34

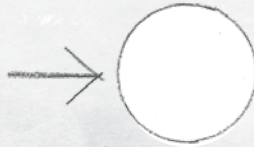
BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.

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SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES
(25–30 MINUTES)
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Leader BIBLE STUDY

Jesus had been teaching His disciples when Peter asked Jesus, “How many times should I forgive my brother when he sins against me?” Peter suggested seven times. Jews considered it standard to show forgiveness three times (see Job 33:29-30), so Peter probably thought he was going above and beyond. Jesus answered Peter’s question by telling a story about an unmerciful servant.

In the parable, a servant owed his master ten thousand talents. A talent was equal to about 20 years of wages. Ten thousand talents represented a debt that could never be repaid. Faced with debtors’ prison, the servant begged for more time to repay the master. Instead, the master released

his servant and forgave the great debt.

The same servant went out and confronted a man who owed him a hundred denarii—about 100 days of wages. The man begged for more time, but the servant refused and put the man in prison. When the master heard what happened, he was angry that the servant who had been forgiven a great debt did not show mercy to the man who owed a small debt. So the master put the man in prison until he could pay his debt. Jesus concluded the parable by explaining that God would react in the same way to anyone who does not forgive his brother.

We are like the servant, and God is like the master. Because of our sin, we owe a debt we cannot pay. We deserve to be punished for our sin, but God the Father showed His love by sending His Son, Jesus, to pay the debt we owe. Jesus lived the perfect life we fail to live and died the death we deserve to die. We come to Him with nothing to offer but empty hands of faith. Those who trust in Jesus are completely forgiven.

As you teach kids, emphasize that God shows mercy to us so that we will show mercy to others—not just three times or seven times, but many times—not keeping count. We have been forgiven a great debt, so we can forgive others when they sin against us.



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The BIBLE STORY

Bible Storytelling Tips

The Unmerciful Servant

Matthew 18:21-35

• **Kid volunteers:**

Invite kids on stage to pantomime the different people in the parable. Encourage them to make pleading gestures for begging or shake their fists angrily when demanding repayment.

• **Dramatic voices:**

As you read the lines of the parable, give the different characters different voices. Perhaps the king has a deep noble voice, while the unmerciful servant sounds like a scoundrel.

Peter asked Jesus, “How many times should I forgive someone who wrongs me? Is seven times enough?”

Jesus answered, “Not just seven times, but seventy times seven times!” Then **Jesus told Peter a story to help him understand what forgiveness in the kingdom of heaven is like.**

Jesus said, “One day, a king asked all his servants to tell him how much they each owed the king. One of the servants owed the king fifty million silver coins! The servant did not have any money to give the king, so the king ordered for the servant and his family to be sold as payment for the debt.

“But the servant fell on his knees and begged the king, ‘Please give me more time. I will repay you everything I owe!’ The king felt sorry for the man, so he let the man go and forgave the debt; the servant did not have to pay the king anything.

“As the servant was leaving, he ran into a man who owed him one hundred silver coins. The servant grabbed the man by the throat and choked him. ‘Give me the money you owe me!’ he demanded.

“The man fell to his knees and begged the servant, ‘Please give me more time. I will repay you everything I owe!’ But the servant refused, and he threw the man into jail.

“Some other servants told the king what happened. The king called for the servant he had forgiven. ‘You are an evil man!’ said the king. ‘I forgave what you could never repay, and you did not forgive the small amount.’ The

king was angry. He **punished the official and made him pay his debt.**”

Jesus said, “This is what My Father in heaven will do if you do not forgive each other.”

Christ Connection: Nothing we do is enough to pay the debt we owe God and take away God’s punishment for our sin. Jesus came and died on the cross to pay for our sin and take the punishment we deserve. When we trust in Jesus, God forgives our sin completely. We can forgive others because God has greatly forgiven us greatly.



**WANT TO
DISCOVER
GOD’S WORD?
GET
ADVENTURE!**

Invite kids to check out this week’s devotionals to discover that God gives us mercy so that we will show mercy to others. King David praised God for His mercy and eagerly shared what God had done for him. (Ps. 66:16) Order in bulk, subscribe quarterly, or purchase individually. For more information, check out www.lifeway.com/devotionals.

Small Group OPENING

SESSION TITLE: The Unmerciful Servant

BIBLE PASSAGE: Matthew 18:21-35

MAIN POINT: God shows mercy to us so that we will show mercy to others.

KEY PASSAGE: Mark 6:34

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.

Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. As kids arrive, ask them about a time they needed to forgive or be forgiven by a friend or family member.

SAY • Do you think it's easier to forgive someone else or to be forgiven? We often want others to forgive us when we treat them badly, but we don't want to forgive those who treat us badly. Jesus told a story about that. We'll hear it soon.

Activity page (5 minutes)

- "Four Hundred Ninety" activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Invite kids to complete the "Four Hundred Ninety" activity page. Instruct kids to find a partner and play a game of dots and lines by connecting pairs of dots in turn. When a player completes a box by drawing the fourth line, he will write his initials in the box and take a bonus turn.

SAY • One of Jesus' disciples asked Jesus about forgiveness. Peter wanted to know how many times he had to forgive people. What do you think Jesus might have said? We'll hear more later.

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: You owe me!

Instruct the class to stand in a circle. Give one child a few pieces of play money. Direct her to pass the play money clockwise around the circle one piece at a time while you play music. Stop the music and ask the first child for the play money back. If the kids holding the play money offer it to you, remind them that they are not the ones who “owe” you money. Play again as time allows.

SAY • If someone gives us money that they expect us to one day give back, we call it “owing” money. We may also call it *debt*. If you owe a debt that you cannot pay back, you could get in real trouble! But what would happen if the person you owe chose to forgive your debt? What would you do?

OPTION 2: If I were a rich man ...

Before class, collect a number of toy, video game, or other catalogs that show the prices of things kids might be interested in buying. Tell each child to imagine he were given \$1,000. Help kids think through what they could afford to buy by rounding prices to the nearest whole dollar and adding them up. Then ask kids how they would feel if, instead of being given \$1,000, they owed \$1,000. What if they owed \$1,000,000?

SAY • Today we will hear a story about a man who owed the king a lot of money. He owed the king more money than he could ever pay back. What would you do if someone owed you a lot of money?



- play money
- “The Kingdom of Heaven” song (optional)

- toy, video game, or other catalogs

Tip: If your group does not know how to add large numbers, let each kid pick a toy. Keep track of the prices, and tell them when they have hit their \$1,000 limit.

Transition to large group

Large Group LEADER

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Countdown

• countdown video

Show the countdown video as your kids arrive, and set it to end as large group time begins.

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

• leader attire

[Large Group Leader enters wearing hiking boots and a large backpack.]

LEADER • Well hi-ho, kids! I see you've found your way back to my campfire. I'm glad for that. I just love having people around to share stories with. Stories are such a great way to learn about new things. Stories can help us learn from situations we may not have experienced. Jesus used stories in His teaching quite often, so that definitely encourages me to use them too. Jesus' stories are usually called *parables*. That basically means they are stories that teach special lessons.

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • In fact, that reminds me of our big picture question. Does anyone remember it from last week? *[Allow responses.]* That's right, ***Why did Jesus tell***

parables? And do any of you remember the answer? [Allow responses.] Right again! **Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.** Jesus' parables helped ordinary people understand parts of God's personality and the way His kingdom works.

Giant timeline (1 minute)

LEADER • Last week we learned the parable of the sower.

Jesus used a story about a man scattering seeds to teach us the ways people react to the gospel. This week we will be learning about how God reacts to us, and about how we should react to others. Our story is called "The Unmerciful Servant." Remember that *unmerciful* is the opposite of *merciful*. Can anyone help me explain what mercy is? [Allow responses.] Great job. Mercy is choosing not to punish someone who deserves to be punished.

• Giant Timeline

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Matthew 18:21-35. Use the Bible storytelling tips on the Bible story page to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video "The Unmerciful Servant."

LEADER • Oh my goodness! That certainly was an unmerciful servant! He punished the man who owed him money, even though the king chose not to punish him at first.

You may have noticed the second servant did owe the first servant a lot of money. One hundred silver coins is not a small debt. The issue is that the first servant's debt to the king was much larger than

• Bibles
• "The Unmerciful Servant" video
• Big Picture Question Poster
• Bible Story Picture Poster

that. When the king forgave the first servant's debt, he probably expected that servant to be thankful and live a changed life. When the king saw that the servant immediately went out to demand money from someone else, the king could tell that the first servant was not changed by the king's mercy.

It's easy to think the unmerciful servant was just a mean person, but the truth is, we often behave in the same way as he did! We want very much for other people to show us mercy, but we often forget or refuse to show mercy to others. In fact, the purpose of Jesus' parable is to show us the way we act toward God and others.

God is like the king in the parable. We have all sinned and deserve death. But God chose to show us mercy. When we say we trust God but treat others without mercy, we are like the first servant, who did not truly live out the king's mercy. God's mercy to us is so great, it makes our mercy to other people look small. When we are unmerciful, it shows that we don't understand God's great mercy to us. **God shows mercy to us so that we will show mercy to others.**

Christ connection

LEADER • God showed us mercy by sending Jesus. While Jesus was on earth, He taught about God and God's kingdom through parables. He performed miracles and healed many people. But even more than that, Jesus took our sin on Himself and died on the cross in our place. He took our punishment so that we could experience God's mercy and forgiveness.

Tip: Use Scripture and the guide provided to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.

Nothing we do is enough to pay the debt we owe God because of our sin. Even so, when we trust in Jesus, God forgives our sin completely. God's mercy toward us is great, and as a result we can show mercy to others.

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together Mark 6:34.

LEADER • Our key passage reminds us that Jesus had compassion on people like you and me. He knew that we could never understand God or obey Him on our own. Jesus taught about God's love and His kingdom, and then He died on the cross for our sins to show us God's love and mercy.

Lead boys and girls in singing "He Saw a Huge Crowd."

- Key Passage Poster
- "He Saw a Huge Crowd" song

Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

LEADER • Have you ever accidentally broken something that wasn't yours? Watch this video and think about that question.

Show the "Unit 22, Session 2" discussion starter video. Ask the kids how they would react in that kind of situation.

Could they show forgiveness to a friend if he broke something very important to them? Could a friend show them forgiveness if they broke something important to that friend?

LEADER • It is very hard to show mercy when someone does something that makes you very angry or upset. God showed us mercy by choosing not to punish us as we deserved. Instead, God sent Jesus to die for our sin and rise again. When we believe in Jesus, we can

- "Unit 22, Session 2" discussion starter video

show mercy to other people and forgive them just as God has forgiven us.

• “The Kingdom of Heaven” song

Sing (4 minutes)

LEADER • God’s mercy is so great. It makes me want to sing praises to Him! Let’s all sing together. Sing together “The Kingdom of Heaven.”

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to small groups.

LEADER • Lord, You are good to us and show us mercy even though we deserve death. It is hard for us to show mercy to others, but we know that because of Jesus, it is possible. Help us to forgive others as You have forgiven us. Help us to show the world what Your great mercy looks like. Amen.

Dismiss to small groups

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.



We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus. Provide *I'm a Christian Now* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

Small Group LEADER

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Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- sticky notes

Display the key passage poster. Read the verse multiple times, using different voices. Encourage the kids to read aloud with you. Then use sticky notes to cover a few words at a time and see if kids can still say the verse.

SAY • Our key passage talks about Jesus' compassion for the people around Him. Jesus could see that they needed a leader and a teacher to show them what God is like. Jesus is our perfect Teacher and picture of what God is like because Jesus is God's Son. He used stories, called *parables*, to help us understand God better. We can have a relationship with God through Jesus.

Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster

Distribute a Bible to each kid. Help the kids locate Matthew 18:21-35. Form groups of three kids. Encourage each group to work together to make a short skit that is similar to the parable but not the exact same scenario. Then have each group perform their skit for the rest of the class.

Example scenarios:

- A parent forgives a child for breaking a window. That child goes out and demands her friend buy her a new

dress when he splashes mud on her.

- A kid forgives her friend when he bumps into her in the lunch line. He begins to yell at a kid who bumps into him.
- A librarian forgives a kid who returns a book with a page torn out. That kid then demands a new poster from a friend who bent a corner while looking at it.

SAY • In Jesus' parable, it seems a bit silly that the servant refused to forgive the other servant who owed him money. The king punished the servant when he didn't show mercy after he had received mercy. In our own lives, we tend to hold back mercy toward others even though we want to receive mercy for ourselves. We often expect other people to be more merciful than we are willing to be.

Jesus showed in His parable that when we refuse to offer mercy to those who have wronged us, it shows we don't really understand how great God's mercy to us is. **God shows mercy to us so that we will show mercy to others.** When we experience God's mercy, it will flow through us and into the lives of the people around us as we show them mercy.

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.

Activity choice (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Mercy tag

Select one kid to be *It*. She will run around tagging kids who must freeze in place. Designate a leader who will act as the *king*. At first, only the *king* may unfreeze people. He will do so by tapping them on the shoulder and saying "have mercy." After a kid is unfrozen, he can choose either to begin helping the *king* unfreeze people by tapping them and saying "have mercy," or he can begin freezing people



himself by tagging other kids. Kids who have been unfrozen can be refrozen by other kids who have been unfrozen.

SAY • Wow! What a crazy game that was. Sometimes it was hard to keep track of who was freezing and who was unfreezing. One thing was certain: after the king showed you mercy, you had the choice to help unfreeze more people by showing them mercy, or to help freeze everyone else.

Our lives are similar to this game in some ways. Once we have experienced mercy for our sin through Jesus' death and resurrection, we can choose whether to show mercy to others. God loves to see His children showing mercy because it demonstrates a bit of His great mercy to the world. When we choose not to have mercy on others, it shows that we don't understand the mercy God has toward us. When we are unmerciful, it shows the world an incorrect picture of God's mercy.

OPTION 2: Merciful/unmerciful masks

- paper plates, 2 per kid
- craft sticks, 1 per kid
- markers or crayons
- tape
- other craft supplies

Distribute to each kid two paper plates and a craft stick. Instruct them to draw a happy face on one paper plate and an angry face on the other to represent merciful and unmerciful attitudes. Help the kids tape their craft sticks to one plate and then tape the two plates together to make a two-sided mask. Allow kids to use other craft supplies to decorate their masks.

Come up with situations where people might choose to act mercifully or unmercifully, and ask the kids to use their masks to show how they might react and how God would want them to react.

SAY • In our lives we can choose to show mercy to others

and forgive them. God showed us great mercy when He sent Jesus to take the punishment we deserve. We can show mercy to others because God first showed mercy to us. If we choose not to show mercy, our bad feelings will often grow inside of us. When we choose not to show mercy, we end up hurting ourselves as well as others.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute each child's journal. Ask the kids to write about or draw a picture of a time they were hurt and did not think they could forgive the person who hurt them.

SAY • Jesus died for us, taking the punishment we deserve, but there is still sin and brokenness in the world. We are all sinners, and sometimes we hurt others or others hurt us. Sometimes it may feel like the hurt is something we can never forgive, but God has already sent His Son to die for our sin. Because God has forgiven us and shown us mercy, we can trust Jesus to help us show mercy to others and forgive people who have hurt us.

Make sure each child secures this week's sheet in the journal, and then collect them. Keep the journals in the classroom so they will be available every week or as often as you wish to use them.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page provided with this session. Pray, thanking God for showing mercy to us. Ask Him to help your group understand His mercy and show mercy to those around them.

- markers or crayons
- Journal Page
- Bible Story Coloring page, 1 per kid

Tip: Give parents this week's Big Picture Cards for Families to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.