

Children's Lessons for Life Groups

All-In-One lessons for kids ages 4-12

from

All-In-One Sunday School, Volumes 2 & 3

Lesson 5



God's Gift of Forgiveness

5

LESSON AIM

To help kids understand that ★ we forgive as God forgives us.

OBJECTIVES

Kids will

- ✓ experience grace by getting prizes without earning them,
- ✓ act out the story of the lost son receiving forgiveness from his father,
- ✓ name things for which they have been forgiven, and
- ✓ be willing to pass on forgiveness to others.

YOU'LL NEED

- six 2-liter bottles
- several plastic holders from six-packs of soft drinks
- scissors
- masking tape
- 3 nickels per child
- paper
- pencils
- Bibles
- photocopies of the "Forgiveness Is a Two-Way Street" hand-out (p. 105)
- ribbon

You'll also need three grocery bags with the following items in them:

- grocery bag 1: a 3×5 card with Luke 15:11-14 written on it, a stack of play money, and a backpack;
- grocery bag 2: a 3×5 card with Luke 15:15-20 written on it, a dirty work shirt, and a plastic container with food scraps in it; and
- grocery bag 3: a 3×5 card with Luke 15:21-24 written on it, a bathrobe, a pair of men's sandals, and a ring made of aluminum foil.

all-in-one
SUNDAY
SCHOOL

BIBLE BASIS

Luke 15:11-32

The parable of the prodigal son illustrates forgiveness at its best—and worst. The irresponsible young man who stars in this story did things that were unthinkable in a family of that day. He took his inheritance before his father's death; he blew the money on selfish, wild living; and then proceeded to live the lowest life as a pig farmer. Yet, in spite of it all, the father freely offered forgiveness and acceptance when the repentant son found his way home. God still offers that same unconditional forgiveness to anyone who will “come home” to him today.

Matthew 6:14-15

Because God so freely forgives us, we in turn are to forgive others. The concept of forgiving so we can be forgiven isn't terribly comfortable for kids or adults. We want to be forgiven, and then—like the older brother in the story—decide for ourselves whether others deserve our forgiveness. Jesus' challenge reminds us forgiving others isn't optional—it's part of his call to discipleship.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR KIDS

It's been said that when it comes to forgiveness, kids ought to be teaching adults. One of the world's most amazing sights is two best buddies walking side by side after a shouting match just moments before. Long-lasting grudges and feuds seldom develop among children unless the conflict is fueled by adults. This lesson capitalizes on the forgiving nature of the younger generation, and on kids' sincere desire for simple, harmonious relationships.

This forgiving nature is balanced by a strong sense of justice, especially in older kids. They, like the older brother in the prodigal son story, want to see “bad guys” get what they've got coming. The challenge here is to help kids see we're all sinners adopted into God's family by his grace. This grace is free to anyone, any time. And since God freely gives it to us, he expects us to pass it on to others.

Secular culture gives kids a strong message—revenge and paybacks feel good. We need to show them forgiveness feels better.

ATTENTION GRABBER

No-Loss Toss

Set up a ringtoss game with six 2-liter bottles arranged in a triangle like bowling pins. Cut apart several plastic rings that hold six-packs of soft drinks together. Kids will try to toss the rings over the necks of the bottles.

Use masking tape to mark a “toss line” for younger kids about 3 feet back from the bottles. Mark a second line a couple of feet farther away for older kids.

Say: **We’re going to play a ringtoss game. For every ring you land over the neck of a bottle, I’ll give you a nickel.**

Give kids each three tries, and award a nickel for each try whether the ring lands on a bottle or not. If kids are puzzled by your generosity, just ignore them and keep the game going. Have the group cheer for the efforts of every player.

After the game, ask:

♦ **What do you think was different about this game?** (We kept getting nickels whether we earned them or not.)

♦ **How did you feel about getting nickels when you messed up and didn’t really earn them?** (Like I didn’t deserve them; I thought it was great.)

Ask the kids who actually landed the rings on the bottles:

♦ **How did you feel when you landed the rings but ended up getting the same prize as people who didn’t land any?** (It made me mad because I earned a prize and the others didn’t; I felt kind of cheated.)

♦ **How is getting a prize when you didn’t earn it like getting forgiveness when you mess up in real life?** (I don’t really deserve what I’m getting.)

Say: **The amazing and wonderful thing is that no matter how many times we mess up in life, God is always willing to give us his free gift of forgiveness. With God, it doesn’t matter if we’re winners or losers, or how many times we’ve blown it. He offers us forgiveness if we ask for it, no matter what. ★ And he wants us to forgive as he forgives us.**

Today we’re going to participate in a story Jesus told about somebody who messed up big time. In fact, there wasn’t a whole lot more he could have done wrong. Let’s see how things turned out for him.

BIBLE STUDY

Teacher Tip

If you have older kids who can take the lead in creating skits to tell the story, encourage them to do so. An alternate approach is to let kids act out the story as you read it straight from the Bible.



Teacher Tip

Encourage kids to add lots of sound effects. (They'll love making pig noises!) Don't be afraid to let kids' creativity flow—you can easily refocus the class by using a prearranged attention-getting signal such as flashing the lights or having kids raise their hands in response to your raised hand.



A Father Forgives (Luke 15:11-32)

Give kids each a sheet of paper and a pencil. Say: **To set the stage for our Bible study, I want you to create an imaginary bedroom for yourself, and you can have anything in it you want. You've got two minutes to draw or write what you'd want in your room. Go!**

Call time after two minutes. Then have kids find partners. Encourage older kids to pair up with younger ones.

Say: **You now have one minute to find out what your partner put in his or her room. Then I'm going to ask each of you to tell about your partner's room.**

Bring everyone together for the pair-share. After kids have told about their partners' ideal rooms, ask:

◆ **What did you think about creating your own room?**

(Awesome; I wish I could really have a room like this.)

◆ **Do you think having a room like that would make you happier than anything else? Why or why not?** (Sure, it would be great to have all that stuff; not really, things can't give me love no matter how neat they are.)

Say: **Our story today is about a kid who had it all. He had the best room a Bible-times kid could have. He had a neat family, and his dad was a wealthy landowner. But all this wasn't enough.**

That's all I'm going to tell you of the story. The rest is up to you. Let's form three groups to tell the rest of the story. I have a bag of things for each group to use. In your groups, read your Scripture and then decide how to use the things in your bag to tell the story to the rest of the class.

Give groups each one grocery bag containing the following items:

Group 1: a 3×5 card with Luke 15:11-14 written on it, a stack of play money, and a backpack.

Group 2: a 3×5 card with Luke 15:15-20 written on it, a dirty work shirt, and a plastic container with food scraps in it.

Group 3: a 3×5 card with Luke 15:21-24 written on it, a bathrobe, a pair of men's sandals, and a ring made of aluminum foil.

Allow about three minutes for Bible study and planning; then have groups present their portions of the Bible story.

After the presentations, ask:

◆ **How did it feel to take off with all that money in your hands?** (Cool; I know just how I'd spend it.)

◆ **How did it feel to put on the dirty shirt and smell the food scraps?** (Yucky; I'd never do that.)

◆ **How did it feel to be welcomed home with a big hug and new clothes?** (Weird at first, but then really good.)

◆ **How were those feelings like feelings you've had when someone has forgiven you?** Encourage kids to share their personal

experiences. You might begin by telling about a time when you received forgiveness.

Then say: **Guess what? That isn't the end of the story.**

Read aloud Luke 15:25-32.

Ask:

◆ **Why do you think the older brother was angry?** (Because he stayed home and worked hard, but his younger brother was getting all the attention.)

◆ **Do you think the older brother had a right to feel that way? Why or why not?** (Yes, the younger brother didn't deserve a party; no, the father loved both his sons, but was especially glad to have the younger one home again.)

◆ **How is the father giving a party for his long-lost son similar to how God treats people who ask him for forgiveness?** (No matter how much people sin and mess up their lives, God is always ready to forgive them.)

Say: **Sometimes we might think—like the older brother did—that a person doesn't deserve to be forgiven. But God wants us to always be loving and forgiving, just like he is. ★ God wants us to forgive as he forgives us. Let's look at a Bible verse that explains how God's forgiveness works.**

LIFE APPLICATION

Both Sides of the Street

Give kids each a photocopy of the "Forgiveness Is a Two-Way Street" handout and a pencil.

Have a volunteer read aloud Matthew 6:14-15 from the handout.

Ask:

◆ **How important is it to forgive others?** (Pretty important; God says he won't forgive us unless we do.)

◆ **How is forgiveness like a two-way street?** (It goes both ways—we receive it and give it.)

Say: **On one side of the street, draw or write things God has forgiven you for. On the other side, draw or write things you may need to forgive others for.**

After kids have finished, ask:

◆ **How does it feel to look at the list of things God has forgiven you for?** (It makes me feel glad that God is so loving; it makes me wish I hadn't blown it so often.)

◆ **How does it feel to look at the list of things you need to forgive other people for?** (Angry; I think it will be hard to do.)

◆ **Does seeing the two lists side by side make it easier to forgive others? Why or why not?** (No, I still feel mad when people are mean to me; yes, I realize if God can forgive me for all those things, then I can forgive others.)

Teacher Tip

Younger children may need prompting to get started with this activity. They could draw an angry, shouting face to show how they yelled at someone. On the other side of the street, they could draw a sad face to show that someone said mean things to them, or they could draw a toy that someone broke. Another approach to this activity is to have kids return to the pairs they formed earlier and let older partners act as scribes for younger partners.



COMMITMENT

A Gift From God

Form pairs. Give kids each a 2-foot length of ribbon. Have kids each fold up their handout and wrap it with their ribbon. Have partners work together to tie bows.

Say: **This little package is to remind you forgiveness is a gift from God—a gift he wants you to pass on to others. ★ God wants us to forgive as he forgives us.**

Encourage kids to show their gifts to their parents and to discuss what they wrote or drew.

CLOSING

Forgiveness Circle

Form circles of about eight and join a circle yourself. Have kids stand close together with their arms extended forward and hands with palms up, touching in the center, as if they're about to receive a large gift. Older kids and adults may need to kneel to touch hands with younger children. Pray a simple prayer, thanking God for the gift of forgiveness and asking for his help in passing it on to others.

FORGIVENESS IS A TWO-WAY STREET

On one side of the street, draw
or write things God has forgiven
you for.

On the other side of the street,
draw or write things you need
to forgive others for.

"If you forgive those who sin
against you, your heavenly
Father will forgive you. But if
you refuse to forgive others,
your Father will not forgive
your sins" Matthew 6:14-15.