

Forgiving Others

Lesson 34

Purpose To encourage class members to seek the peace that comes from forgiving others.

Preparation

1. Prayerfully study Genesis 45:1–15; Matthew 5:43–45; 18:21–22; Luke 15:11–32; 1 Nephi 7:8–21; Moroni 6:8; Doctrine and Covenants 64:9–10.
2. Write each of the following scripture references on a separate piece of paper: Moroni 6:8; Matthew 18:21–22; Doctrine and Covenants 64:9–10; Matthew 5:43–45.
3. Materials needed:
 - a. A piece of paper from which to make a paper airplane (see page 198).
 - b. Adhesive tape.
 - c. A coin, small rock, or other small weight.
 - d. A set of scriptures and a scripture marking pencil for each class member.Continue to encourage class members to bring their own scriptures to class each week.

Note to the teacher *When we burden ourselves with anger, hate, and vengeance, we forfeit the blessings of having the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We invite the spirit of the adversary into our lives and thus limit our own progress toward exaltation when we are unforgiving. We invite the Holy Spirit into our lives when we follow the example of Jesus Christ and truly forgive.*

Suggested Lesson Development

We Have Been Commanded to Forgive All People

Discussion and quotation

- What does it mean to forgive someone?

After class members have a chance to respond, ask a class member to read the following statement by Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:

“Forgiveness . . . allows the love of God to purge your heart and mind of the poison of hate. It cleanses your consciousness of the desire for revenge. It makes place for the purifying, healing, restoring love of the Lord” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1992, 45; or *Ensign*, May 1992, 33).

Explain to class members that forgiving others does not mean approving of their wrongdoing or offense. Forgiving someone means that with the help of our Father in Heaven, we can cleanse our hearts of anger or hatred toward the offender, cease to dwell on the offense, and feel peace. This process is not always easy or quick, but Heavenly Father will help us as we try to forgive.

Scripture activity and discussion

Give each class member (or small group of class members) one of the pieces of paper you have prepared with a scripture reference on it.

Have class members locate and read their references. Allow enough time for each class member to understand the scripture's message. Then ask the following questions, and have class members answer by reading aloud the scripture that answers the question.

1. How often is the Lord willing to forgive? (Moroni 6:8.)

- Why is it important for us to have this same willingness to forgive? (Emphasize that to become more like the Lord, we must strive to follow his example, even though it may be difficult sometimes.)

2. How often should we forgive others? (Matthew 18:21–22. You may want to point out that Jesus was not stating a precise number of times we must forgive; he was using the large number to show that we should forgive as often as necessary.)

- How often do we ask the Lord to forgive us? (Remind class members that we all have a need to ask for the Lord's forgiveness. We should strive to show others the same kindness and mercy the Lord shows us.)

3. Why should we forgive others? (D&C 64:9–10.)

- How can it be a greater sin to refuse to forgive someone? (When we refuse to forgive others, we can become filled with anger, hate, and a desire for revenge. These feelings can cause us to lose the companionship of the Holy Ghost and make it more difficult for us to live other gospel principles. Also, when we do not forgive someone, it can make it more difficult for that person to complete his or her own repentance process.)

4. What blessings does the Lord promise us if we are forgiving toward others? (Matthew 5:43–45.)

- How can forgiving others make us “children of our Father in Heaven”?

Forgiving Others Brings Us Peace

Object lesson

Ask a class member to make a paper airplane, or make one yourself. Tape a coin, rock, or weight to one side of the airplane. Stand on the same side of the room as the class members, and ask a class member to throw the airplane gently toward the other side of the room. Next, pick up the airplane and remove the taped object. Have the class member throw the airplane again. After the class member has done so a few times, put the airplane away, and ask the following questions:

- How can just one small weight keep the plane from flying correctly?

Explain that taping a weight to the wing of a paper airplane is like holding a grudge. When we refuse to forgive others, we carry around a weight that keeps us from traveling the straight and narrow path our Father in Heaven wants for us. It is important to forgive others so that we can enjoy the companionship of the Holy Spirit and grow spiritually.

Quotation
and discussion

Ask a class member to read the following statement made by Elder Gordon B. Hinckley when he was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:

“There is no peace in harboring old grudges. There is no peace in reflecting on the pain of old wounds. There is peace only in repentance and forgiveness. This is the sweet peace of the Christ, who said, ‘Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God’ (Matthew 5:9)” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1980, 88; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 63).

- Why is it difficult to feel peace when we do not forgive others?
- How can forgiving others help us be peacemakers?

Note to the teacher

For stories to be effective, you must rehearse them so you can read them well or tell them in your own words. Teaching—No Greater Call, pages 98–100, contains some suggestions for telling a story.

Story and discussion

Read the following story, which was related in general conference by Bishop H. Burke Peterson when he was First Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric:

“During World War II there were terrible examples of man’s inhumanity to man. After the war was over and the concentration camps were opened, there was much hatred among the weak and emaciated survivors. In one camp, observers noticed a native of Poland who seemed so robust and peaceful they thought he must have only recently been imprisoned. They were surprised to learn that he had been there over six years! Then, they reasoned, he must not have suffered the terrible atrocities to his family members that most of the prisoners had. But in questioning him, they learned how soldiers had come to his city, lined up against a wall his wife, two daughters, and three small sons, then opened fire with a machine gun. Though he begged to die with them, he had been kept alive because of his knowledge and ability in language translation.

“This Polish father said: ‘I had to decide right then . . . whether to let myself hate the soldiers who had done this. It was an easy decision, really. I was a lawyer. In my practice I had seen . . . what hate could do to people’s minds and bodies. Hate had just killed the six people who mattered most to me in the world. I decided then that I would spend the rest of my life—whether it was a few days or many years—loving every person I came in contact with’ (George G. Ritchie with Elizabeth Sherrill, *Return from Tomorrow* [Waco, Texas: Chosen Books, 1978], p. 116)” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1983, 84–85; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1983, 60).

- What reasons might this man have given if he had chosen to be unforgiving?
- What might have happened to this man if he had spent all his time being angry and planning his revenge?
- How did his decision to forgive make a difference in his life?

The Scriptures Contain Many Examples of Forgiveness

Scripture discussion

Read and discuss with class members the following scriptural events that illustrate the concept of forgiveness:

1. Nephi exhorting his brothers to have faith in the Lord (1 Nephi 7:8–21).
 - What had Laman and Lemuel done that Nephi needed to forgive?
 - How long did it take Nephi to decide to forgive his brothers?

2. Joseph making himself known to his brothers, who had sold him into Egypt (Genesis 45:1–15).

- When Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, whom was he concerned with first? (His father and his brothers.)
- How did Joseph show his brothers that he had forgiven them? (He took care of them and their families during the famine.)

3. The prodigal son returning home (Luke 15:11–32).

- How did the prodigal son’s father react when his son returned?
- How did the older brother react when the prodigal son returned? What can we learn from the father’s response to his elder son?

Quotation and discussion

- Who gave us the best example of forgiveness to follow? (The Savior.)

Read the following statement about Christ’s forgiving love:

“All his life he had been the victim of ugliness. As a newborn infant he had been spirited away to save his life at the instruction of an angel in a dream. . . . At the end of a hectic life he had stood in quiet, restrained, divine dignity. . . .

“He was beaten, officially scourged. He wore a crown of thorns. . . . He was mocked and jeered. He suffered every indignity at the hands of his own people. . . . He was required to carry his own cross. . . . Finally, with the soldiers and his accusers down below him, he looked upon the Roman soldiers and said these immortal words: *‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.’* (Luke 23:34)” (Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* [1969], 279–80).

- Think of some things others have done that have hurt or offended you. How can the Savior’s example help you forgive others?

Emphasize that even though we will not experience anything as severe as the things the Savior experienced, we all have opportunities to forgive others. The Lord’s commandment to forgive others applies to everyone.

Testimony

Testify of the importance of forgiving others in bringing us peace and helping us enjoy the companionship of the Spirit. As appropriate, you may want to share with your class members an experience that you have had with forgiveness.

Encourage class members to follow the Lord’s example of forgiving others. Invite them to seek his help in forgiving so that they too can feel the peace that comes through forgiving others.

Enrichment Activities

You may want to use one or more of these activities during the lesson.

1. Sing or read with class members the second verse of “Did You Think to Pray?” (*Hymns*, no. 140).

- Why is it important that we pray when we are trying to forgive someone?
- How can praying for the Lord’s help in forgiving someone help bring us rest?

2. Read the following statements to the class. After each statement, ask class members to decide whether the statement shows a forgiving or unforgiving attitude. Ask them to explain their choices.
 - a. She didn't invite me to her party, so I'm not going to invite her.
 - b. He ignored me when I asked for his help. Maybe he was worried about something else.
 - c. He made fun of my hair, so I made fun of the way he dresses.
 - d. I guess I'll forgive her, but I'm not going to talk to her.
 - e. She never sits by me or talks to me during class. I wonder if she's shy.
3. Read or tell the following story:

"It seemed like a silly thing to fight over, and 12-year-old Ava Rosenberg didn't want to fight. But another 12-year-old at school kept insisting that Ava had stolen her pen."

The girl and her sister made frightening threats against Ava. One day, as Ava went to the drinking fountain at school, a group of people approached her, and one girl attacked her. She kicked and punched Ava and beat her head on the ground.

"Ava's mother had come to the school to discuss the threats against her daughter. When she arrived, she found Ava in the office in a terrible state of shock—her face discolored, swollen and bleeding, her jaw severely dislocated.

"'We spent many hours at the hospital,' Sister Rosenberg says. What followed was a nightmare of unsuccessful operations, culminating eventually in Ava receiving a bone graft from her lower jaw to her upper jaw, secured by a titanium plate and screws. As a result, her face was severely traumatized and she was in great pain."

- How do you feel about the girl who assaulted Ava? How do you think Ava felt about her?

Continue the story:

"Ava finally came out of the hospital on a Saturday. The next day was fast Sunday, and during the testimony meeting Ava stood to speak. It was physically difficult to form the words, and tears filled her eyes. But Ava had something important to say. She asked the congregation to fast and pray—that the Lord would bless the girl that had done this to her.

"'The scars from my injuries will heal,' Ava said. 'But the girl who attacked me has deep scars inside. I have a loving family and the gospel to get me through. She has neither. Pray for her. Pray that the missionaries can find her and teach her, so that she can turn from hate to love.'

"Many in the congregation were moved by Ava's example of forgiveness. To her, however, it was simply a matter of doing what the Savior taught. 'We're supposed to love our enemies,' she says matter-of-factly. 'When I was in the hospital, I couldn't speak because I was in so much pain. But I could think, and I remember thinking to myself, What would the Savior do?'

Despite continued threats against her, repeated surgeries far from home, lingering pain, and a sometimes discouraging recovery, Ava's friends and family attest they have never heard her say a single word against the girl who beat her.

"'I will probably have a plate in my jaw all my life,' she says. 'But it doesn't matter because I know I will be healed in the celestial kingdom. I just hope and pray that [the girl who attacked me] will be healed too'" (Richard M. Romney, "Pray for Her," *New Era*, Oct. 1994, 44–45).

- When Ava stood up in testimony meeting, she asked the congregation to pray for the girl who attacked her. If Ava had done what people naturally do in her situation and had given way to anger, hatred, and a desire for revenge, what effect might that have had on her?
- What do you think about Ava's reaction to the events?