



Discussion Guide

Date: 2/15/2026

Sermon Title: Do I have to forgive?

Scripture: Matthew 18:21-22

This discussion guide is a layout to be used with a group or class. We have included opening and closing prayers to start and end your group. The guide may be used for personal or family reflection as well.

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious and merciful God, You are slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. As we gather today, soften our hearts where they are hardened, bring light where there is hurt, and give us courage to wrestle honestly with forgiveness. Teach us what it means to receive Your grace and to extend that same grace to others and to ourselves. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

OPENING QUESTION:

1. Share a time when someone forgave you for something. How did that experience of receiving forgiveness make you feel?

SETTING THE CONTEXT:

Peter believes he is generous. In rabbinic teaching, forgiving three times was often considered sufficient. Peter doubles it and adds one more for good measure. Jesus responds with a number that is not mathematical but theological. “Seventy-seven times” (or “seventy times seven”) signals limitless forgiveness. Forgiveness in the Kingdom of God is not about counting offenses; it is about living from grace. This teaching is immediately followed by the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:23–35), where Jesus illustrates the staggering difference between the mercy we receive and the mercy we sometimes withhold.

ENTERING OUR TEXT:

Read Matthew 18:21-22 (NRSV). If you're in a group, have members read from different translations like The Message or ESV.

1. Why do you think Peter asks this question? What might have been behind it? Why does Peter suggest “seven times”? What feels generous about that?
2. What do you think Jesus means by “seventy-seven times”? Do you think He is speaking literally?
3. What emotions rise in you when you hear Jesus’ answer? How does this passage challenge common cultural views about forgiveness?

WRESTLING WITH THIS QUESTION DO I HAVE TO FORGIVE:

1. Is forgiveness optional for a follower of Christ? Why or why not?

2. How does Jesus' teaching here connect to the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:12–15? What is the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?
3. Does forgiving mean excusing harm or pretending it didn't matter?
4. How do we forgive someone who is not sorry?

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13; Romans 12:19; Luke 23:34

EXTENDING GRACE TO OTHERS:

1. In the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Read Matthew 18:23–35), what stands out to you?
2. Why do we sometimes struggle to extend the same mercy we have received?
3. How does remembering our own need for grace change how we treat others?
4. John Wesley emphasized that grace is both received and practiced. How might forgiveness be a "means of grace"?
5. What might forgiveness look like practically in your current relationships?

EXTENDING GRACE TO OURSELVES:

1. Often the hardest person to forgive is ourselves. Why do you think self-forgiveness can be more difficult than forgiving others?
2. How does Romans 8:1 "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" speak to self-condemnation?
3. When we refuse to forgive ourselves, what might that say about how we view God's grace?
4. Is it possible that holding onto guilt feels easier than accepting grace? Why?
5. What spiritual practices help you receive God's forgiveness deeply?

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Psalm 103:8–12; 1 John 1:9; 2 Corinthians 5:17

SERMON QUESTIONS:

1. Forgiveness is something that all people struggle with. Pastor Clayton opens the sermon with a story about 'getting historical' and keeping score of wrongs done to you. How does keeping a score affect your relationships and spiritual well-being?
2. The sermon mentions that Jesus referred to forgiveness as a lifestyle and not this arbitrary number of times. How are you growing up in your ability to forgive?
3. When we fail to forgive, we lock ourselves up. Jesus is inviting
4. Pastor Clayton shares how this passage has been misused that we must forgive people. However, this passage is not about forcing people to forgive. Have you experienced or seen this text misused?
5. In Pastor Clayton's sermon he shares how N.T. Wright's metaphor of forgiveness as breathing with holding in versus releasing. Does this help you understand the spiritual necessity of letting go?
6. Forgiveness is something we must keep working at and when we withhold forgiveness it's like "Drinking poison and expect the other person to die". Forgiveness brings us wholeness and healing. Where are you withholding forgiveness or where are you finding healing?



7. In the end of the sermon Pastor Clayton shared the story of a woman who wrote a letter of forgiveness and found healing in mailing it, even though the person never responded. What does this story teach us about who benefits most from forgiveness?

MOVING TOWARD PRACTICE:

1. Is there someone you need to forgive? What is one small step you could take?
2. Is there something you need to release yourself?
3. What fears surface when you consider forgiving?
4. How does forgiveness set free the forgiver?
5. What would our church look like if we truly practiced “seventy-seven times” forgiveness?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Merciful God, we confess that forgiveness is hard. Sometimes we want justice more than mercy, distance more than reconciliation, and resentment more than release. Remind us how deeply we have been forgiven in Christ. Free us from the chains of bitterness. Teach us to extend grace to those who have wounded us, and to ourselves when we fall short. Shape us into a forgiving people, that the world might see Your mercy through us. In the name of Jesus, who forgave even from the cross, Amen.

WAYS TO RESPOND:

Choose one or more of the following practices this week.

1. Each day, practice the breathing metaphor. Breathe in deeply (God's forgiveness and grace) and breathe out slowly (releasing hurt and resentment). As you do, pray for God to work forgiveness in your heart.
2. Write a letter of forgiveness to someone who has hurt you. You may choose to send it or not, but the act of writing can be healing. Focus on releasing them from the debt they owe you.
3. If there's someone you're struggling to forgive, commit to praying for them daily for one week. Pray for their well-being and ask God to give you the will to forgive.
4. Take inventory of the "historical files" you're keeping on people. Write down the names and offenses, then prayerfully go through the list, asking God to help you delete these files and extend grace.
5. Sometimes we struggle to forgive ourselves. If this is you, spend time this week meditating on God's forgiveness toward you and practice extending that same grace to yourself.

LEADER NOTES:

This topic can bring up deep pain and difficult emotions. Create a safe space where people can be honest. Remind the group that forgiveness is a process, and it's okay to be at different stages of that journey. Be prepared to offer pastoral support or professional counseling resources if needed.