

# 13

## Receiving Forgiveness As We Forgive

---

**OBJECTIVE**

Each young man will understand that the process of repentance includes forgiving others and that if he does not forgive others the Lord will not forgive him.

---

**PREPARATION**

1. Prayerfully study Matthew 18:23–35, John 3:16, and Doctrine and Covenants 64:8–10.
2. Materials needed:
  - a. Copies of the scriptures (each young man should bring his own).
  - b. Picture 6, Glenn Kempton and Tom Powers.
  - c. A paper and pencil for each young man.
  - d. Pencils for marking scriptures.

---

**SUGGESTED  
LESSON  
DEVELOPMENT****Quotation****Introduction**

Relate the following story told by Bishop H. Burke Peterson:

“For much of our lives, we lived in central Arizona. Some years ago a group of teenagers from the local high school went on an all-day picnic into the desert on the outskirts of Phoenix. As some of you know, the desert foliage is rather sparse—mostly mesquite, cat-claw, and palo verde trees, with a few cactus scattered here and there. In the heat of the summer, where there are thickets of this desert growth, you may also find rattlesnakes as unwelcome residents. These young people were picnicking and playing, and during their frolicking, one of the girls was bitten on the ankle by a rattlesnake. As is the case with such a bite, the rattler’s fangs released venom almost immediately into her bloodstream.

“This very moment was a time of critical decision. They could immediately begin to extract the poison from her leg, or they could search out the snake and destroy it. Their decision made, the girl and her young friends pursued the snake. It slipped quickly into the undergrowth and avoided them for fifteen or twenty minutes. Finally, they found it, and rocks and stones soon avenged the infliction.

“Then they remembered: their friend had been bitten! They became aware of her discomfort, as by now the venom had had time to move from the surface of the skin deep into the tissues of her foot and leg. Within another thirty minutes they were at the emergency room of the hospital. By then, the venom was well into its work of destruction.

“A couple of days later I was informed of the incident and was asked by some young members of the Church to visit their friend in the hospital. As I entered her room, I saw a pathetic sight. Her foot and leg were elevated—swollen almost beyond recognition. The tissue in her limb had been destroyed by the poison, and a few days later it was found her leg would have to be amputated below the knee.

“It was a senseless sacrifice, this price of revenge. How much better it would have been if, after the young woman had been bitten, there had been an extraction of the venom from the leg in a process known to all desert dwellers. . . .

“There are those today who have been bitten—or offended, if you will—by others. What can be done? What will you do when hurt by another? The safe way, the sure way, the right way is to look inward and immediately start the cleansing process. . . . The longer the poison of resentment and unforgiveness stays in a body, the greater and longer lasting is its destructive effect. . . . The poison of revenge, or of unforgiving thoughts or attitudes, unless removed, will destroy the soul in which it is harbored” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1983, pp. 83–84; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1983, p. 59).

- Discussion
- How are feelings of unforgiveness like poison inside us?
  - How can we cleanse ourselves from the poison of unforgiveness?
- 

### **Forgiveness, the Divine Gift of Love**

Scripture and discussion

Have a young man read John 3:16.

- What did Heavenly Father do so that we could have eternal life? (In his love and mercy toward men, Heavenly Father gave his Only Begotten Son so that we might repent and receive a remission of our sins.)

Quotation

Invite a young man to read the following statement by Elder Marion D. Hanks:

“The coming of Jesus Christ in the meridian of time was God’s supreme effort to make his love known and effectual among his children. The Father had always acted out of love, but the plan of things required a Savior whose life would be the highest expression of God’s love and whose sacrifice would represent a greater love for his Father and brothers and sisters than could be equaled. He made the sacrifice and finished his mission. . . .

“His disciples received from him not only the sense of his eternal power and godhood, but clear direction about how a child of God should live” (“Failing Never,” *Ensign*, Sept. 1975, p. 74).

Explain that Jesus Christ’s coming was an act of love and mercy and a gift of love to all men. His atoning sacrifice provided the way for us to once again enter into Heavenly Father’s presence and receive eternal life. Jesus, through his example, revealed to us what Heavenly Father is really like: quick to forgive, full of love and mercy, patient, long-suffering, kind, and just. Jesus Christ set the perfect example to pattern our lives after.

---

### **Forgiveness, the Hallmark of Discipleship**

Scripture and discussion

Explain that Jesus taught his followers to forgive everyone and to love their enemies and bless those who curse them. He even explained that if a person fails to forgive, he commits a greater sin than the offender.

Ask a young man to read Doctrine and Covenants 64:9–10. Suggest that the young men mark these verses.

- How serious is it to fail to forgive others?
- Whom are you required to forgive?

Quotation

Explain that Jesus set the supreme example in forgiving those who offend and hurt us. Bishop Robert L. Simpson said:

“Biblical history tells us that no mortal man has ever been subjected to the humility, the pain, the suffering that were experienced by the Savior of the world during his final hours of mortality.

“Following a number of false charges, he was betrayed by one considered to be among his closest circle of friends. He was then subjected to a so-called trial, which produced a sentence that was dictated by political convenience and public sentiment rather than justice.”

- How would it feel to be betrayed by a friend?
- How would you react to someone who falsely accused you of a crime?

Explain that Jesus Christ’s suffering did not end after he was falsely accused and betrayed by a friend. Continue reading:

“Then in rapid agonizing succession: there was a long struggle to Calvary as he bore the heavy cross; he was jeered at and spat upon by the multitude all along the way; there was the offering of vinegar, climaxed by the cruel spikes; and finally, there he hung, his body broken and bleeding, still taunted by his enemies; and it was in the midst of all this that Jesus pled perhaps quietly, with deep reverence, ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. . . .’ (Luke 23:34.)” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1966, p. 128; or *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1966, p. 1148).

- Have a young man read Doctrine and Covenants 64:8.
- What is a disciple? (A follower of Christ, a believer in Christ.)

Point out that the word *disciple* comes from the word *discipline*, meaning to act according to a prescribed pattern. Be sure to emphasize that a disciple of Christ is one who not only believes or follows but also acts and lives his life in harmony with the Savior's example.

- Why were the disciples afflicted and sorely chastened by the Lord? (There were contentions, strife, and quarreling among them rather than the forgiving spirit and oneness of heart that should characterize disciples of Christ.)

Scripture reading and discussion

Ask three young men to read the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:23–35. You may want to have the young men read the parts of the following three characters:

1. The king, who first threatened and then forgave his servant.
2. The servant who was forgiven but would not forgive his fellow servant.
3. The fellow servant.

You may want to reread and discuss the message of Matthew 18:23–35 using the following questions:

- Whom does the king in the parable represent? (Our Heavenly Father.)
- Whom does the unmerciful servant represent? (Those of us who do not forgive easily.)
- Whom does the other servant represent? (Anyone who has offended another.)
- According to this parable, what must we do to gain forgiveness from our Father in Heaven?
- What lessons for our lives are taught in this parable?

### **Forgive to Be Forgiven**

Scripture and discussion

- Have a young man read Doctrine and Covenants 64:9.
- Why does the greater sin lie with the person who will not forgive his brother?

Help the young men understand that when we fail to forgive others, we fail to keep the greatest commandments, which are to love God and others. Therefore, by refusing to love and forgive, we retain the greater sin.

Quotation and discussion

Elder Marion D. Hanks asked, “Does it not seem a supreme impudence to ask and expect God to forgive when we do not forgive?—openly? and ‘in our hearts’?” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1973, p. 15; or *Ensign*, Jan. 1974, p. 20). Explain that by forgiving others we can be forgiven.

- How can we forgive a person openly and in our hearts?
- How can we overcome resentment, anger, or vengeance toward those who have offended us so that we can truly forgive?
- How can prayer help us forgive?
- How can understanding the Savior's example help us forgive others?

Scripture and chalkboard discussion

Have a young man read Doctrine and Covenants 64:10.

- Why must we forgive all men without exception? (In order to be forgiven by the Lord we must be quick to forgive those who offend us.)

Write *Forgiveness* at the top of the chalkboard.

- Have you ever wanted to be forgiven for a wrong you committed against someone?

Ask the young men to share their feelings before and after being forgiven.

Quiz

Give each young man a piece of paper and a pencil. Ask the young men to entitle the page “Do I Hold Grudges?” Have them number from one to eight down the page. Explain that you are going to give them a short quiz about forgiving in their hearts. All the questions should be answered honestly with a simple yes or no. Do not have the young men answer aloud; they should not reveal their answers to anyone.

Read the following questions:

1. Do you ever say, “Well, I will forgive, but I can never forget”?
2. Are you ever secretly happy when something unfortunate happens to someone you don't like?
3. Do you ever wish you could get even with someone for something he has done to you?
4. Is there anyone you avoid or to whom you refuse to speak?
5. When you get angry with someone, do you sulk and take a few days to get over it?
6. Do you ever talk unkindly to others about someone who has offended you?
7. Is there someone in your immediate family that you resent for something he or she has done?
8. When you get in arguments with your brothers or sisters, do you bring up things they have done before that made you angry?

Have the young men think about those questions to which they had to answer yes. Explain that forgiving is not easy. It is one of our greatest challenges and tests our real love for others.

Picture and story

Tell the young men that the peace that comes from forgiving others is shown in a story once told by Elder Spencer W. Kimball. Explain that in 1918, three law officers were murdered when they attempted to arrest several criminals. Glenn Kempton's father was one of the officers killed. Sometime later, the murderers were captured, tried, and sent to prison for life.

- How would you feel toward someone who had taken the life of your father?
- Why would it be hard to forgive such a man?

Brother Kempton described his experience to Elder Kimball this way:

“As a young boy in my early teens, there grew in my heart a bitterness and a hatred toward the confessed slayer of my Father, for Tom Powers had admitted killing my Dad.

“The years swept by, I grew up, but still that heavy feeling stayed inside me. High school ended, and then I received a call to go to the Eastern States Mission. There my knowledge and testimony of the gospel grew rapidly, as all of my time was spent studying and preaching it. One day while reading the New Testament, I came to Matthew, fifth chapter, verses 43 to 45. . . .

“Here it was, the words of the Savior saying we should forgive. This applied to me. I read those verses again and again and it still meant forgiveness. Not very long after this, I found in the 64th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, verses 9 and 10, more of the Savior's words. . . .

“I didn't know whether or not Tom Powers had repented but I did know now that I had an appointment to make after I returned home, and I resolved before I left the mission field to do just that.

“After returning home, I met and married a fine Latter-day Saint girl, and the Lord blessed our home with five lovely children. The years were passing rapidly and the Lord had been good to us, yet guilt arose within me every time I thought of the appointment I had not kept.

“A few years ago, just shortly before Christmas, a season when the love of Christ abounds and the spirit of giving and forgiving gets inside of us, my wife and I were in Phoenix on a short trip. Having concluded our business in the middle of the second afternoon, we started home. As we rode along, I expressed the desire to detour and return home via Florence, for that is where the state prison is located. My wife readily assented.

“It was after visiting hours when we arrived but I went on inside and asked for the warden. I was directed to his office.

“After I had introduced myself and expressed a desire to meet and talk to Tom Powers, a puzzled expression came over the warden's face, but after only a slight hesitation, he said, 'I'm sure that can be arranged.' Whereupon he dispatched a guard down into the compound who soon returned with Tom. We were introduced, and led into the parole room where we had a long talk. We went back to that cold, gray February morning thirty years before, re-enacting that whole terrible tragedy. We talked for perhaps an hour and a half.

Finally, I said, 'Tom, you made a mistake for which you owe a debt to society for which I feel you must continue to pay, just the same as I must continue to pay the price for having been reared without a father.' "

Show picture 6, Glenn Kempton and Tom Powers. Then continue:

"Then I stood and extended my hand. He stood and took it. I continued, 'With all my heart, I forgive you for this awful thing that has come into our lives.'

"He bowed his head and I left him there. I don't know how he felt then, and I don't know how he feels now, but my witness to you is that it is a glorious thing when bitterness and hatred go out of your heart and forgiveness comes in.

"I thanked the warden for his kindness, and as I walked out the door and down that long flight of steps I knew that forgiveness was better than revenge, for I had experienced it.

"As we drove toward home in the gathering twilight, a sweet and peaceful calm came over me. Out of pure gratitude I placed my arm around my wife, who understood, for I know that we had now found a broader, richer and more abundant life" (*The Miracle of Forgiveness* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969], pp. 291–93).

---

### **Conclusion**

Testimony and challenge

Testify that after we are baptized, the Savior forgives us of our sins if we repent. At baptism and each time we partake of the sacrament, we covenant to follow the Savior and do all he asks of us. One of the things he expects us to do is to forgive others. As we do so, he has promised us joy and peace, teaching us that both forgiving and being forgiven are essential to our eternal salvation.

Have the young men turn their papers over and write down one thing that they would be willing to do during the coming week to help them forgive and strengthen their love for someone else. Challenge the young men to develop the spirit of forgiveness in all their associations and especially with their own family members. (Be sensitive to the needs of the young men. The spirit of forgiveness should not prevent them from discussing with the bishop any ongoing abuse they might be receiving.)

Suggest they think about their lives. Has anyone injured them or offended them in any way? If so, challenge them to cleanse their souls of any bitterness by totally forgiving that person. Challenge them to overcome any negative and unforgiving feelings they have by seeking the aid of the Spirit.