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Lesson 15

Freedom In Forgiveness

TEACHER PREPARATION

KEY CONCEPTS

Unless we learn to forgive, our lives can become poisoned by anger and hard feelings.

Forgiveness brings peace into our hearts.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. recognize the need to forgive others.
2. recognize the need to ask for forgiveness for wrong things they have done.
3. understand how not forgiving harms them physically, emotionally and relationally.

KEY TERMS

Forgiveness: making a choice to excuse a wrong action or thought; giving up my right or desire to hurt someone who has hurt me; giving up my anger.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In order to build on the character traits of humility and generosity, we must teach our students to forgive. Forgiveness is an essential life tool, making the navigation of childhood and all of life easier. Holding onto anger and resentment can cause anxiety and depression in both children and adults. The earlier forgiveness can be taught, understood and put into practice, the healthier the child will grow.

Forgiving others is always hard to do when you are still feeling hurt. It takes courage to decide to forgive someone. Forgiving someone is a choice showing strength of character, not weakness. Forgiving someone may not take the hurt away immediately. It also won't immediately take away the memory of what happened. When you forgive, you may still feel sad for a

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while. It is important to emphasize to your students forgiveness is not a feeling; it is a choice. Forgiveness takes bravery. Forgiving someone does not mean the hurtful thing that was said and done is okay. It means the person who was hurt is willing to absorb the pain and not retaliate. The forgiver chooses to bless and not to curse.

MATERIALS/PREPARATION

1. In **Exploring the Lesson**, you will need a glass jar filled with water, bleach and red food coloring or something to color water.
2. In **Discovering the Lesson**, you will need an empty backpack or cloth bag and many rocks of all sizes collected by the children from outside of school or brought from home.
3. In **Applying the Lesson**, you will need paper and pencils.

LESSON

BEGINNING THE LESSON

[Say to the students:] **In the last several lessons, Hector, Dugan and Trish have learned about the character traits of humility, generosity, trust and honesty. We, too, have learned the best way to a healthy, happy and successful life is to learn to be humble, generous, honest and trustworthy. Today, the children are going to meet someone in the Library who teaches them an important lesson. I wonder who it is!**

READINESS (5 minutes)

[Read to the students:] **Chapter 15 – A Day in Court**

Trish took a deep breath and broke the uncomfortable silence they all felt. “I know you don’t like lists or feeling manipulated, but the next thing on the list doesn’t seem to be there by chance.”

She left her list open beside her and Dugan couldn’t resist taking a peek at what she had written.

“Ha! Ha! That’s pretty funny,” he snorted.

Hector picked up the list. “The next item is forgiveness, huh? Makes you wonder if anything happens by chance in this library.”

“I wish the Librarian would come back,” said Dugan.

“I have a funny suspicion we’ve been left on our own for a reason,” said Trish.

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“Then let’s figure out what the reason is,” prompted Hector.

Suddenly, a loud, deep voice rumbled down the halls. “HEAR YE! HEAR YE! COURT IS NOW IN SESSION!” The announcement came from a gallery adjacent to the Map of Wonders.

They passed through a heavy set of red curtains and found themselves looking down on a British courtroom setting. There was the judge’s desk front and center on a raised platform. The tiered jury box was off to the judge’s left. Tables for the defense and prosecution faced the front and a fenced in defendant’s box stood alone on the right.

“THE CASE OF HURT FEELINGS, MISUNDERSTANDING AND DECEPTION WILL NOW BE HEARD! STEP FORWARD AND MAKE YOUR CASE KNOWN!” said the deep voice.

As they looked down on the scene from their place by the red curtains, the gate to the defendant’s box swung open.

“Who is the defendant?” asked Dugan.

“I’m pretty sure it must be one of us,” whispered Hector.

“Let’s send Edgar down,” said Dugan.

“Excellent idea,” added Trish.

As they started to push Edgar toward the defendant’s box, Edgar dug his paws in and began to protest most vigorously, “Howwwwl!”

“STEP FORWARD!” the unseen voice commanded. “ALL THREE OF YOU! AND LEAVE THE DOG ALONE!”

“Guess, we know now who the guilty party is,” sighed Dugan.

“I think that’s *parties*,” corrected Trish.

As they each stepped into the defendant’s box, a necklace of heavy stones suddenly appeared around each of their necks! Their newly visible burdens only added to their sense of defensiveness and shame.

“DO YOU KNOW WHY YOU ARE HERE?” demanded the Voice.

“Because someone was acting obnoxious?” offered Trish as she looked at Hector.

“NO!” roared the Voice. “TRY AGAIN.”

“Because all of us were being mean to each other,” said Hector hanging his head.

“Go on,” said the Voice more quietly.

“Well, I was still feeling hurt from the way they were teasing me about my list,” said Trish.

“And I was tired of being told what to do,” added Hector.

“And they twisted my words to make it look as if I was a liar,” said Dugan.

“DUGAN! Do you really think that is why you are here?” asked the Voice.

“Not really,” mumbled Dugan. “I know I got all mad when they kept questioning me about manipulating Hector to get his coin and I wanted to make them sorry.”

“Much closer to the truth,” said the Voice.

“By holding on to your hurts and not forgiving each other, you allowed things to get much heavier and more uncomfortable than was necessary,” instructed the Voice.

“FORGIVENESS IS THE MOST COSTLY THING IN THE WORLD!” the Voice boomed.

“I don’t think I really understand, Mr. ... uh, Sir,” said Hector.

“Of course, you don’t,” replied the Voice in softer tones. “You wait too long to seek or grant forgiveness which makes everything more difficult.”

The stones around their necks grew heavier as each wrestled with their guilt and what they would do with it. Hector was the first to speak.

“I’m sorry,” said Hector. “I don’t know what got into me, but I’m truly sorry for hurting you, Trish.” As soon as he said the words, some of the stones around his neck disappeared.

“Thank you for saying so,” replied Trish. “I forgive you.” As she spoke, some of the stones around her neck disappeared as well.

“Dugan,” Hector continued, “I had no reason to doubt your desire for the gold coin was a long-standing one, I just didn’t want to give it to you. Please forgive me.” More of Hector’s stones vanished.

Trish and Dugan soon followed Hector’s example, apologizing for hurting or putting the others down. As they confessed and forgave each other, their stones were taken away along with the weight of their guilt.

“Trish, I want you to make another list,” said the Voice. “Write this down.”

THE LONGER YOU WAIT TO ASK FOR FORGIVENESS,
THE HEAVIER YOUR BURDEN BECOMES.
REFUSING TO FORGIVE CAN BECOME
THE HEAVIEST WEIGHT OF ALL.

EDGAR IS A GOOD DOG

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AND YOU SHOULD FEED HIM MORE.

STOP PUTTING YOUR BLAME ON HIM.

The final item on the list about Edgar broke the last of the heaviness in the courtroom.

“HO, HO, HOOO!” The Voice laughed a laugh that filled each of them with profound relief and joy. Even Edgar jumped around sharing in the excitement. The unbelievable sense of well-being each of them received from the Voice convinced each of them the One-Behind-The-Voice wasn’t the slightest bit angry with them. When they realized he was no longer in the courtroom, a sweet sadness filled their hearts.

“I wonder if we just met the special Someone the Librarian went off to meet,” said Dugan.

“I wonder what he is called?” added Trish.

“The Director,” said the Librarian, stepping into view. “He is called the Director.”

EXPLORE (10 minutes)

[Say to the students:] **The children learned they had to forgive in order to feel happiness again. The anger in their hearts came from not forgiving each other. Then it created hurt in their friendship. I am so glad the Voice (the Director) helped them process their need to forgive each other, aren’t you? What do you think forgiveness is?** *[Write the students’ answers on the board if you desire. Refer to the definition in the **Key Terms**, if needed.]* **Why is it a good thing to forgive someone and not stay angry at them?** *[Listen to the students’ answers. You may want to include some of these answers in your discussion: if we keep our anger inside, it can build up in us and make us feel sick; not forgiving others can ruin friendships and relationships; if we choose to stay mad at people, our lives will not be the best they can be.]*

[Say to the students:] **I need two volunteers to come to the front.** *[Place the glass jar of water, red food coloring or something to color the water and bleach on the desk.]*

[Say to the students:] **This jar of water represents your life. If you are angry at someone and refuse to forgive them, it affects your life.** *[Ask one of the volunteers to pour the red food coloring into the water. Stir the water*

so the color mixes in well.] What happened when we added the red coloring to the water? Yes, it completely changed the water. This represents how unforgiveness can affect your life. It can affect everything you do because your heart and mind will be thinking about it all the time. Now, look what happens when we choose to forgive someone. *[Ask your other volunteer to add bleach to the jar of red water. Stir it well.]* What is happening? *[The water is turning clear again.]* This models what happens when we forgive each other. Forgiveness clears up our hearts and frees us from all the bad and sad feelings we were letting control us.

DISCOVER (20 minutes)

[Take an empty backpack or sack and let the students fill it with rocks. If possible, have enough rocks so each student can put one rock into the backpack. You want the backpack to be VERY HEAVY. Tell your students each rock represents unforgiveness toward someone. Give each person a chance to put on the backpack and walk around. After each student has had a turn wearing the backpack, discuss these questions:]



- 1. What did it feel like when you put on the backpack?**
- 2. How did it feel when you tried to walk?**
- 3. Do you think you would want to carry this backpack on your back forever? Why or why not?**
- 4. How is unforgiveness like carrying a backpack full of rocks on your back?**
- 5. How do you think you can get rid of the rocks?**

[Say to the students:] Forgiveness is a choice you make. You do not forgive someone just because they asked you, but because it is right and it will “keep rocks out of your backpack” (remember our activity). By forgiving someone you are not saying what they did was okay, but you are saying you decided not to hold it against him or her. Forgiving someone may not take away the hurt immediately. It also won’t take away the memory of what happened right away. You may still feel hurt or sad for a while. Eventually, you will feel better because forgiving others brings peace.

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APPLY (30 minutes)

Activity 1: How do I forgive someone?

[Give each student a small piece of paper. Say to the students:] **On the paper, please draw or write about a time when someone hurt your feelings or made you angry. Then, I want you to think about how we discussed forgiveness being a choice. If you think you can forgive the person you have written or drawn about on your paper, I would invite you to tear your paper up into tiny pieces and throw the pieces in the trash. This will represent you forgiving them and forgetting about your hurt. If you can, you might want to go to the person and tell them you have forgiven them.**

Activity 2: What should you do when you need to ask someone to forgive you for doing or saying something that hurt them?

[Say to the students:] **Remember how you felt when someone hurt you or made you angry? There are also times when you may have hurt someone else or made them angry. It is your responsibility to ask them to forgive you. Whether they do or not is up to them. You need to do what is right. When you ask someone to forgive you, you need to say these things:**

[Write on the board:]

1. I am sorry for ...
2. This was wrong because ...
3. In the future I will ...
4. Will you forgive me?

*[Ask the **older elementary students** to copy these four sentences from the board into their journal. They can refer to them when they need to forgive someone.]*

[In order to reinforce the steps of asking for forgiveness, invite the students to help you develop scenarios about a student who needs to ask for forgiveness. Develop scenarios that apply to your students' age and circumstances. While we know every student may not willingly forgive, they need to see and experience what forgiving someone looks like. Use the four steps listed above in the scenarios.]

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Example: John wanted to play ball, but the other boys wouldn't invite him to join them. So, he took the ball away from some guys who were playing a game on the playground and kicked it over the fence. The student who owned the ball, David, was very angry and upset. The teacher saw what happened and talked to John about what he had done. She guided him to understand he needed to ask David for forgiveness.

Teacher: David, John needs to talk to you and tell you some things.

David: Okay.

John: I am sorry for taking your ball and kicking it over the fence. I will go get it. (The student needs to take responsibility for his actions)

Teacher: Why was it wrong, John?

John: It was wrong because I took something that was not mine. I was mad because you had not invited me to play. So, I kicked your ball over the fence so the others could not play with it anymore.

Teacher: John, what will you do in the future?

John: Next time I get angry, I will talk to a teacher about my problem.

Teacher: John, what do you need to ask David?

John: Will you forgive me, please?

Teacher: David, I think you have something to think about, too. What do you need to ask John?

David: I need to ask him to forgive me for not letting him play in the game. Next time, I will try to be a better friend. I will forgive you, John. Will you forgive me, too?

SHARE (5 minutes)

*[Encourage your students to go home and share what they have learned about forgiveness with their families. You could suggest they act out the 'rocks in a backpack' scenario and explain what it means to their families. The **older elementary students** may also want to share the four sentences about forgiveness they wrote in their journal.]*

ENDING THE LESSON

[Say to the students:] Learning to be a forgiving person is not always easy. It is a choice you will need to make. Being able to forgive someone will help you keep strong relationships with your family, friends and people in your community. Remember, developing good character in your life will

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enable you to live a healthier and happier life. You will need to learn to forgive people and ask for forgiveness yourself. Forgiving does not mean you should let a person keep hurting you. If someone keeps on being unkind and mean, speak to your teacher or your mother or father about the problem. Hurting others or being hurt is never okay.

GOING DEEPER (optional)

[Ask for two volunteers. Say to the students:] **Our two volunteers are going to do a role play about forgiveness. Please watch carefully, because the rest of you are going to do the same role play in pairs.**

[Designate one as the “offender” and the other as the “forgiver.” Choose an offensive action for the offender to do to the forgiver. (Maybe sticking out the tongue, making an ugly face, etc.) The offender is not to say anything, or touch the forgiver. When the offender has made the offense, the forgiver is to say, “I forgive you,” but is not to say or do anything else. Then repeat the sequence two more times (total of three).

Now, reverse the role play. The offender becomes the forgiver and the forgiver becomes the offender. Repeat the role play.

Thank the volunteers. Now, have the class divide into pairs and repeat the role play. If the number of students is uneven, use one of the original volunteers to make an even number. Remind the class, no one is to touch the other or say anything except, “I forgive you.”]

[Once everyone has completed the role play, ask the students:] **When you played the forgiver, how did it feel to always have to forgive?** *[Let several students respond, then say:]* **Let’s suppose this really happened to you. The same student, day after day, does the same hurtful thing. And it doesn’t end after three times, but the offender keeps doing it. How many times would it take before you would not be able to forgive them anymore?** *[You may want to have your students take a few moments to think about their answer or even write the number on a piece of paper.]*

[Say to the students:] **Let’s have a show of hands. Please be honest. How many of you would find it hard and maybe wouldn’t forgive the offender the first time? Please raise your hands. If you didn’t raise your hand the**

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first time, how many of you could forgive the first time, but probably wouldn't be able to forgive the second time? Raise your hands. *[Continue raising the number until either no one has a hand up, or it is obvious one or more will keep raising their hands. Notice when the largest number of your students raised their hands (three, four, five, etc.) Then, say:]* **It seems like this class averages four or five (or whatever the average actually is). This question of how often we should forgive was actually asked of Jesus.**

[Ask a student to read the passage, or for younger students, read the passage to them.] **Then Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?"** (*Matthew 18:21, New Living Translation*).

[Say to the students:] **Peter, who was one of Jesus' closest followers, obviously thought forgiving someone for the same offense seven times was very generous. [Compare Peter's number, seven, with the average number your class just gave.]**

What do you think Jesus' answer is going to be? Will He say, "Yes, Peter, to forgive seven times would be very generous"? *[Let several students respond then read the next verse.]* **"No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven!"** (*Matthew 18:21-22, New Living Translation*).

[Say to the students:] **How many would that be; seventy times seven?** *[Let one or more students respond. If no one gets the right answer (490), work the problem out on the board.]*

What do you think Jesus meant, when he said we should forgive people 490 times? *[Let one or more students respond].* **Do you think Jesus meant we should keep a record of how many times a person hurts us and when it reaches 491, then we should stop forgiving? No, that would be silly. This was Jesus' way of telling Peter he should never stop forgiving, no matter how many times a person offended him.**

I believe the only way we could possibly be that forgiving is if we have experienced Christ's unlimited forgiveness of us!

PARENT-TEACHER CONNECTION

Forgiveness is an essential life tool making the navigation of childhood and all of life easier. Holding on to anger and resentment causes anxiety and depression in both children and adults. The earlier your child can learn to forgive, the healthier the child will become.

Forgiving others is always hard to do when you are still feeling hurt. It takes courage to decide to forgive someone. Forgiving someone is a choice showing strength of character, not weakness. Forgiving someone may not take the hurt away immediately, and it certainly won't immediately take away the memory of what happened. When your child forgives, he or she will probably still feel sad for a while. So, it is important to emphasize to your child that forgiveness is not a feeling, it is a choice. Forgiveness needs bravery. It does not mean what was said or done that was hurtful was okay. It means the person who was hurt is willing to absorb the pain and not retaliate. The forgiver chooses to bless and not to curse.

Questions you might ask your child:

1. What were the stone necklaces in the story about? (They represented the burdens of not forgiving. When the children started forgiving each other, the stones began disappearing.)
2. How did your teacher use water to teach about forgiveness? (The teacher used food coloring to change the water from clear to red, demonstrating how anger makes it hard to forgive. Then, she used bleach to change it back, demonstrating how forgiving reduces anger.)
3. When you want someone to forgive you, what are four things you can say to help the person forgive you?
 - I am sorry for...
 - In the future, I will...
 - This was wrong because...
 - Will you please forgive me?

Parents, share about a time when you chose to forgive someone. What were the results?



