

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

The Forgiving Power of the Spirit

Old Testament: Jeremiah 31:34

³⁴No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the LORD', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

New Testament: Luke 15:11-24

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

¹¹Then Jesus* said, 'There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them.

¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶He would gladly have filled himself with* the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.' "

²⁰So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

²²But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one--and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³and get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

General Concept: The Holy Spirit makes a forgiving community by restoring the alienated back to the fellowship of the church.

Key Concepts in the Different Age Levels in Sunday School

N/K/YE: **The Holy Spirit forgives.**

ME/OE: **Through the Holy Spirit, we receive forgiveness.**

Y: **The Holy Spirit enables us to be forgiven and be restored in our relationship with our God and with each other.**

A: **The Holy Spirit makes a forgiving community by restoring the alienated back to the fellowship of the church.**

Exegesis of Biblical References

The Israelites were exiled to Babylon as God's punishment to them for their disobedience. Despite the warnings and repeated calls for repentance by Jeremiah, the Israelites, led by their ruling elite in Jerusalem, refused to listen and continued their evil ways. As a result, chaos broke and there was disunity and disharmony among themselves.

This is why the Babylonian enemy was able to easily defeat them and took them into captivity. However, after spending years as an alienated, uprooted and a vanquished people in a foreign land, God once again heard the cry of His people and the Lord began to listen to their hearts asking for forgiveness. God then sent a word through Jeremiah to proclaim God's desire for forgiveness and plan of restoration saying "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." After all they have been through, the people still have a future to look forward to right in their own homeland where they can once more live as a people able to freely worship and serve their God as a forgiven, restored people.

Jesus use parables to make his message more understandable for his audience and to emphasize better his point. In the parable of the lost son, Jesus cited the human capacity and tendency to sin as exemplified by the son who craved for and took his share of wealth and spent it unwisely. But, Jesus, in the parable, also taught about forgiveness as illustrated by the father who welcomed and accepted his son despite of what he has done and what he has gone through. Jesus presented to his audience a God who is prepared and willing to forgive those who humble themselves and would turn back from their evil ways.

As followers of Jesus who comprise the church and as recipient of Christ's Spirit, we are reminded of our capability to forgive others, gifted with the ability to restore those who are alienated, and our duty to accept those who are lost. Being a forgiving and accepting community of fellow forgiven sinners becomes one of the abiding and outstanding marks of a true fellowship of the church that is imbued with the spirit of our Lord Jesus. Let the forgiving power of the spirit direct, motivate and empower us so we can be the church that is meant and called to be, one that accepts and embraces all peoples.

Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users

Like the good shepherd who left the ninety-nine in order to find one lost sheep, the church never gives up seeking to restore an alienated member. The church is a community that doesn't take delight in punishing the offender; it rejoices in the return of a forgiven sinner. If punishment needs to be handed out as the law requires, it is for the purpose of restoring relationships that have been broken by the offense committed. The satisfaction served by punishment, however, does not make a forgiving heart. It is the Spirit that heals the hurt suffered by the violated and at the same time breaks down the violator towards repentance. The Spirit's work at both sides prepares the ground for reconciliation and restoration.

As a community of the Spirit, the church lives under rule of the gospel rather the law. In contrast to the law which is harsh and punitive, the gospel is tender and forgiving. The intents of the law are self-evident and self-operational, whereas the power of the gospel comes from the invisible wind of the Spirit. That does not, however, abolish the function of the law in the Christian life. In actual fact, the Spirit employs the services of the law in order to make the work of the gospel effective.

Accordingly, the church employs the co-operation of the law and gospel by which the offender accepts the guilt and submits to the process of making amends for the injury done. At the same time, the offended party goes through a process of healing to soften the ground for forgiveness to sprout. The two-pronged process takes place under the discipline of the Spirit. Finally, damaged relationships are repaired and the separated members are restored back to the fellowship of the church.

Nursery/Kindergarten/Younger Elementary Levels

I. Objectives

At the end of the session, the learners are expected to:

1. tell that the Holy Spirit helps us to forgive others;
2. express one's feelings when he or she is forgiven and when he or she accepts apology from others; and
3. demonstrate through creative activities the act of forgiving others.

II. Concept: The Holy Spirit forgives.

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably NRSV), song chart, pictures of the story, candies/chocolates/banana/kamote

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time: Greet the children as they arrive. Set the mode of spirit-filled classroom. You feel the presence of the Holy Spirit by being happy and friendly.
2. Opening prayer: "Dear God, thank you for gathering us today! May your Holy Spirit be with us. May your Holy Spirit help us to forgive! This is our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen!"
3. Opening song: "Rejoice in the Lord"
Rejoice in the Lord always and again, I say rejoice and again I say rejoice (2x).

I'm excited (3x) in the Lord (3x),
When you're walking with the Lord you can't get bored.

Oh oh oh somebody touched me (3x)
It must have been the hands of the Lord.

B. Getting Ready

1. **Activity for N/K.** "Picture Study"
 - a. Show a picture showing a boy and a girl fighting.
 - b. Ask these questions:
 - 1) What do you see in the picture? Why do you think they fight?
 - 2) With whom did you fight? What did you fight about?
 - 3) What did you feel? How did you become friends with this person?
2. **Activity for YE.** Sharing time
 - a. Ask the class: Did you experience somebody hurt your feelings? (Let everybody share in the class.) What did you do? Did you cry? How did you forgive that somebody?
 - b. Lead the discussion and connect to the story below.

C. Learning Time

1. To prepare the pupils, let them form a big circle and sing, "Shake a Friend's Hand" and accompany the song with appropriate action.
2. Tell the story.

The Lost Son

(Based on Luke 15:11-15)

There was a man with two sons. The younger son said, "Father, give me my share of the property. The father gave him his share. Then his son left. He went to a far place.

The son spent all his money. He became poor. He looked for a job. He became a caretaker of pigs. He ate their food with them. He slept with them and stayed with them the whole time.

One day, he remembered his father. He said to himself, "I will get up and go to my Father. I will say to Him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer called your son. Treat me like a slave."

So he set off and went to his Father.

His father saw him coming. He was filled with compassion. He ran and put his arms around him. Then he kissed him.

The son told his father about his intention. He asked for his forgiveness. The father forgave him. He accepted him as his son. He clothed him with a robe. He put a ring on his finger. He gave him sandals for his feet. He prepared a good meal for him. Then he said, "This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!"

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

Discuss the lesson. Ask these questions.

1. Who are the characters of the story? (Father and younger son)
2. What did the son ask? (Give him his share)
3. Where did he go? (To a far place)
4. What happened to him? (He spent all his money. He became poor.)
5. Where did he work? (He became a caretaker of pigs)
6. Whom did he remember? (His father)
7. What did he do? (He went back to his father. He asked for forgiveness.)
8. Did his father forgive him? (Yes.) How? (He accepted him. He clothed him. He put a ring on his fingers. He gave him sandals. He set a good food for him.)
9. Who helped the father to forgive? (The Holy Spirit)

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: When we ask for forgiveness, what does the Holy Spirit do? (The Holy Spirit guides us. We follow.)

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Teach the memory verse: ""Father I have sinned against heaven and before you." (Luke 15:21)
2. Reflective Commitment. Tell the children to recall any experience where he/she forgave someone who did wrong. Let them share their experiences and affirm that they should forgive others.
3. Candy/Chocolate/Banana/Kamote of Forgiveness. Distribute 3 pieces of candy each. Tell them not to eat the candies. Let them share with their classmates particularly those who did something wrong to them or bullied them. As they give the candy they may say, "Peace be with you" or "I forgive you." They may also accept candies from their classmates whom they have wronged.

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Commitment: "I commit or promise to forgive others."
3. Closing songs: "Come Holy Spirit" and other good-bye songs
4. Closing prayer: "Loving God, we thank you for the forgiving power of the Holy Spirit. May that power be with us so that we may forgive those who sinned against us! This is our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen."

Middle and Older Elementary Levels

I. Objectives

At the end of the session, the learners are expected to:

1. analyze the parable of the "Prodigal Son";
2. explain the actions of the father and his son;
3. state that the Holy Spirit enables the believers to forgive others and ask for forgiveness; and
4. list ways by which one can forgive or ask for forgiveness.

II. Concept: Through the Holy Spirit, we receive forgiveness.

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably NRSV), song chart, pictures of the story, 2 fresh fruits like banana, apple or mango (for the game), candies/chocolates/banana/kamote, coupon bond, ballpens, pencils, cartolina

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time: Greet the children as they arrive. Set the mode for a spirit-filled classroom. You feel the presence of the Holy Spirit by being happy and friendly.
2. Opening prayer: "Dear God, thank you for gathering us today! May your Holy Spirit be with us. May your Holy Spirit help us to forgive! This is our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen!"
3. Opening song: "Rejoice in the Lord"
Rejoice in the Lord always and again, I say rejoice and again I say rejoice (2x).
I'm excited (3x) in the Lord (3x),
When you're walking with the Lord you can't get bored.
Oh oh oh somebody touched me (3x)
It must have been the hands of the Lord.

B. Getting Ready

Prepare the class to play the game "Fresh Fruit Relay" to enable them to appreciate the value of forgiving, giving, and receiving.

1. 2. Have the children form two teams and tell each team to form one line. Give the fruit to the first player. She or He then passes it to the next without looking back and turning around. When the fruit reaches the last player, she or he will shout, "Thank You", and passes it back to the player in front of her/him who will in return receive the fruit. The player in front will shout "You're welcome!" This is round 1 of the game. For the next rounds, the teacher may direct the class to change the underlined words with-I love you, I love you too-, I need you-I need you too-, I care for you-I care for you too-, I forgive you-I forgive you, too. The team that earns the most points wins the game.)
2. Write the word prodigal on the board. Ask the class what they remember about the meaning of the word "prodigal". Present the meaning of the word being, "wasteful" or "lavish" and to use this word in appropriate contexts such as, "How would a prodigal feast look like?" (With lots of food on a banquet; exquisite and expensive china; visitors in fine, formal and extravagant clothes) Who are the people you know who live a prodigal lifestyle? (politicians, business people, actors, etc.)

C. Learning Time

1. Ask: Who is prodigal in this story? Tell the class to read Luke 15:11-24.
2. Divide the class into four groups. Assign each group specific verses and tell the

members to discuss the verses. Let each group to choose their reporter who will present the highlights of the given verses.

- a. Group 1. Verses 11-12
- b. Group 2. Verses 13-16
- c. Group 3. Verses 17-21
- d. Group 4. Verses 22-24

3. Process the report of each group.

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

1. Tell the class to answer the following”

- a. Who is called prodigal in this story? (The son)
- b. Why do you think the son is called prodigal (He wasted his inheritance.)
- c. How exactly was he considered wasteful or prodigal? (First, he asked for his share of the family's property which his father appropriately granted. Then, he went to a far place and recklessly spent all his inheritance.)
- d. What was the result of his reckless actions?(Soon his money was all gone. He became poor.)
- e. How did he try to deal with this consequence? (He worked as caretaker of pigs.)
- f. Who helped the father to forgive? (The Holy Spirit)
- g. Why do you think we must forgive those who sinned against us? (Forgiveness is not ours to keep. God has commanded us to forgive. God has accepted and loved us despite our sins. God commands us to do the same.
- h. How do you think we should forgive? (First, we have to ask the Holy Spirit to guide us. Then, we understand and learn from what has been done. We accept that we want to become better persons.)

2. Tell the class to act out the story. Use the same grouping and let each group act out the verses assigned to them.

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: When we ask for forgiveness, what does the Holy Spirit do? (The Holy Spirit guides us. We follow.)

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

Tell the children to do the following activities:

1. Discuss the memory verse: ""Father I have sinned against heaven and before you." (Luke 15:21)
2. *Show and tell.* Tell the children to recall any experience wherein he/she apologized to someone who did wrong. Emphasize that the Holy Spirit enables the believers to forgive others and ask others for forgiveness.
3. *Candy/chocolate/banana/kamote of forgiveness.* Distribute 3 pieces of candy each. Tell them not to eat the candies. Let them share to their classmates who did something wrong to them or bullied them. As they give the candy they may say, "Peace be with you" or "I forgive you." They may also accept candies from their classmates whom they have wronged.

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Commitment: "I commit or promise to forgive others."
3. Closing songs: "Come Holy Spirit" and other good-bye songs
4. Closing prayer: "Father, we thank you for your loving kindness. We thank you that we can come to you whenever we have a problem and that you will always be there for us. We know that you are quick to forgive us when we mess up and will always welcome us back when we return to you. Amen."

Youth Level

I. Objectives

At the end of the session, the learners are expected to:

1. accept the fact that God forgave us first so that we may forgive others;
2. relate the act of being forgiving with the restoration of our relationship with God and others as illustrated in the parable; and
3. write some insights on the effect in one's life being forgiving and being forgiven.

II. Concept: The Holy Spirit enables us to be forgiven and be restored in our relationship with our God and with each other.

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably NRSV), song chart, pictures of the story, candies/chocolates/banana/kamote, coupon bond, ballpens, pencils, cartolina

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time
2. Opening prayer: "Loving God, we thank you for this time that we are gathered to study the truth of your word. We acknowledge the presence of your Holy Spirit in our midst, in accompanying us as we study, and in sharing the God News of your love to others. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen."
3. Opening song: "O Holy Spirit, Rouse Your Church" (HFJ # 180)

B. Getting Ready

1. Begin the class with a hand meditative activity (<http://www.chrisgribble.com/a-celtic-meditation-exercise-hand-meditation/>). Let them sit on the floor. Prepare mats for them to sit. While soft music is being played, the leader dramatically reads the following Celtic Meditation Exercise:
 - a. Sitting with your palms up resting in your lap, eyes closed, tune into your breathing, relax your tension points and go into your center.
 - b. Become aware of the air at your fingertips, between your fingers, on the palm of your hand. Experience the fullness, strength and maturity of your hands. Think of your hands, think of the most unforgettable hands you have known the hands of your father, your mother, your grandparents. Remember the oldest hands that have rested in your hands. Think of the hands of a new born child, your nephew or niece of the incredible perfection, delicacy of the hands of a child. Once upon a time your hands were the same size.
 - c. Think of all that your hands have done since then. Almost all that you have learned is through your hands turning yourself over, crawling and creeping, walking and balancing yourself; learning to hold something for the first time; feeding yourself; washing and bathing, dressing yourself. At one time your greatest accomplishment was tying your own shoes.
 - d. Think of all the learning your hands have done and how many activities they have mastered, the things that they have made. Remember the day you could write your own name.
 - e. Our hands were not just made for themselves but for others. How often were they given to help another. Remember all the kinds of work they have done, the

tiredness and aching they have known, the cold and the heat, the soreness and the bruises. Remember the tears they have wiped away, our own or another's, the blood they have bled, the healing they have experienced. How much hurt, anger and even violence have they expressed and how much gentleness, tenderness and love they have given. Remember the times when you offer your hand for forgiveness. How often they have been folded in prayer; both a sign of their powerlessness and of their power.

- f. There is a mystery which we discover in the hand of a woman or a man that we love. There are the hands of a doctor, a nurse, an artist, a conductor, a priest, hands which you can never forget.
 - g. Now raise your right hand slowly and gently place it over your heart. Press more firmly until your hand picks up the beat of your heart that most mysterious of all human sounds, one's own heartbeat, a rhythm learned in the womb from the heartbeat of one's own mother. Press more firmly for a moment than release your hand and hold it just a fraction from your clothing. Experience the warmth between your hand and your heart. Now lower your hand to your lap very carefully as if you were carrying your heart. For it does. When you extend your hand to another, it's not just bone and skin, it is your heart. A handshake is a real heart transplant.
 - h. Think of all the hands that have left their imprint on you. Fingerprints and hands that have left their imprint on you. Fingerprints and handprints are heart prints that can never be erased. The hand has its own memory. Think of all the places that carry your handprints and all the people who bear your handprint. They are indelible and will last forever.
 - i. Now without opening your eyes begin to write out of your stream of consciousness. Slowly become more aware of your outer extremities. The pressure of the air on your forehead. The sensation of the air touching your fingertips.
 - j. Slowly as you are ready become present to your reality once more. (You may add the following sentences to conclude) Now give your hands to the persons beside you. Hold their hands and try to express how thankful you are to them as your press slowly their hands. Whose hands were those? They may be another person's hand. It may be God's hands. Indeed, they are God's hands. And your hands are God's hands. Amen.
2. Invite participants to share reflections after the meditation. Encourage them to connect reflections with the things that they have done so far for the church and people around them. Particularize their answer about giving forgiveness.

C. Learning Time

1. Let the students read and study Jeremiah 31:34 and discuss what the Lord will do about their sins as they will begin to know God.
2. Ask the class to read Luke 15:11-24 in unison using their own personal Bibles.
3. After reading and studying, group the class into two groups. Ask each group to pretend they are newscasters and they would cover the story of the Prodigal Son. Let them think of catchy headlines that can attract the viewers.
4. Let each group present their headlines and encourage a healthy discussion afterwards.

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

Discuss briefly the lesson. Ask these questions.

1. How will you describe the characters of the story?
2. Why do you think the Father gave all the possessions to the younger son?
3. What did the younger son do to his possessions?
4. After realizing all of his wrong doing, he came back to his father. Did the father forgive him?
5. How did the father forgive him?
6. Who do you think helped the father to forgive his son?

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: Who enables us to be forgiven and be restored in our relationship with our God and with each other? (The Holy Spirit)

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Tell the students that forgiving is the work of the Holy Spirit.
2. Instruct the students to write some insights on the effect in one's life being forgiving and being forgiven. Tell the class to use this title: My Experience on the Effect of Being Forgiving and Having Been Forgiven.
3. Reflective Action: Tell the class to share what they have written on their paper.

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Closing song: "O Holy Spirit, Rouse Your Church" (HFJ # 180)
3. Closing prayer: "Father, we thank you for your loving kindness. We thank you that we can come to you whenever we have a problem and that you will always be there for us. We know that you are quick to forgive us when we mess up and will always welcome us back when we return to you. Amen."

Adult Level**I. Objectives**

At the end of the session, the learners are expected to:

1. explain the virtue of being forgiving and reconciling as exemplified by Jesus;
2. note the act of forgiveness as illustrated by the parable;
3. state the significance of a forgiving community of faith to all its members;
4. list the church ministries that promote forgiveness; and
5. make a commitment, through the Holy Spirit, to forgive others and accept forgiveness from others.

II. Concept: The Holy Spirit makes a forgiving community by restoring the alienated back to the fellowship of the church.

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably NRSV), song chart, pictures of the story, candies/chocolates/banana/kamote, coupon bond, ballpens, pencils, cartolina

III. Learning Experiences**A. Opening Worship**

1. Welcome time
2. Opening prayer: "Loving God, we thank you for this time that we are gathered to study the truth of your word. We acknowledge the presence of your Holy Spirit in our midst, in accompanying us as we study, and in sharing the God News of your love to others. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen."
3. Opening song: "O Holy Spirit, Rouse Your Church" (HFJ # 180)

B. Getting Ready

Think-Pair-Share Activity is a discussion strategy that can be used as pre-reading activity. Each student becomes an active participant.

1. Let the adults form pairs. One's partner would be the person sitting beside him or her.
2. Let them think of a situation where they were being hurt by somebody. Have them share these situations with their partners.
3. Discuss what process was used in forgiving or reconciling with that somebody who did wrong to him or her.
4. Conclude by coming back together as a whole group and having students share their ideas and discuss the forgiving power of the Holy Spirit.

C. Learning Time

1. Ask the adults to read in unison Jeremiah 31:34 and realize that God said I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sins no more.
2. Tell the adults to read responsively the verses in Luke 15:11-24. Direct their attention to the characters of the story.
3. Let the student think deeper about the forgiving power of the Father over his prodigal son.
4. Prepare some play money, sandals, a play ring, some food scraps in a plastic bag or bowl, a toy pig, a toy cow or picture of a cow, a party invitation or balloon, a Bible, and some binoculars.

5. Tell the class to get one item and look for the verse that talk about this item. Once called, let the student read the verse that is related to the object.

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

Tell them to react to the following statements regarding forgiving:

1. Christ has forgiven us so we forgive others.
2. We are able to forgive or pass over the wrong done by a person to another in the same spirit and manner demonstrated by Jesus in his life and ministry.
3. We are able to reconcile when we commit ourselves to actively find ways and means in bringing together conflicting parties and creating in the process a spirit of acceptance and understanding of each other.
4. Forgiveness is an unnatural act. We therefore need God's strength and grace to be able to forgive others.
5. Forgiveness ends the cycle of hatred, guilt and violence.

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: What is the importance of forgiveness-reconciliation-acceptance to us? Who helped us bring unity, wholeness, completeness, totality among us?

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Memory Verse: Luke 15:21
2. Let them list the church ministries that promotes forgiveness I support the Church (e.g., support the NDFP-GRP Peace Talks)

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Reflective Action: I commit through the Holy Spirit to forgive others and to accept forgiveness from others.
3. Closing song: "O Holy Spirit, Rouse Your Church" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 180)
4. Closing prayer: "Father, we thank you for your loving kindness. We thank you that we can come to you whenever we have a problem and that you will always be there for us. We know that you are quick to forgive us when we mess up and will always welcome us back when we return to you. Amen."