

Interactive lesson



picture from

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/a-happy-family-eating-popcorn-while-sitting-on-the-couch-6336668/>;

photo credit: Tima Miroshnichenko

As a preschool child, what was your (child's) favorite show or storybook?

How many times did you watch or read it?

Did the parents get angry when a request was made to watch or read it again?

How often does a child get hungry?

How often do parents feed a child?

Do they get angry if their child gets hungry again the next day?

Do they feed everyone in the whole community every day? Why not?

If you repeatedly take care of someone's needs, what happens?

If you interact with someone, you form a relationship with them. What happens if you stop interacting?

To keep a relationship healthy, you need to sustain it with healthy interactions. What people do you have the most important relationships with?

How many times do you help them?

Do you get mad at them for asking for help?

What about forgiveness? How many times do you forgive

them?

How many times has God forgiven you?

Our relationships with one another, how we treat one another, model the most important relationship we can have. Do you know with whom that is?

God loves us more than we can fathom, and God forgives us when we repent of our mistakes. So how should we treat those whom we love?

May we all learn to forgive one another as God forgives us.

Gospel lesson

We continue this week from where we left off last week, with Jesus teaching the disciples God's way of thinking about things:



picture screencaptured from
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z7dHS86g11o;](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z7dHS86g11o)
credit: LUMO

Matthew 18:21-35

NRSV

²¹ Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?"

²² Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

²³ "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with

his slaves.

²⁴ When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him;

²⁵ and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made.

²⁶ So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.'

²⁷ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt.

²⁸ But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.'

²⁹ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.'

³⁰ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt.

³¹ When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place.

³² Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.'

³³ Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?'

³⁴ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt.

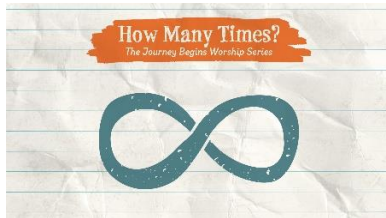
³⁵ So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive">

UMH #390>

Message: How Many Times?



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/the-journey-begins/sixteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/sixteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Amazing, forgiving Lord,

as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may learn to love You, and to show Your love to one another no matter how many times or ways we are tempted to withhold it. Amen.

We wrap up "The Journey Begins" series this week by asking, "How Many Times?"

“We can be honest with ourselves and with God as we realize that we too often have asked that same question, "How many times must I forgive?" ”



picture from MMMS collection

One day during VBS this past summer, we played a series of games involving a parachute canopy. At one point as folks were lowering the edges of the canopy, one of the young boys pulled it too close. The girl next to him tried to warn him that he could get hurt holding it that way, but in the excitement, he only heard her yelling at him, not what she said.

When the parachute was then raised by everyone, the young boy got caught by the edge of the parachute. He thought the girl next to him was trying to choke him (after all, she had been yelling at him), so he hauled off and punched her in the stomach. She doubled over, falling to the ground, and all the fun stopped while we sorted things out.

We then talked about what happened. Everyone agreed that it was not good the boy got hurt. Everyone agreed that he should not have hit the girl. Everyone agreed that she did the right thing by not hitting back. We clarified that God loves both the girl who was hit and the boy who hit her.

I talked about Matthew 5:39 where Jesus says to turn the other cheek if someone hits you. Turning in the Bible is used not just as a physical movement, but as a fundamental change of the situation to something different. Turning the other cheek does not mean to put up with abuse, but rather to fundamentally change the situation by refusing to continue the violence, anger, fear, or hatred. The kids identified this as stepping away from the situation and getting a trusted adult to help.

When we lash out, we have to deal with the consequences. If the boy (instead of lashing out in fear and anger) had sought help, not only would the girl not gotten hurt, the boy would have been able to rejoin the games that day.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/jvh-moses/>

When the Egyptians realized the Israelites were leaving after the final plague, they chased after them with violent intent. Lashing out in anger, they were drowned. Had they stayed home or even turned back before entering the path through the sea, they would have remained alive.

The Israelites could have chosen to try to fight the Egyptians instead of trusting in God; if they had,

they likely would have been slaughtered. Instead, like a child turning to a trusted adult, they obeyed God's directions and were saved.

As Christians, we try to follow God's directions, but sometimes we are weak and we make mistakes. Paul wrote to the Romans that we should welcome those weak in faith, but not for the sake of quarreling.

What was happening then probably sounds all too familiar today: when people joined the faith community, those who had been there longer expected them to behave in the same way they did, down to mundane details such as when and what to eat.



pictures from

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/delicious-vegetable-salad-and-golden-fork-and-knife-on-table-4198023/>;

photo credit: Karolina Grabowska and

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/grilled-meat-laid-on-a-wood-slab-3276235/>; *photo credit: Anna Guerrero*

Paul was giving them a news flash: God does not care if we choose to be vegan or eat meat, or what time of day or night we have our meals, as long as we are eating a healthy diet and giving God thanks for it. God does not demand a specific form or time of worship, just that we worship God with all that we are (& show God's love to one another and the world).

When we nitpick at one another, we cause rifts instead of developing relationships filled with God's love. The bigger the issues we judge one another about, the bigger the rift. Judging is a sinful trap

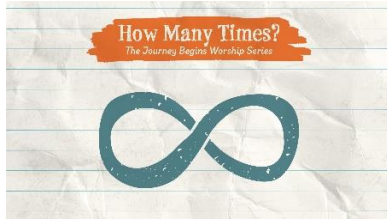
that separates us both from one another and from God, because it prevents opportunities to share God's love.

Have any of you had to deal with someone that drove you crazy with a bad habit, or even an addiction? They know they should do better, yet screw up, and then come hat-in-hand saying they are sorry and need your help to get back on track. How often do you forgive them?

Now I do not mean to be an enabler, to open the gate for them to be tempted and mess up again, draining your resources ad nauseam. I mean to help them recover and be put in an environment where they can flourish rather than fail, with the temptation to mess up again removed or as minimized as possible.

In the parable Jesus told about the slave owing ten thousand talents, the king released the slave and forgave the debt out of pity; but do you think that king would enable the slave to continue accruing debt at that level by keeping him in the same position?

The slave, fearful and upset at the accounting and his failure, lashed out at the first person he saw. Do we generally do the right thing when we are upset and lash out? Like that young boy hurt by the parachute, I think we are prone to making bad assumptions and poor choices when we are upset.



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/the-journey-begins/sixteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/sixteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-graphics>

Think of the person who comes to you repentantly, even when they should know better by now. Instead of asking how many times must I forgive them, try asking: How do I stop from lashing out at them? How do I turn the other cheek, fundamentally changing the situation? How do I do like God does for me, and nurture them to something better?

For that matter, do I drive someone else crazy like that? Do we even realize to whom we cause similar heartache? Sometimes the perpetrator does not know what problems they cause, and a gentle conversation is needed to start the resolution process. If you are too upset for that, take time to pray and let God's peace calm you before approaching the person.

After all, sometimes it is our expectations that are unrealistic. When we seek understanding and harmony with one another where all are nurtured, God's love enables us to build stronger relationships and better communities.

God never stops trying to help us grow into something better. Let our other relationships reflect the one we have with God, by sharing God's love and restorative forgiveness with all - not keeping count,

but as a way of life, the foundation of our community, the enabling of God's kingdom on earth.