

LIGHTHOUSE GROUP CURRICULUM

Matthew 18:12-35

LEADER'S STUDY

Love Inside and Outside the Family of God

Matthew 18:12-35

What is happening?

Jesus is sharing with his disciples his Father's heart for the lost, and the sheer magnitude of His forgiveness. Not seven times, but seventy times seven! He first paints a vivid picture of a shepherd leaving the 99 sheep to search for the one that is lost. Then, he details how we are to reconcile with a believer who sins against us. Note his wording: "If the other person listens and confesses, you have *won that person back*". The motivation for seeking reconciliation is not for personal gain or to be proved right, but to win that person back into the family of God. If you think Jesus is giving us an "out" in Matthew 18:17 when he says to treat the unrepentant believer as we would a pagan or a tax collector, then you need to read Matthew 5:43-48, and consider Jesus' own example: how did he treat tax collectors and sinners?

Jesus then drives the message home with the parable of the unforgiving debtor. If we ever think it is impossible to keep forgiving someone over and over, then we need to remember how much we've been forgiven by God.

Where is the gospel?

Consider the great love of Jesus: he washed the feet of betrayers and deserters right before his death – a death that would result in their salvation. We cannot possibly receive God's forgiveness without it changing our hearts towards one another. God's forgiveness is what enables us to forgive each other. The power and richness of His love takes away our poverty so that we can afford to richly bless and forgive others. Forgiving each other is a privilege that we don't deserve, and it brings us great freedom and joy.

As you prepare for this week, ask yourself questions like these: According to Jesus, should our love for those outside the family of God be any different than our love for those inside His family? Who gets to decide who is truly inside the family of God? What rules and requirements do we demand people meet in order to be on the "in" crowd? Do we live up to these standards ourselves? How is God calling me to depend on Him more? How does this change my perspective today? How is God calling me to respond based on this scripture?

Spend some time reading and meditating on these truths as you prepare for your meeting. Be willing to share this with your group and invite them to join you in sharing how God is asking them to respond to His word. Be willing to share areas that He is calling you to "follow Him" and make clear "I" statements about how you are going to align with Him.

Some helpful scriptures: Matthew 5:43-48; Romans 5:6-11; 1 Corinthians 11:17-32

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INTENTIONAL BIBLE READING

READ Matthew 18:12-35
and meditate on it.

Read in the ESV or similar word-for-word translation. Read it again in the NLT or other thought-for-thought version to get a different perspective.

Try to summarize the passage in your own words.

Consider the historical context:
The Jewish law was very clear towards enemies: "eye for eye and tooth for tooth". Here we see Jesus raising the bar from justice and revenge to forgiveness and love.

The debtor in Jesus' parable owed 60 million days' worth of work: A lifespan of 110 years is only 40,150 days. This was literally an unpayable debt, yet the king forgave it.

On the cross, Jesus met the demands of justice and mercy to establish a new covenant, a new moral economy, a new kingdom. His new command is to love one another as He loves us.

POTENTIAL STUDY QUESTIONS

These are just questions you might ask to help your group discussion. Don't feel like you need to answer all of these as a group

What seems to be the main point of this passage?

What should our motivation be in correcting another believer (vs.15)?

According to Matthew 5:43-48, how are we to treat unrepentant believers/pagans and tax collectors (vs.17)?

Contrast the moral economy of the Kingdom of Heaven vs. that of this world.

How is the ability to forgive a privilege given to us by God?

What did you learn about God and His character from this passage?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

When I put limits on love, generosity, patience and forgiveness, what does that reveal about my own pride and level of trust in the Savior?

Do I see myself as a betrayer of Jesus who found grace, love and forgiveness in Him, or do I see Jesus as a way to get what I want and still maintain leadership of my life?

How is God calling me to obey, based on this passage?

With whom will I share what I have learned?

(This is a critical part of growth that is often overlooked. If we can share it with someone else it means we really understand it, it cements it in our own minds, it makes us accountable to the truth and it blesses the one who hears it.
Rom 10:17)

Based on this passage, what can we pray about and how should we pray?