

LEARNING TO FORGIVE

GRADES 4-6 – Lesson 1

GOAL: Students will understand how wide and long and high and deep God's love is for them and because of that He is all-merciful. Our sin is never too great for God's mercy and He desires for all the lost sheep to be reunited with the flock. Students will be introduced to Church teachings regarding dignity in prisons and how as children of God we are called to minister and pray for those in prison.

Lesson:

The prison system in America is characterized by its emphasis on punishment and retribution. But, the Church rightly recognizes that mere punishment is not justice. In particular, long, unfair sentences, solitary confinement, and the death penalty can be used in vengeful ways rather than helping the offender to correct the wrong done. Restorative justice emphasizes repentance and repairing the harm done. It allows for victims and families to forgive the offender and allows the offender to seek that forgiveness.

Bible Story:

- Read [Matthew 18: 21-34](#) the story of the unmerciful servant.
- Watch the [video rendition](#).

Discussion:

- Why is the servant called “unmerciful”?
- Who showed mercy in the story?
- What did he do that showed the opposite of mercy? What should he have done?

Discussion about Rules:

- What rules do you have to follow at home? At school?
- Who gets to make rules?
- What makes a good rule?
- What happens if you break a rule?

- Why do we need rules?
- How do rules help keep us safe?

Activity:

1. Have the students get into small groups and come up with 3 important rules for this classroom, and a punishment they think should be used for breaking the rules.
2. Have each group present their rule list and consequences.

Discussion:

- Did all of you write the same rule?
- What do you think about the rules?
- Do they work for the classroom?
- What do you think the consequences should be for breaking a rule? How can we decide on the consequences?
- Do rules need to change when you're in a different place?
- What is mercy?
- Does mercy affect the consequences when we break the rules?
- Is there a time when the rules would not apply? When?

Watch:

- Even though Jesus forgives us when we sin, sometimes we still have to suffer the consequences of our actions.
- Ask students to share a time when they have been punished for doing something wrong. Maybe they had a time-out or lost a privilege. Adults, too, have to face consequences for their actions.
- Watch [Nylo's Story](#) to learn about a boy whose mom is in jail. He misses her but learns to write letters to her every day so they can be connected.
- What does this tell us about Nylo's mom? Even though she is in jail, taking responsibility for something that she did that was wrong, she is still a good mom to Nylo and is teaching him and encouraging him. Reinforces the idea that our bad choices do not define who we are.

Prayer:

*Merciful Father,
Thank you for giving me my mind to reason and think.
I ask your blessing on all those who have made wrong choices.
Help them to recognize what they have done and to ask for your forgiveness. Teach me to be fair and just
with those around me.
Show me how to be merciful and to forgive those who offend me as you did.
In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

Lesson adapted from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles Office of Life, Justice and Peace