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*Hey small group leaders! We hope you are being challenged, encouraged, and drawn more and more to Jesus as we explore the “Red Letter Challenge”! It’s our deepest desire that our church family SEES Jesus as He truly is, chooses to be YOKED to Him, finds REST for their souls, and BUILDS their lives on His word. Would you pray with and for your small group over the remaining 4 weeks?*

***Thank you for shepherding a group of people to Love God, Love Others, and Live Sent!***

NEED A RESOURCE, HAVE A QUESTION, OR WANT TO HAVE A CONVERSATION?  
Let us know how we can help! Contact your groups director or [discipleship@rockbridge.cc](mailto:discipleship@rockbridge.cc)

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**“Forgiveness is the giving, and so the receiving, of life.”**

[George McDonald]

**LEADER RESOURCES || Leader Note** *We do our best to equip, empower, and encourage you to shepherd your group well. Access a resource by clicking on the underlined title and share them with your group!*

- **Passage Summary**
  - Jesus tells a parable to illustrate the problem of unforgiveness. The ability to forgive comes because a person has been forgiven, and thus it is evidence of a transformed heart and life. The parable illustrates the following truths: the scope of forgiveness extended by God, the ridiculousness of forgiving “little” (when we’ve been forgiven “much”), and the problem exposed by unforgiveness (never been forgiven=lost).
- Here are two resources to help you lead your group well:
  - [Handling Issues With Truth and Grace](#) (written)
  - [Practices of a Small Group Leader](#) (video)
- [Matthew 18 Commentary & Status, Sheep, & Servants](#)
  - Use this commentary and short video for background and encouragement. These would be good resources to share before you gather.
- [As We Forgive Our Debtors & Questions About Forgiveness](#)
  - These would be an encouraging resources to share with your group after you gather.

**ENGAGE & CONNECT || Leader Note** *The goal for the icebreaker is to prepare your group for the conversation ahead by connecting with one another’s hearts and building joy together.*

Share about a time when someone was generous to you.

**\*OPTIONAL\* DEVOTIONAL RECAP || Leader Note** *If all or the majority of your group is using the personal devotional book, this is an opportunity to allow people to share the main thing they gleaned from the previous week’s readings. This should be kept short (30 seconds per person) so there is time for the discussion and prayer time. Another option is to allow people to share this through a group text/chat.*

What is one thing that God taught you, convicted you of, or invited you to begin doing as you read the devotional book last week?

**BEGIN WITH PRAYER || Leader Note** Begin your time together by thanking God for his presence and praying His word back to Him. Ask a few people to pray, beginning in a posture of humility and dependence!

Spend a moment praying this passage, beginning your time together in humility and gratitude!

*“He brought me up from a desolate pit, out of the muddy clay, and set my feet on a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and they will trust in the Lord.”*

[Psalm 40:2-3]

**BIG IDEA || Leader Note** Read this aloud so your group knows the theme of today’s reading and discussion.

Complete forgiveness is not possible apart from God. Forgiven people forgive!

**PASSAGE & DISCUSSION || Leader Note** Have people read aloud the passage as instructed. Your role is to FACILITATE, so keep your group moving along, encourage multiple people to share, and look for opportunities to point out the grace and glory of God! Here are two reminders: 1) Every question does not have to be answered ... go where the Spirit leads! 2) Answers do not have to be read aloud ... they’re for guidance!

Have a couple of people read aloud portions of Matthew 18:21-35

1. *This is a good opportunity to go first!* What does Peter asking about forgiving "up to seven times" reveal about his understanding of forgiveness? How do you find yourself being similar to Pete’s attitude? *Peter likely believed 7 times was generous (reflecting the Jewish tradition of forgiving up to 3 times). By suggesting 7, Peter might have thought he was extending mercy. However, Jesus' response (77 or 70 times 7) redefines forgiveness as boundless, suggesting Peter's view was limited and transactional.*
2. What does Jesus' response to Peter teach us about the nature of forgiveness in God’s kingdom? *Jesus shifts the focus to God's infinite mercy and the expectation that disciples mirror that mercy. His response also emphasizes that forgiveness in God's kingdom is not a matter of calculation or limit, but an ongoing posture of the heart. Forgiveness is not based on merit or keeping count but is rooted in love and grace. This suggests that we should adopt a continual attitude of forgiveness toward others.*
3. How might we recognize an unwillingness to offer mercy in our own lives? Is there a particular situation or person where you need to be more merciful? *Answers may vary: we can recognize this when we hold grudges, refuse to forgive, or demand others meet certain conditions before we extend grace. The unforgiving servant, despite having been forgiven much, failed to show even a fraction of that mercy to someone else. This challenges us to reflect on whether we forgive others as generously as God has forgiven us.*
4. In the sermon we heard, *“The servant viewed the debt/debtor issue not as relational but transactional. Therefore, he was never transformed.”* How does the servant’s behavior (v. 28-30) reveal a misunderstanding of God’s grace and forgiveness? *The servant’s refusal to forgive the small debt shows that he didn't fully grasp the significance of the grace shown to him. He treated forgiveness as an isolated event rather than a transforming experience that should affect how he treats others. This reveals a transactional understanding of forgiveness, rather than one rooted in a heart changed by grace. Forgiveness is meant to change the forgiven person’s entire outlook on life and relationships.*

5. What role does humility play in this passage? How does our pride obstruct our ability to forgive others? *Humility is central to forgiveness because it acknowledges our own need for mercy. The servant's pride, in demanding repayment from a fellow servant, shows his failure to recognize his own position as a forgiven debtor. Pride leads to self-righteousness, making it difficult to extend forgiveness. True forgiveness requires the humility to see others as equally in need of grace as ourselves.*
6. How does withholding forgiveness impact both the forgiver AND the one needing forgiveness? How have you seen that to be true in your own life? *The one needing forgiveness remains in bondage to their debt, while the forgiver becomes trapped in bitterness and judgment. In the passage, the unforgiving servant is ultimately punished, demonstrating that an unwillingness to forgive can result in spiritual consequences and loss of God's favor. Forgiveness frees both parties and reflects God's nature.*
7. How does this passage challenge you in areas where you struggle to forgive? Let's get honest and specific with one another! *Answers may vary: challenges us to examine our hearts and consider whether we are withholding forgiveness from someone, despite the great mercy God has shown them; calls for an honest evaluation of one's attitudes and a willingness to release bitterness and extend grace, trusting in God's justice and mercy.*
8. In the sermon we heard, *"The willingness and ability to show mercy, give grace, and extend forgiveness are evidence of citizenship in the Kingdom, not requirements."* What is your response to this?

**STEP OF OBEDIENCE || Leader Note** *This is an opportunity for people to put into practice what the Spirit is inviting them to do and live in obedience to God for the sake of love! You can encourage your group to be accountable to one another and use these to follow up with one another throughout the week.*

One truth that we must wrestle with is this: The JOY of being totally forgiven, eternally loved, and part of God's Kingdom is GREATER THAN the pain of being sinned against. Let that settle in for just a moment! Based on the Holy Spirit's wisdom, what is a step of obedience that you can take?

As Colossians 3:13 reminds us, *"Be gentle and ready to forgive; never hold grudges. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others."* Here are a few questions to consider for your next step in forgiving others ...

- RESIST revenge and RELEASE hurt and resentment!
- REFUSE to celebrate (or wish for) their misfortune!
- RECIPROCATE God's grace to them!
  - Protect their dignity!
  - Do not speak ill or spread negativity!
  - Bless them if possible!
- RECEIVE empathy from the Lord!

*Give your group a few moments to reflect on their answers to the questions above. Then have your group answer the question aloud. Feel free to separate into smaller groups of 3-4 for this question.*

**PRAYER FOCUS || Leader Note** *We want to commit to praying for OTHERS as a unified church who is dependent upon God for everything. Be intentional about saving at least 5 minutes for prayer at the end of your gathering each week to pray together. You can pray for one another as well as the prompt below!*

## Merciful As the Father

- Let's pause to reflect on the incredible mercy and forgiveness that God has shown each of us through Jesus Christ. Take a moment to think about anyone in your life who may need your forgiveness or where you can extend mercy. Loving Father, would you soften our hearts, give us the strength to forgive, and help us reflect your boundless grace in how we treat others?

MEMORY VERSE || **Leader Note** *Through this series, we want to encourage your group to memorize the passage below, as it is one of the foundational truths upon which the "Red Letter Challenge" is based on. Psalm 119:11 tells us, "I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you."*

*"Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house. Yet it didn't collapse, because its foundation was on the rock.*

(Matthew 7:24-25)

RLC RESOURCES || **Leader Note** *Below are additional resources that you can share or use before, during, or after you gather. If you have questions, contact your groups director or [discipleship@rockbridge.cc](mailto:discipleship@rockbridge.cc)*

- **Rock Bridge RLC Website** → [rockbridge.cc/red](http://rockbridge.cc/red)
  - This contains an overview video and links to a 40 day Bible reading plan, which complement and enhance the Red Letter Challenge series.
- **Participant Assessment** → [HERE](#)
  - This free tool helps people discover how they're doing in the 5 targets: Being, Forgiving, Serving, Giving, and Going. It is recommended that people take this at the beginning of the series, so share the link via text or email with them.
- **Videos** → [HERE](#)
  - These short videos (6-8 minutes) can be sent to your group before you gather, watched at the beginning of your gathering, or sent to your group as a way to follow up the discussion. They are NOT the content of the discussion, just an enhancement!
- **Red Letter Disciple Podcast** → [HERE](#)
  - This is a podcast by the creators of the Red Letter Challenge. It does NOT go along with the series, but does have podcasts about discipleship that will equip and encourage you. This would be best for people to listen to on their own.