



REVENGE VS. FORGIVENESS: Why aren't grudges worth it? Facilitator's Guide

KINGDOM

🎯 OVERVIEW:

The more you dig into the message of Christ, the more you learn that God's kingdom operates in a totally different way than the world. The world says revenge is a dish best served cold, but Christ says vengeance should be left to God. The world says we should treat bad people badly, while Christ says that evil should be overcome with good. In this lesson, you will read Christ's story of a servant who was forgiven but refused to forgive others. It shows the absurdity of not following Christ's example of radical forgiveness. This lesson also shares the remarkable experience of Corrie ten Boom and an activity that demonstrates the maddening cycle of revenge and the refreshing power of forgiveness.

? OPENING QUESTIONS:

- Think of a time someone wronged you (hurt you, angered you, stabbed you in the back). How did you respond?
- What makes revenge so enticing?

💬 WHAT THE BIBLE HAS TO SAY ABOUT IT:

A 44-year-old man walks onto a bus with his 9-year-old autistic son. His son points to another boy, this one 11 years old, and tells his dad, "He's the one who was bullying me." The dad reaches over, grabs the bully by his hair, and starts bashing his head against the window. He yells at the boy, "If you ever come near my son again, I'll kill you!"

This father didn't want justice; he wanted revenge. He could have addressed the situation by talking with the bully's aunt, teachers, or school administrators. By beating up his son's bully, this father became a bully himself. Now he is in jail, charged with child abuse and bodily injury to a child. The bully's aunt is demanding that the father be prosecuted to the full extent of the law and is threatening to sue the school district because the bus driver did nothing to stop or report the situation. What's more, several activists have started calling for the father's release, condemning the aunt of the bully, believing that the father was justified in attacking the bully because he was defending his son. Revenge is never just between two people. It starts a cycle that spirals into chaos.¹

Jesus taught that we should stop the cycle of revenge before it hurts anyone else. In his most famous sermon, Jesus taught, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also," (Matt. 5:38–39). Really think about that for a second. It's a radical thought—most people would say it's crazy. Instead of taking revenge, Jesus calls us to forgive. We shouldn't fight evil with evil; we should overcome evil with good. Jesus tells a story to explain why we should forgive rather than get even. As you read, think about how you are like the servant in the story when you refuse to forgive, starting a cycle of revenge instead of stopping it.

Read: Matthew 18:21–35



**Discuss:**

- Do you think the father who chose to take revenge on his son's bully was justified in his actions? Why or why not?
- What could he have done instead to protect his son without taking revenge?
- What is the point of Jesus' story about the unforgiving servant?
- When other people wrong us, why should we forgive them instead of taking revenge?

LEADER'S NOTE: The main reason for forgiveness, emphasized in this parable, is because we have been forgiven by God (verses 32–35) so we have every reason to forgive others. It's easier said than done, but this is a great opportunity to help students identify and value God's forgiveness in their own lives. Consider using follow-up questions such as: What has God forgiven you of? What would it mean if you didn't have God's forgiveness?

**A SECOND LOOK:**

Would you be able to forgive someone who was responsible for making your life miserable and killing a member of your family? That's a really tough question. It's one thing to say that you would. It's something else entirely to actually do it. But throughout history, a number of people have actually embraced this kind of radical forgiveness. Jesus calls his followers not to repay evil for evil, but instead to bless those who have hurt us. One of the people who demonstrated this kind of radical forgiveness was Corrie ten Boom. She lived in Holland when Jews were being captured and sent to concentration camps. Corrie's family decided to risk everything to save their Jewish friends and neighbors. They built a hiding place in Corrie's bedroom, and they sheltered their Jewish friends from the Nazis so they wouldn't be sent to concentration camps. But someone tipped off the Nazis, and Corrie and her family were sent to concentration camps themselves. In the concentration camps, Corrie's father, brother, and sister were all killed. Miraculously, Corrie survived and was released through a clerical error.

But the story doesn't end there. A few years later, Corrie was traveling in Germany, spreading the message of God's forgiveness. She gave a talk about God's forgiveness in a church, only to find out afterwards that one of the people listening to her talk was a guard at the camp where her sister had died. He approached Corrie, not recognizing her, and asked about God's forgiveness. In that moment, she was face-to-face with a man responsible for some of the worst suffering in her life. But because of the power of the God's forgiveness, she chose to forgive him in that moment. She shook hands with him and told him he was forgiven. Later she wrote about the experience, describing it as a healing warmth spreading over her body. In that moment, she felt God's love in the most intense way she had ever known.²

Discuss:

- What do you think gave Corrie ten Boom the strength to forgive the concentration camp guard?
- Why do you think that moment of forgiveness gave her such a rich, intense feeling of God's love?
- Could you have forgiven the guard like Corrie did, if you were in her place? Why or why not?
- What do you think it does to people's minds and hearts to spend their lives focused on revenge?
- What do you think it does to people's minds and hearts to spend their lives focused on forgiving others in the way that Christ forgave?



RATE IT:

Give yourself a 1 to 5 rating. How you are doing at forgiving others?

1

I tend to hold grudges for a long time, and I look for ways to pay people back for the harm they've caused me.

3

My grudges last a while, but I usually don't act on them. I usually forgive the small things, but not the big things.

5

I regularly work to forgive people, even if they've wronged me in major ways.



LIVE IT OUT: *Sweet Revenge Card Game*

What you'll need: one or more packs of cards (enough for each student to have 4-7 cards)

SET-UP

Four to seven players sit in a circle. Each player is dealt one card for every person (if there are four players, each gets four cards, etc.) Choose one player to be the "Starter" (the person to the starter's right will be the "Ender").

RULES:

During a round, each player gets one turn (proceeding clockwise). During a player's turn, they must get rid of three of their cards. Cards can either be given to other players or placed into the "Pot" in the center. You can hand any other player up to all three cards, but only one card can be placed in the Pot per turn. The goal is to reach the end of a round (after the Ender's turn is up) without any cards. Continue playing for as many rounds as it takes to declare one or more winners (players who have no cards left by the end of a round).

There are two ways a game might end:

1. **Draw:** Players get caught in a never-ending cycle of revenge by passing cards back and forth so that no one can win.
2. **One or more win:** One or more players make it to the end of a round without any cards.

LEADER'S NOTE: The Ender has a distinct advantage because the round is over after their turn, so if they run out of cards, no one else can give them more during the round. The game is titled "Sweet Revenge" because players will likely want to take revenge on others who load them up with cards by forcing them to take cards in return.

Have students play this way for 10 minutes. Then ask them these questions:

Discuss:

- What was your first response when someone loaded you up with cards? What was your strategy to win?
- Was anyone about to win, but had their hopes dashed at the last minute with a single card? How did that make you feel?
- Did your game ever fall into a never-ending loop? How could you have ended the game? Did you do this?



Then have students play one last game. Tell them there is a secret third way for a game to end, with all players winning at once:

3. **ALL players win:** It is possible for all players to end a round without any cards. Players will have to forget about revenge and strategize with the others by graciously accepting cards and regularly burning cards in the Pot. Getting the players to ignore the urge for revenge and discover this ending is the ultimate point of the game.

LEADER'S NOTE: The secret to all players winning is for everyone to start the last round with only one card. This is possible, but it's tricky to get to this point. It will work with any number of players. Don't tell the students this secret. Let them try to figure it out on their own.



APPLY IT:

Write down one way you are going to apply what you now know about forgiveness. What difference will it make in your life this week? How will you apply it to your life?

Be specific:

What are you going to do?

When are you going to do it?

Is there someone who can keep you accountable?

LEADER'S NOTE: Whenever students make applications, challenge them to be specific. It's one thing to say, "I'm going to trust God more." The truth is, our students won't really know if they did this, or if they grew in trust over the week. It's another thing to say, "Every morning this week before I eat breakfast, I'm going to tell God that today is his and that I trust him, and I'm going to ask him to give me the strength to replace worries with trust." Challenge your students to answer the questions under the "Be Specific" section. You can even have them pair up, share their applications, and ask for accountability from their partner.



THINK ABOUT IT:

"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive," (Col. 3:12-13).

"To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you." – C.S. Lewis⁵

***Any reference within this piece to Internet addresses of websites not under the administration of LeaderTreks is not to be taken as an endorsement of these websites by LeaderTreks; neither does LeaderTreks vouch for their content.

¹ "This Dad Pummeled An 11-Year-Old Kid For Bullying His 9-Year-Old Autistic Son," *Yahoo.Com*, June 3, 2014, accessed July 19, 2017, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/dad-pummeled-11-old-kid-bullying-9-old-140217575.html>.

² Corrie ten Boom, *The Hiding Place* (Washington Depot, CT: Chosen Books, 1971).

³ C.S. Lewis, *Readings for Meditation and Reflection*, ed. Walter Hooper, (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 63.