

Use “The Scene” to introduce “How to Forgive” the High School Sunday school lesson for January 21, 2018. The lesson is found on page 49 of *High School Teacher*.

the SCENE

Viewing the latest news through the lens of Scripture

In this month when we celebrate the life and influence of Martin Luther King Jr., let’s take a look at some of his thoughts on the subject of forgiveness—along with the thoughts from God’s Word.

“Forgiveness does not mean ignoring what has been done or putting a false label on an evil act. It means, rather, that the evil act no longer remains as a barrier to the relationship. Forgiveness is a catalyst creating the atmosphere necessary for a fresh start and a new beginning. It is the lifting of a burden or the canceling of a debt. The words ‘I will forgive you, but I’ll never forget what you’ve done’ never explain the real nature of forgiveness. Certainly one can never forget, if that means erasing it totally from his mind. But when we forgive, we forget in the sense that the evil deed is no longer a mental block impeding a new relationship. Likewise, we can never say, ‘I will forgive you, but I won’t have anything further to do with you.’ Forgiveness means reconciliation, a coming together again.”

—Martin Luther King Jr., attributed to a sermon delivered at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Alabama

“Agape is not a weak, passive love. It is love in action. Agape is love seeking to preserve and create community. It is insistence on community even when one seeks to break it. Agape is a willingness to go to any length to restore community. It doesn’t stop at the first mile, but it goes the second mile to restore community. It is a willingness to forgive, not seven times, but seventy times seven to restore community. The cross is the eternal expression of the length to which God will go in order to restore broken community. The resurrection is a symbol of God’s triumph over all the forces that seek to block community. The Holy Spirit is the continuing community creating reality that moves through history. He who works against community is working against the whole of creation. Therefore, if I respond to hate with a reciprocal hate I do nothing but intensify the cleavage in broken community. I can only close the gap in broken community by meeting hate with love.”

“Hate begets hate; violence begets violence; toughness begets a greater toughness. We must meet the forces of hate with the power of love; we must meet physical force with soul force. Our aim must never be to defeat or humiliate the white man, but to win his friendship and understanding.”

—Martin Luther King Jr. and James M. Washington, “An Experiment in Love,” from *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches*

“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?’

Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’

—Matthew 18:21-22 (NIV)

“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

—Colossians 3:12-14 (NIV)

As students arrive, give each of them a copy of the readings. Choose some students to read the passages aloud. Then discuss in this way:



MEETING GOD FACE-TO-FACE

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What do you think about Martin Luther King’s words? Are his thoughts on forgiveness in line with the Bible? Explain your answer.

What do you think about this statement: “He who works against community is working against the whole of creation.” What does that mean to you?

Have you ever been in a situation in which you had to forgive someone over and over again? What did that feel like? How did you handle it?

Martin Luther King Jr. certainly had many things done to him for which he and his family had to face the question of whether to forgive or not. Imagine you were innocent, and yet were insulted and threatened by hundreds of people—how would you react? In today’s lesson we are going to examine what Jesus taught about forgiveness.