

Semicontinuous
Exod. 12:1–14
Ps. 149

Complementary
Ezek. 33:7–11
Ps. 119:33–40
Rom. 13:8–14
Matt. 18:15–20

We Are Connected

Goal for the Session *Tweens will study Jesus' teaching about reconciliation and plan ways to live in harmony.*

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Matthew 18:15–20

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by Mitchell G. Reddish

Matthew 18:15–20 has parallels with 16:13–20. Both passages use the word “church” (*ekklēsia*)—the only two places the term appears in the Gospels—and both passages speak of binding and loosing. Even though this passage is primarily concerned with matters of church discipline, its focus is on reconciliation, not punishment. The ultimate goal is to “regain the brother” (v. 15). Familial language is used. The final saying in verse 20 is a reminder to the community that the risen Christ is present in and with the church, even when the church must deal with disciplinary issues. This reminder serves as a word of assurance and as a precaution.

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Charles Hambrick-Stowe

Jesus speaks here not of honest differences of opinion but of a fellow Christian who “sins against you.” Such sin would include the offenses summarized in the Ten Commandments, but one might extrapolate it to mean any self-serving behavior that breaks the unity of fellowship in Christ. When church members injure one another, it is not merely an individual personal offense: it is a theological matter, harming the body of Christ. Each step outlined by Jesus is to be undertaken in the hope of healing and restoration. Jesus could mean this: if we in the church do not forgive and heal, who on earth is going to do it?

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Jin S. Kim

The ministry of reconciliation must be at the heart of any Christian community's mission. The church has not been given the power to “bind” and to “loose” (v. 18) because it is always right, but because its primary language is one of confession, restoration, and reconciliation when offenses and divisions occur. This requires leadership that confesses in real time before the community, seeking collective accountability and correction as it returns the favor to the church body. There will be conflict, but it is precisely through conflict that we model for the world how to bind and loose one another appropriately.

NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by Dale P. Andrews

Care and responsibility to forgive, to seek out reconciliation with the offender, are sustained in the authority given to the church. Power to bind and loose belongs not simply to the church leader or to the universal church (as demonstrated through Peter in Matt. 16:13–20), but also to the local church (18:18–20). This discipline teaches a theology of care by illumining the manner of care. The authority to interpret how to apply the rules of care, even the law, is given to the church. We seek to care for one another even when injured or offended, which requires discipline in binding and loosing ourselves to repent and to forgive, all sustained in Christ.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Matthew 18:15–20

Focus on Your Teaching

Tweens typically are drawn to the idea of living and working together as one big family of faith. As they become more engaged with church activities, they experience fun and rewarding times; unfortunately, they also experience hurt feelings and broken relationships. A too-quick word, a thoughtless critique, or an unintended hurt bring dissonance into the harmony of church life. As you prepare to teach, be mindful of hurts that may exist in your class or your church and consider how Jesus' words speak to these situations.

Bringer of peace and love, show me the importance of living in peace with others and strengthen me to heal broken relationships. Help me to create harmonious relationships with the children in my class. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- green cloth
- candle, matches or battery-powered candle
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 on card stock
- scissors
- markers
- pencils
- masking tape, tacky wall adhesive, or push pins
- Singing the Feast, 2020–2021*; CD player
- Color Pack 1, 2
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 2

For Responding

- option 1: paper or plastic cups, Bibles
- option 2: ball of yarn, 5 balloons

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, arrange a green cloth in the center of your meeting space and place the candle on it. If you are using option 2 in Responding, inflate and tie five balloons. (Be mindful of any latex allergies.)

Welcome learners as they arrive. Ask two volunteers to play Charlie and Kyle in the skit on Resource Sheet 2 (Scripture Skit) and give them copies of the resource sheet so they can prepare. Set out copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Figures), scissors, and markers. Ask each learner to cut out the figures on one sheet, write his or her name on one figure, decorate one figure to look like a friend, and leave one figure blank (to use in Closing). Be sure to do this yourself. Work together to create a circle of the named and decorated figures on a wall or bulletin board. (The unnamed figures represent people who may visit or join the group in upcoming weeks.) As you work, ask tweens what they'd like to do as a Sunday school class this year.

Gather the group around the candle. Tell learners the church is in the season of Ordinary Time (season after Pentecost)—a time to learn and grow as Jesus' followers. Green is this season's color. Ask a volunteer to light the candle as a reminder of Christ's presence in your midst. Invite learners to tap a beat on the table with a pencil as they sing or listen to "The Whole World Is in God's Hands" (track 19 on *Singing the Feast, 2020–2021*).

Pray aloud:

Dear God, thank you for creating us to live and work together. Help us learn more about being your people. Amen.

Extinguish the candle, if necessary.



FEASTING on the WORD

CURRICULUM

We Are Connected

The Whole World Is in God's Hands

*The whole world is in God's hands,
The whole wide world is in God's hands,
The whole world is in God's hands,
The world is in God's hands.*

The wind and the wave are in God's hands . . .

The fish and the bird are in God's hands . . .

All of the animals are in God's hands . . .

All the world's people are in God's hands . . .

You and me are in God's hands . . .

It may be helpful to review how to locate a Bible passage: Turn the table of contents in the front of the Bible and locate the name of the book. Turn to it and use the chapter numbers at the top (or bottom) of the page to locate the chapter. Refer to the small numbers within the chapter to locate the verses.

During this session, some tweens may tell about their own arguments and broken relationships. Be loving and supportive. If a situation described seems intense, speak privately to the young person after class and suggest talking with his or her parents or the pastor.

Display Color Pack 1. Tell tweens this photo tells the middle of a story. Invite them to imagine what happened at the beginning of the story and what might happen next. Encourage a broad range of ideas by asking "What else?" several times. Discuss:

- ✧ What feelings do you have when you and a friend or family member have an argument?

Say that the Bible reading today is about relationships.

EXPLORING

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Scripture Skit). Ask for volunteers to be the Narrator, Jessie, and Jamie, and have them join the volunteers portraying Kyle and Charlie in performing the skit.

After the skit, distribute Bibles and ask learners to turn to Matthew 18:15–20. Form two groups and read aloud the passage, alternating verses between groups. Discuss:

- ✧ Who is saying these words? (Jesus; see Matthew 18:1)
- ✧ What are the steps Jesus gives for working out problems with other church members? (vv. 15–17)
- ✧ How many members of the church might end up being involved in restoring harmony?
- ✧ Why do you think Jesus says to give people so many chances to reconcile?
- ✧ How did Jesus treat tax collectors and Gentiles (people who aren't Jewish)? (For examples, see Matthew 9:9–13; Mark 7:24–30; Luke 19:1–10.)
- ✧ Thinking back to the skit, what might have happened if Kyle never talked to Charlie again?
- ✧ What would happen to our church if people stopped talking to each other when they had a disagreement?
- ✧ Why do you think Jesus places a high priority on members of the church living in harmony?

Show Color Pack 1 again. Ask:

- ✧ How could Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18:15–20 help these two mend their relationship?
- ✧ How can Jesus' teaching help you to live in harmony with others?

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

1. **Community Pyramid** As learners build a pyramid, they will consider how reconciliation helps to make a community harmonious. Form groups of three or four and give each group ten paper or plastic cups. Have each group build a pyramid with its cups, with four cups on the bottom row. After each group has a pyramid, ask: Which cup(s) can you remove without making your pyramid shorter or less stable? Have groups experiment with their cups to answer this. After a few moments, invite each group to tell what it discovered. Wonder together how the church is like the cups in the pyramid. What happens when there is disharmony—when some feel they aren't part of the group

anymore? Invite learners to use the cups as props and talk through the process of reconciliation described in Matthew 18:15–20.

- 2. Community Web** Creating a yarn web will help learners imagine how a strong community promotes living in harmony. Stand with learners in a tight circle. Pull several feet of yarn from the ball of yarn. Holding on to the end of the length of yarn, say one thing you can do to live in harmony with others and toss the ball to someone across the circle. Repeat this process until everyone is holding part of the web. As time allows, go around a second time to strengthen the web. Observe that you have created a strong and caring community. Place the inflated balloons—representing people in the community—on the yarn web. Experiment with what happens when part of the web is raised or when a few people let go. Invite observations about how the action of each member affects the community.
- 3. Standing Together** Help learners experience what happens when relationships are not harmonious. Ask two pairs to stand back to back, close together with shoulders touching, to form a square. Have them interlock their arms and then sit down at the same time. (It may take a few tries.) Once they are successful, pull one learner away from the square without changing the position of the other three. Ask the remaining three to sit down at the same time. Ponder together about what happens when one person is separated from the community. What can group members do to keep the group living and working together in harmony?

**EASY
PREP**

CLOSING

Show Color Pack 2. Ask:

- ✿ What are some things these young people might do to stay connected—to help them live in harmony with one another?
- ✿ What can they do when problems and disagreements pop up?

Invite tweens to suggest attitudes and actions that will help your class be a strong community of Jesus' followers. (For example: being forgiving, being patient, speaking kindly, being a good listener.) Have each tween write one of these attitudes or actions on a blank figure from Resource Sheet 1 (Figures) and add it to the display created in Gathering.

Pray aloud:

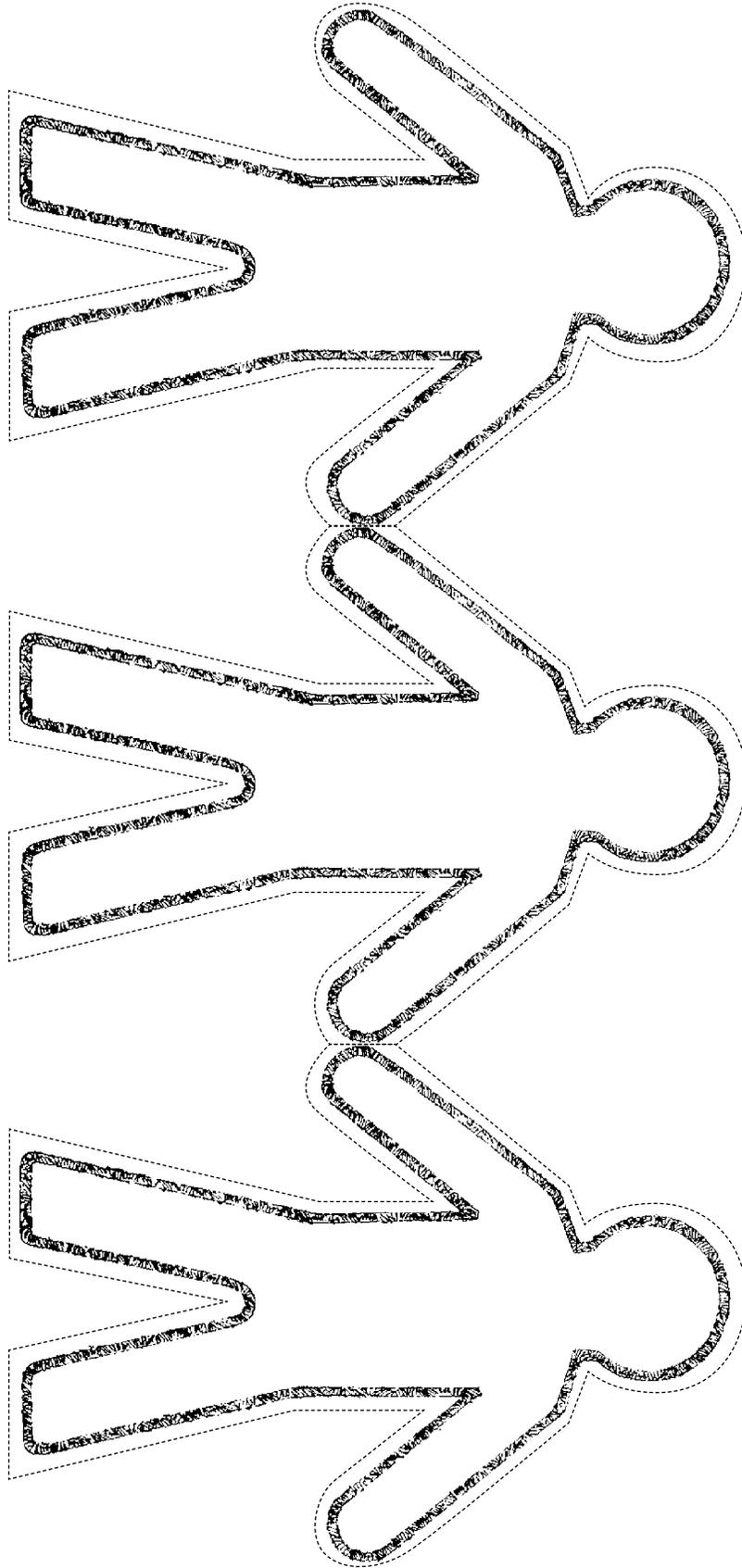
Patient and loving God, thank you for our friends and for this class. Help us to live as a community of your people and help us to heal any hurts in our relationships here, at home, and at school. Thank you for loving us. Amen.

Invite learners to exchange “high fives” as they bless one another by saying: “You matter to God and you matter to me.”

September 6, 2020
We Are Connected

Tweens
Resource Sheet 1

Figures



Scripture Skit

Cast: Narrator
Charlie
Kyle
Jessie
Jamie

Prop: marker

Scene 1

Narrator: If your brother or sister sins against you, go and correct them when you are alone together. If they listen to you, then you've won over your brother or sister. (Matthew 18:15, CEB)

- Action:**
1. Charlie takes a marker from Kyle and won't give it back.
 2. They argue and Kyle walks away.
 3. Kyle returns and talks to Charlie.
 4. Charlie returns the marker and the two shake hands.

Scene 2

Narrator: But if they won't listen, take with you one or two others so that *every word may be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses.* (Matthew 18:16, CEB)

- Action:**
1. Charlie takes a marker from Kyle and won't give it back.
 2. They argue, and Kyle walks away.
 3. Kyle returns and talks to Charlie, but Charlie won't return the marker.
 4. Kyle walks away and returns with Jessie and Jamie.
 5. The four friends talk together and Charlie returns the marker.
 6. The four friends exchange high fives.

Scene 3

Narrator: But if they still won't pay attention, report it to the church. (Matthew 18:17, CEB)

- Action:**
1. Charlie takes a marker from Kyle and won't give it back.
 2. They argue, and Kyle walks away.
 3. Kyle returns and talks to Charlie, but Charlie won't return the marker.
 4. Kyle walks away and returns with Jessie and Jamie.
 5. The four friends talk about the situation, but Charlie won't return the marker.
 6. Kyle, Jessie, and Jamie leave and return with the church (the entire class).
 7. These people talk with Charlie, and he returns the marker to Kyle.
 8. The group exchanges fist bumps.

Scene 4

Narrator: If they won't pay attention even to the church, treat them as you would a Gentile and tax collector. (Matthew 18:17, CEB)

- Action:**
1. Charlie takes a marker from friend Kyle and won't give it back.
 2. They argue and Kyle walks away.
 3. Kyle returns and talks to Charlie, but Charlie won't return the marker.
 4. Kyle walks away and returns with Jessie and Jamie.
 5. The four friends talk about the situation, but Charlie won't return the marker.
 6. Kyle, Jessie, and Jamie leave and return with the church (the entire class).
 7. All these people talk with Charlie, but Charlie takes the marker and leaves.
 8. The others pray for Charlie and then call out to invite him to come back.

