

Semicontinuous  
**Exod. 12:1–14**  
**Ps. 149**  
Complementary  
**Ezek. 33:7–11**  
**Ps. 119:33–40**  
**Rom. 13:8–14**  
**Matt. 18:15–20**

# Keeping Peace

**Goal for the Session** *Children will hear Jesus' teachings about handling conflict and plan ways to make peace with others.*

## ■ 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” (*ekklesia*)—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

As children play or work together, it is natural for them to disagree. Their squabbles and fights provide opportunities for them to learn how to resolve conflict. If they always give in to the other person, they never learn how to negotiate a solution that benefits both parties. If they always have their way, they may not develop empathy for the other's point of view. Rather than tell them to stop bickering, help children work out their differences. Jesus' words in Matthew 18:15–20 provide a basis for children to sort out their disagreements.

*Loving God, stand with me as I use Jesus' words to sort out my disagreements and help me be a model for the children in my group. Amen.*

### YOU WILL NEED

- green cloth
- votive candle and matches or battery-operated candle
- Bible
- offering basket
- name tags (optional)
- poster board
- newsprint
- markers
- Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player
- copies of Resource Sheet 2
- crayons
- Resource Sheet 1
- Color Pack 1, 2
- pastel construction paper

### For Responding

- option 1: Resource Sheet 3, newsprint or poster board, marker
- option 2: Bible
- option 3: craft foam, fine-tipped permanent markers, embroidery thread, scissors
- option 4: *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player; Color Pack 2

## LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

*Before the session*, print the opening lines from Gathering on poster board, and save to use in future weeks. Print response for Closing on newsprint. If you and the children do not know each other, provide name tags. For option 3 in Responding, cut 1" x 3" strips of craft foam and punch a hole at each end.

As the children arrive, play "The Whole World Is in God's Hands" (track 19 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021). Invite them to help set up the worship table with the green cloth, candle, Bible, and offering basket. When everyone is present, explain that the green cloth indicates that the church is in Common Time or Ordinary Time. In this case, it is the weeks after Pentecost until Advent.

Light the candle, and lead the following:

**Leader:** *During these weeks, we gather to praise God and study God's Word.*

**Children:** *We want to be faithful followers of God's Word and of Jesus.*

**Everyone:** *Loving God, thank you for our group and our church. May your Spirit show us the way. Amen.*

Receive the offering. Extinguish the candle.

To introduce the theme, ask:

✿ What happens when you and a friend get into an argument?

After the children have offered some thoughts, explain that Jesus knew arguments happened and taught his followers how to handle them.

If you don't know the children or there are new children, include a get-acquainted game, such as having each person say her or his first name and something she or he likes that begins with the initial ("My name is Michelle and I like mangos").

## EXPLORING

To introduce an important word in the Bible story, give each child a copy of Resource Sheet 2 (Hidden Word Puzzle). Provide the colors of crayons in the key for every two or three children. When they have completed the page, read the word that was revealed. Ask:

✪ What does *reconcile* mean?

After some children have answered, ask a child to retrieve the Bible from the worship table and open it to the Gospel of Matthew. (If helpful, place a marker at Matthew 1.) Explain that most of the Bible stories during these weeks of Common Time will come from Matthew. Ask:

✪ Who will be in the stories from Matthew?

After the children have named Jesus and other disciples, ask:

✪ What other books of the Bible tell stories about Jesus?

Recall that the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) are the source of what we know about Jesus. Ask the child to turn to Matthew, chapter 18, and hold the Bible open while you tell the story on Resource Sheet 1 (Steps for Keeping Peace). Ask another child to hold Color Pack 1. Explain that in today's Bible story, Jesus is talking to his disciples. Recall the word found on Resource Sheet 2 (Hidden Word Puzzle) and suggest that they listen for it in the Bible story. After the story, ask:

✪ Based on Jesus' words, what do you think *reconcile* means?

Begin a class dictionary. Print *reconcile* on a sheet of pastel construction paper. Around the word, print the definition developed by the group and any synonyms they named. Display it where it will be seen in future sessions. Ask:

✪ What did Jesus say that would help people reconcile?

## RESPONDING

If possible, offer at least two options so the children have a choice. One might be more challenging to interest children who can work on their own.

**1. Group Agreement** The beginning of a church school year and Matthew 18:15–20 are a good combination for the children to think about how they will work and learn together. Introduce this option by explaining that Jesus' words in Matthew 18:15–20 remind us that there are good and not so good ways to work and learn together. Follow the steps on Resource Sheet 3 (Group Agreement) to lead the group in this process. If you are unable to leave the agreement posted in the learning space, save it to display each week.

**2. Contemporary Skit** Placing the steps to reconciliation presented by Jesus in a contemporary context will help the children understand how to use them.

✪ Read Matthew 18:15. Set forth this situation: Charlie has a marker and Camille takes it.

✪ Read Matthew 18:16. Camille would not listen to Charlie. Now what is Charlie to do? Talk together about who the people might be. Invite three or four children to act out what Jesus says to do.

EASY  
PREP

Be clear with the children that they may seek help and advice from a trusted adult when the situation is more than they can handle.

### 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 . . .*

- ✿ Read Matthew 18:17. Camille pays no attention to the friends Charlie brought with him. Now what is Charlie to do? Invite all to act out what Charlie should do now.
- ✿ Read Matthew 18:17. Camille still won't cooperate. Now what is Charlie and the church to do?

Talk with the group about times when they find themselves in similar situations.

3. **Bracelet** To help children remember Jesus' words about reconciliation, they will make bracelets they can wear or carry with them. Give each child a strip of foam craft and a permanent fine-tipped marker. Have them print *reconcile* on the strip. Help them thread several strands of embroidery thread through the holes and tie it to their wrists. When all are ready, talk about when they might need to remember to find ways to reconcile with someone.
4. **Song** When children feel unsure that they can handle a difficult situation, "The Whole World Is in God's Hands" (track 19 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021) can be a reminder that God is in charge. Invite the group to listen to the song. Ask:
  - ✿ What is the good news in this song?

Show Color Pack 2. Ask:

- ✿ How does this picture remind you of this song?
- ✿ What does it mean to be "in God's hands"?

Sing the song together, feeding the group the new line for each stanza. Explain that this song will begin each session during weeks during Common Time and can be a reminder for them that God loves them and cares for them.

### CLOSING

Play "Let Us Love One Another" (track 16 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021) as the children gather at the worship table. Light the candle.

Read the response for the litany from the newsprint together (*God, help us reconcile*). Lead the children in the litany, cueing them for the response:

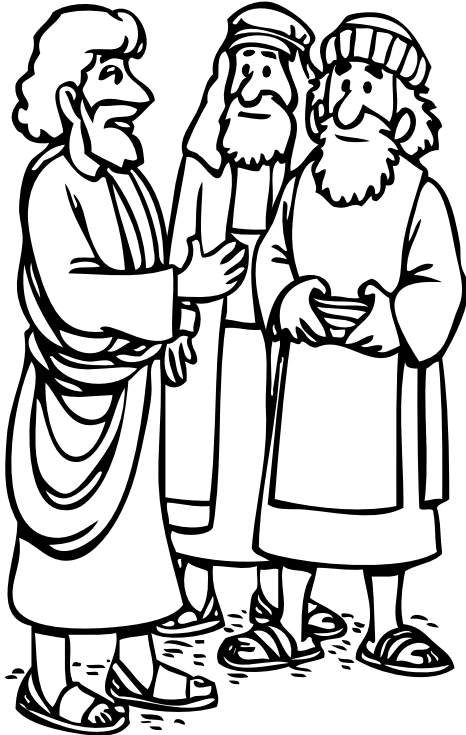
*When we hurt a friend,* Response  
*When we are angry with a brother or sister or friend,* Response  
*When we don't like someone because of what she or he said or did,* Response  
*When we are upset with a parent or teacher,* Response  
*Amen.*

As the children leave, say to each one: "(Name), God loves you. Show God's love to others this week."

## Steps for Keeping Peace based on Matthew 18:15-20

Jesus often taught large crowds of people, but sometimes he taught only the disciples when they were alone. Many of those teachings are collected in the Gospel of Matthew. Perhaps he taught his closest friends as they walked along the countryside. Or maybe he told them these things when they rested under a tree.

On this day, Jesus talked with the disciples about what to do when someone treats you badly or unfairly, how to be reconciled. Jesus said to them:



*If your friend hurts you in some way like saying mean things about you, go to this person when you are alone, just the two of you. Explain that what the person said or did was wrong and hurt you.*

*But if the person won't listen to you, leave. Ask one or two friends to go with you to talk to the person who treated you unfairly. Then you have people who can tell others what you said and did.*

*If the person who treated you unfairly still pays no attention to you, report what is going on to the church. If the person who treated you badly won't even pay attention to the church, have nothing to do with this person because this one is no friend to you.*

*Remember that when two or three of my friends are together, I am there with them.*

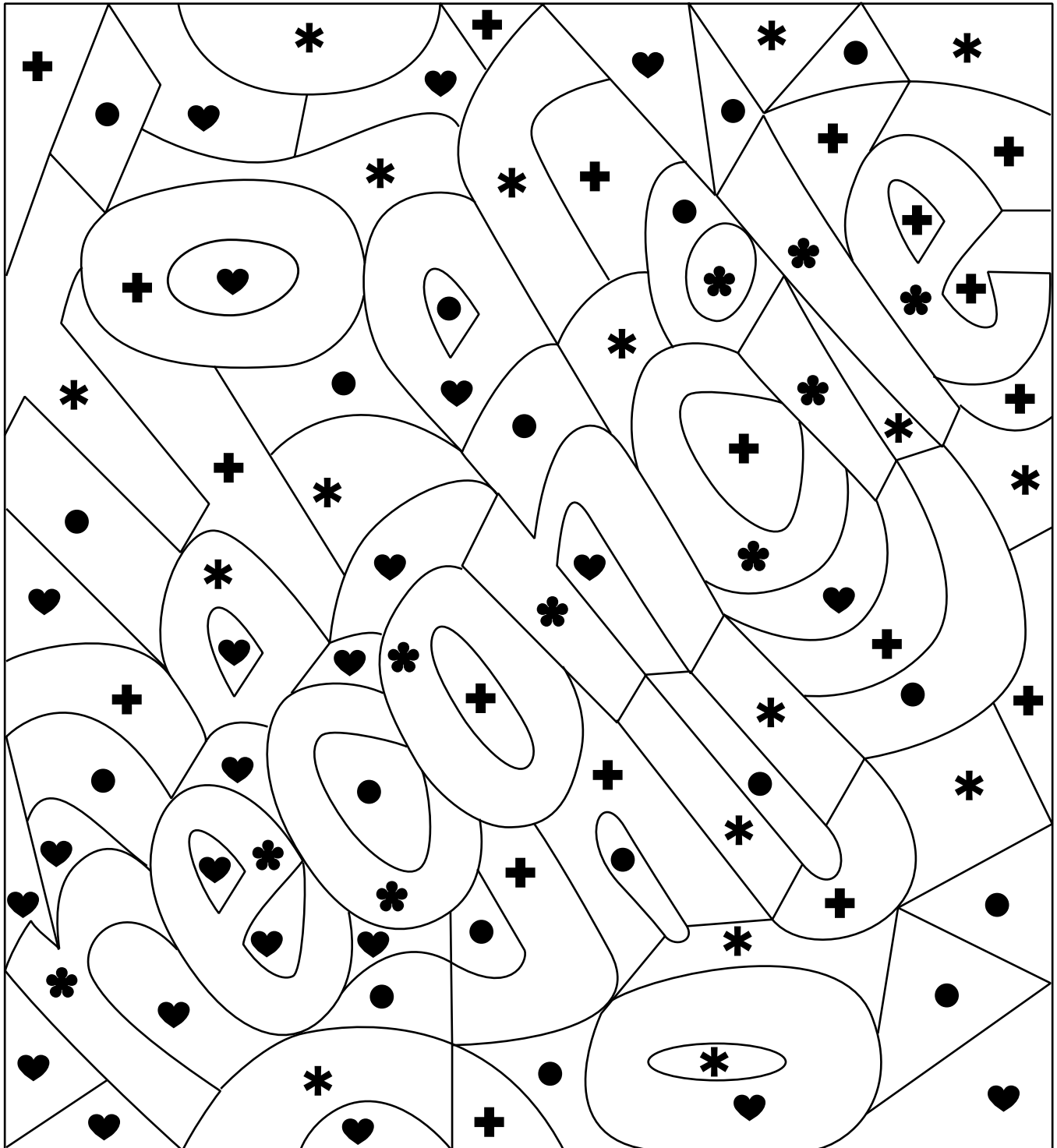
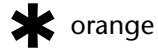
Surely the disciples thought about Jesus' words as they walked from town to town.

September 6, 2020  
Keeping Peace

Multi-Age  
Resource Sheet 2

## Hidden Word Puzzle

**Color Key:**



## Group Agreement

Creating an agreement will benefit your group in two ways. It will: 1) provide an opportunity to talk about how their Sunday school class will act as a community of Jesus' followers; 2) give ownership of the group to the children—when learners help to create the guidelines for the group's behavior, they are more likely to follow them.

To create a group agreement with learners:

1. Begin by asking the children to tell about some of the rules they have at school or at home. Ask: Which of those rules might be helpful for our Sunday school class? What other rules or guidelines might help our group work well together?
2. Ask the children to name the kinds of positive behavior they think are important for your group. You may want to start with an opening phrase such as: "As Jesus' followers we will work together to . . ."
3. Accept all suggestions respectfully and write them on newsprint or markerboard. After all the ideas are recorded, comment that you want to keep your class agreement short. Work together to combine similar suggestions. Keep the language very simple.
4. Highlight positive behavior by rephrasing any suggestions that begin with "do not." For example, "Speak kindly to one another" instead of "Do not say mean things."
5. Limit the list to four or five rules. When everyone is satisfied with the list, copy it onto a clean sheet of newsprint or poster board. Have each learner and teacher sign it.
6. Display this list in a prominent place and encourage newcomers to add their signatures.

