

Lesson 10: Reacting to persecution

Aims for each learner:

- Truly believe that forgiveness is better than revenge.
- Take steps to forgive a person who hurt him/her.
- Memorize Matthew 5:44.

Cultural clues:

- Revenge and forgiveness

Prepare: For q. 4, write out & cut up copies of Matthew 5:44.

Opening

Last week's practical task: Did you manage to reflect on the suggested Bible verses each day? How was this for you? Which verse struck you the most?

Lesson 10 home study review:

Question 1: forgiveness

Question 2: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Introduce today's topic: Look at the introduction, two people should read the two men's words: Have you ever felt like either of these men? *Allow learners to share how they have felt without challenging their views at this point.* Today we learn about how God wants us to react to persecution, and especially how we can forgive our enemies.



Discussion

The cycle of revenge (Questions 1-3)

Question 2: Look at the picture together.

- What example did you note where you have seen this cycle of revenge happening?
- Forgiveness is hard and revenge is easy. But which of them makes the damage worse?

Forgiveness instead of revenge (Questions 4-16)

Question 4:

- How did Jesus teach us to break free from the cycle of revenge? *He taught us to love and forgive our enemies.*



Write out and cut up copies of the memory verse, Matt 5:44. Ask each learner to put the words in correct order.

Question 5: Read the entire question.

- What did Jesus pray as spikes were hammered into his hands? *'Father forgive them'.*
- Was Jesus Christ a weak leader or strong? What did his strength enable him to do? *forgive*
- What can we learn from his example? *To forgive is not a sign of weakness, but of strength/courage.*
- Who will give us the strength to forgive our enemies? *Jesus, by the power of his Spirit living in us.*

Read 1 Peter 2:21-25:



- According to verse 22, did Jesus deserve to suffer? *No, 'he committed no sin'.*
- Look at verse 23. Instead of seeking revenge or cursing his persecutors, what did Jesus do? *He did not retaliate; made no threats. Instead, 'he entrusted himself to him who judges justly'.*
- Look at verse 24-25. What has Jesus Christ done for us? *He carried our sins on the cross, healed us with his wounds, brought us scattered sheep back to the Shepherd.*
- How do you feel, remembering that Jesus Christ did all this for you?
- It is very hard to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. So why should we try to do it? *Christ forgave us first and set us free. He himself gives an example for forgiving our enemies. He commands us to do it. Forgiving breaks the cycle of revenge, and releases us from bitterness.*

Why forgive? *To go deeper on this topic if time allows.*



In pairs, learners should read **Matthew 18:21-35**, discuss for a few minutes and then feedback what they learned to the group. If appropriate, they could retell or act out the story.

Question 9: Read the first part of Farid's story.

- If Farid had carried out his plan of revenge, what would have been the results?

He would have given in to Satan. His workmates might have retaliated, adding to the 'cycle of revenge'.

Question 10: Read the second part of Farid's story.

- What good result came about because Farid forgave instead of taking revenge?

His workmate was deeply touched, and later became Jesus' follower.

Read out what also happened: After writing the forgiving letter, Farid went home. But he was still very worried about losing a whole month's wages. He said, "I couldn't sleep that night, tossing and turning until I finally got up to pray on the balcony. Just as I was about to go back indoors, someone threw a stone onto the balcony. Attached to the stone was a letter from another Christian whom I had not met for months for security reasons. The letter contained the same amount of money as my wages. I was amazed: how faithfully the Lord cares for me!" (www.pneumafoundation.org/pi_7_2003.jsp)

- If you were Farid receiving this letter, how would you feel? *Discuss the likely emotions.*

Question 12: Read Miriam's story & the question.

- Why do you think God met Farid's financial loss in a marvellous way, but not Miriam's?
- What set Miriam free from hating her relative?
She chose to forgive. Then joy filled her heart!

We don't know. God knows what is best for each of us and works for good in our lives. Sometimes he shows us a miracle to strengthen our faith, as with Farid. Sometimes he makes us go the hard way to strengthen our endurance, as with Miriam.

Question 13: Read the question. What did you write here?

Sometimes it is right to protest, especially on behalf of other Christians. Sometimes the apostle Paul protested when he was unjustly treated (e.g. Acts 16:35-37). But it should always be lawful protest, not revenge.

Question 15: Read the story. Did this believer find it easy to forgive those who beat him? *No.*

- He said he suffered through not forgiving his persecutors. What do you think he meant by this? *Probably that he suffered a lot from the bitterness inside him.*
- When have you held on to resentment and refused to forgive? What was the result for you?
- If you then forgave that person and let go of resentment, what difference did this make?

Now read the sentence after the box and the speech bubble.

- Can you think of someone who has hurt you? Think of that person's name in the blank spaces, and say it quietly under our breath. *Give time for people to do this quietly. Learners are not asked to speak the name aloud or write it down, to avoid disclosing confidences.*
- Were you able to do that? How did it feel to say those words?

Joy in our sufferings (Questions 17-19)

Read 1 Peter 4:12-16. *Everyone should open the passage in their Bibles.*



- What was your favourite verse in this passage, and why?
- Describe an occasion when God gave you joy in the midst of suffering.

Conclusion

Obeying today's teaching:

This week take time to ask God if there are others you need to forgive. It is hard and you cannot do it in your own strength. No one can force you to forgive, but if you choose to forgive, God will give you the strength to carry it out. Then it will release great joy in your life!

Who could you tell about today's topic?

You could share with that person the story of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:23-35).

Pray together using the practical task:

Lead learners through these steps in prayer:
First ask God to show us one person we need to forgive.

Then read steps 1 & 2 slowly.

Pray the prayer in step 3 together, each person quietly saying the name of the person they want to forgive.

Read out the last step. Pray for each of us to receive strength to keep forgiving in this way.