

MARK OF A DISCIPLE

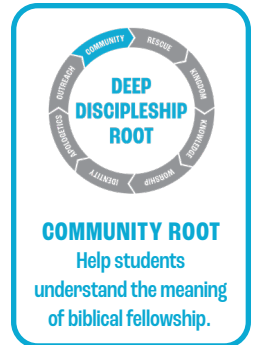
Disciples of Christ seek God and his perspective (Matt. 6:33).

MAIN PASSAGES

LUKE 23:32–38

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF PASSAGE

The other Gospel writers point out that Jesus was crucified with two others. Isaiah prophesied the two would be “transgressors” (Isa. 53:12). Mark and Matthew reveal the two criminals as “robbers” and that Jesus was crucified between them (Matt. 27:38; Mark 15:27). But only Luke included the conversation between Jesus and the two thieves that surrounded him. Maybe Luke’s medical background led him to dig into the details more. As Jesus was being executed as a sinless substitute for humanity, he asked his Father to forgive the very people executing him and even those hanging next to him. One of the thieves chose to mock Jesus. The other chose to believe, and it made an eternal difference.



OPENING OPTIONS

10–15 minutes

Choose from the following options to give students opportunities to connect and have structured and unstructured fun.

I. SEMI-UNSTRUCTURED HANGOUT TIME

Based on your group’s size, allow for unstructured hangout or play a game from **Deep Discipleship Games**—we recommend **Nail it or Fail it**. NOTE: Free Deep Discipleship Games are already included with your Deep Discipleship Account. View the game in advance in case you need supplies or slides.

II. ARRIVAL ACTIVITY

Forgiveness Freeze Tag

Choose two students from your group: one “Tagger” and one “Forgiver”. The Tagger tries to tag as many students as possible (if your space is too small to run in, set a rule that students must walk). When tagged, the student must freeze.

The only way to become unfrozen is for the Forgive to tag the frozen student and say, “You’re forgiven.” Play one-minute rounds and switch Taggers and Forgivers every round.

Connection to Lesson

Forgiveness has a wonderful way of setting us free or “unfreezing” us. In today’s lesson, we’ll see Jesus set an incredible example of forgiving others before they even ask for it.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

- Open space to move

III. ICEBREAKER

You can use this icebreaker question to transition students from activity to teaching time.

Share about a time you were surprised someone forgave you.



LARGE GROUP MESSAGE

15–20 minutes

Use the following teaching points and suggested illustrations as a starting point to build your message. Incorporate the suggested discussion questions to keep students engaged with the message.

POINT #1: Jesus shows us how to love our enemies

(Luke 23:32–38)

Jesus was innocent. He never sinned, not even once. Despite this truth, Jesus was arrested, given an unfair trial, and sentenced to death on the cross. The people who called for Jesus to die didn't like him. They treated Jesus terribly and nailed him to a cross between two other men who were actual criminals. During this horrible execution, Jesus said these words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (v. 34). What? Jesus asked God to forgive the people who were taking his life as they were doing it! When Jesus said to love your enemies, he meant it (Matt. 5:44).

ILLUSTRATION

Imagine that you are playing dodgeball at school. Someone who doesn't like you throws the ball really hard, and it smacks you right in the face. Ouch! One reaction would be to grab a ball and throw it as hard as you could back at that person. But what if you picked up a ball, gently tossed it back, and said, "That hurt, but you're really good at this game."

Even when others hurt us, we don't have to retaliate. All believers have the Holy Spirit's power in us. Therefore, we have a choice to love instead of to hate.

- **Ask:** How do you typically respond when others hurt you?
- **Ask:** How does Jesus' example of praying for his enemies inspire you to do the same?

POINT #2: Jesus is willing to forgive everyone

(Luke 23:35–38)

As this scene plays out, we see the people continuing to mock Jesus. Mocking someone is making fun of them. They called Jesus the Messiah and the Chosen One as a joke. They also put a sign above Jesus that said, "This is the king of the Jews." This was all after they physically hurt him over and over. The religious leaders and the soldiers all joined in mocking Jesus. They had no idea that Jesus actually is those things.

ILLUSTRATION

Let's say you're a great player on a soccer team. You are playing soccer at school, and some kids start mocking you, saying things like, "Oh, look, it's Mr. Soccer Star." Or, "Don't pass to her, she thinks she's the captain of everything." The funny thing is, those things are actually true. You are the captain, and you are great at soccer. You could get defensive or be mean back. Instead, you remain calm and still invite them to play on your team.

Jesus is the Messiah, the Chosen One and the King, not just of the Jews but of everyone! He died for his followers as well as for those against him. In all the mocking and meanness, Jesus knew that the only way for the sins they were committing to be forgiven was for him to die. And he did so willingly. Jesus loves us that much, and as Christ-followers, we are asked to follow his example of love and forgiveness.

- **Ask:** Why do you think Jesus didn't fight back or try to prove he really was King?
- **Ask:** If you were made fun of for something true, how could you respond in a loving way?



REFLECTION

5 minutes

Give students a chance to creatively process what they've just learned and to prepare for small group discussion.

Ask students to memorize Luke 23:34a (And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.") by creating a rhythm, clapping it out, or making up a little tune.

SMALL GROUPS

10-15 minutes

Divide into small groups. Small Group Leaders can guide students through the following discussion questions.

What does the Word say?

- What did Jesus say in verse 34 while he was on the cross?
Jesus asked God to forgive the very people who were mocking him and crucifying him.
- Why were the soldiers and the one thief mocking Jesus?
They made fun of him because in their minds, Jesus wasn't actually the Son of God, like he claimed he was. They figured if he really was the Messiah, he'd have the power to save himself (which he did, but he chose to stay on the cross so that all who believe could be saved!).

What does the Word mean?

- Why was the sign posted above Jesus so strange?
Because everything written on that sign was true. Jesus is the King.
- Why do you think Jesus forgave people while they were hurting him instead of waiting until later?
Answers will vary, but remind students that Jesus sets a high bar for us with this powerful example of forgiveness and love!

What should I do now?

- Imagine someone says something mean about you or hurts you on purpose. How can you respond in a way that shows forgiveness?
Answers will vary, but could include staying calm, not "getting even" or taking revenge, responding kindly, praying for that person, etc.
- How does knowing Jesus died to forgive your sins help you forgive others who hurt you?
Answers will vary. It reminds us we were forgiven by God when we didn't deserve it, so we should forgive others when they don't deserve it.



APPLICATION

5 minutes

Reinforce the lesson and challenge students to apply it to their lives.

Have students write the initials of someone they need to forgive on a heart-shaped sticky note. Then, have them think of a way they could show forgiveness or love to that person and add that to the sticky note. Have them come one at a time and place the heart on a poster board. If you'd rather not do it publicly, you could simply have students write all of this on page 4 of their Student Guide.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

- Heart-shaped sticky notes OR page 4 of Student Guide
- Writing utensils
- Poster board

Application Question

How will you show that person that you've forgiven them this week?

PRAY

Pray that your students will be able to recognize when they need to offer forgiveness. Ask God to give them hearts that love others well and forgive easily. Thank Jesus for dying so we could be forgiven.

NOTES

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