

Semicontinuous
Exod. 12:1–14
Ps. 149

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

Caring Community

Goal for the Session

Third- and fourth-graders will listen to Jesus' teaching about handling conflict and decide how to draw together as a community.

■ 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

By third grade, most children are beginning to value social interaction with peers and to enjoy being a part of a club, team, or other group. They are still developing social skills and tend to have very little discretion, so conflicts may arise quickly. Such squabbles are an inevitable part of childhood. This is the beginning of the Sunday school year for many, so it is a good time for learners to discuss strategies that will help them draw together as a group. Encourage them to practice positive conflict resolution skills.

Loving God, give me wisdom to discern where I might put Jesus' teachings into practice in my daily living. Help me to create a loving community with the children. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- green cloth
- candle, matches or battery-operated candle
- Color Pack 1, 2, 3, 4
- colored copier paper
- scissors
- stapler
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- Bible
- colored pencils
- newsprint or markerboard, markers
- fine-tipped permanent marker
- Singing the Feast, 2020–2021*; CD player

For Responding

- option 2: colored construction paper; oil crayons or colored chalk; hairspray or art fixative; *Singing the Feast, 2020–2021*; CD player
- option 3: Resource Sheet 2, newsprint or markerboard, marker, poster board, pens

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, cut colored copier paper into 1" x 11" strips, five strips per learner. Display Color Pack 1 and 2 next to each other.

Welcome the children as they arrive. Invite them to arrange the green cloth and candle in the center of your table or on a separate small table. 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. Light the candle, welcoming Christ in your midst.

Pray aloud:

Loving God, thank you for the gift of this group. Help us to learn more about living as your children. Amen.

Extinguish the candle, if necessary.

Set out the paper strips and stapler. Have children work together to make a paper chain. Arrange the finished chain around the edge of the green cloth. Discuss:

- ✪ When else have you worked on a project as part of a group?
- ✪ What would happen to our community chain if two or three links were ripped?
- ✪ What kinds of things might cause a group to fall apart—to not work well together?

Comment that in the Bible passage today, Jesus teaches about living with others.

EXPLORING

Show Color Pack 3. Explain that Jesus and his followers went from town to town to teach about God's love. At that time, teachers usually sat while teaching. People sat at their feet to

Although the children won't be using their own Bibles today, it is important that they understand where the story originates. Showing them where to find the passage in the Bible will help them make that connection.

listen, learn, and ask questions. Ask learners to imagine they could jump into this picture. Where would they like to sit?

Turn to Matthew 18:15 in your Bible and point to the name Matthew and the chapter number at the top (or bottom) of the page. Explain that the Gospels are the books in the Bible that contain the stories and teachings of Jesus.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Disagreements). Ask for volunteers to read the parts of the Narrator, Voice 1, and Voice 2. Remaining group members will read the Chorus part in unison. Allow a moment for learners to prepare, and then read the skit.

Discuss the story:

- ✪ What steps did Jesus teach his followers to help them resolve conflicts with one another? (As learners respond, write the steps on newsprint or markerboard.)

Direct the children to stand in an area with space to move around. Tell them to use their bodies without speaking any words to show what it feels like to be in an argument. Next, invite them to find a partner and show step one of Jesus' way of handling conflict. Then ask them to join together as a group to show each of the next steps. Ask:

- ✪ What do you like about Jesus' way of handling squabbles with others?
- ✪ How do Jesus' steps help keep the community together, even when people are angry at each other?
- ✪ If you had been sitting at Jesus' feet that day, what question would you have asked him?

Hold up Color Pack 4. Invite learners to point out any ways the picture reminds them of the Bible reading today.

Ask the children to look at Resource Sheet 1 (Disagreements) and use colored pencils to underline any words or groups of words that tell about resolving disagreements and building a strong community. Have learners report what they underlined and use a fine-tipped permanent marker to write these words and phrases on the hands on Color Pack 4. Ask:

- ✪ When might we need to follow Jesus' way of handling problems in our Sunday school class?
- ✪ What other things might we do to create a strong and caring group?

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Game** As they play Human Tangle, children will learn about pulling together to solve problems. Have children stand in a circle. Tell each one to reach across and join hands with two different people, but not to join hands with the person on either side or take both hands of one person. Then tell them to work together to undo the tangle. They may step over and duck under one another's arms, but should not let go of hands. (They

EASY
PREP

can let hands rotate as they twist.) Encourage them to help by making suggestions for untangling the group. The game is finished when everyone is standing together in one circle again. Give a group cheer. Discuss: What did this game teach you about working together as a group?

- 2. Collaborative Circles** Children will use art to create circles of trust and discuss ways to draw together as a community. Play some quiet music, such as “Music for Meditation” (track 23 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021). Give each child a piece of colored construction paper. Set out oil crayons or colored chalk. Ask each learner to draw a few circle designs on his or her paper and sign his or her name at the bottom. After a minute or so, stop the music. Explain that learners will pass their papers to the person on the right. When the music begins again, they will work on the new drawing, decorating existing circles or drawing new circles. Emphasize that they are to enhance, not damage, each other’s work. Start the music again. Stop the music every minute or so to pass papers to the right. After four or five times, have the children take back their original drawings and add final touches. Use hairspray or art fixative to “set” the drawings. Ask: What did you like or dislike about this activity? What did it teach you about working together? What other things might help our class draw together as a group? Display the pictures in your learning area.
- 3. Group Agreement** Creating a group agreement allows children to discuss expectations and behaviors that will help to draw them together as a community. Follow the steps on Resource Sheet 2 (Group Agreement) to guide learners through the process of making such an agreement.

Throughout the season try to point out when you notice the group living out its agreement. Children respond well to affirmation and like to celebrate their accomplishments.

If learners do not know a song, take a moment to teach it. First, ask them to listen to the recording. Then read aloud each line of the lyrics, having learners echo each line after you. Finally, sing the song with the recording.

Let Us Love One Another

Let us love one another.
God is love and loves us all.
One that knows not love
knows not God above.
So, beloved, let us love one
another.

Let us love our neighbors.
God is love and loves us all.
One that knows not love
knows not God above.
So, beloved, let us love one
another.

CLOSING

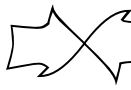




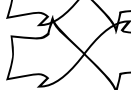












Gather in a circle around the candle and light it. Point to Color Pack 1 and 2 and invite learners to read the words with you. Ask for a volunteer to read aloud the words written on Color Pack 4 during Exploring. Affirm how these words are a good reminder of how to work out problems in your group. Pray aloud:

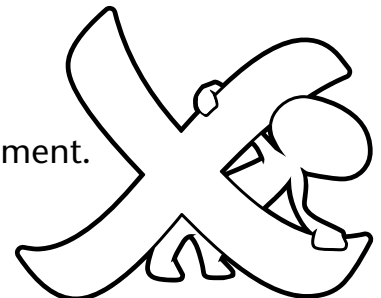
Loving God, thank you for our time together. Help us as we go out to spread your love in the world. Amen.

Sing “Let Us Love One Another” (track 16 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021). Close with a circle blessing. In turn, each learner will turn to the person on her or his right and say: “(Name), God bless you this week.” Begin the circle blessing with the person on your right.

Try to have a quick word with individual learners as they leave. Thank them for coming and affirm the positive contributions they have made.

Disagreements

-  **Narrator:** Once there were some followers of Jesus who met and worked together.
-  **Chorus:** They were the church.
-  **Narrator:** It was great to be a part of this church family. Everyone was welcome and the people enjoyed meeting together.
-  **Chorus:** They were just like one big family.
-  **Narrator:** But sometimes, like every family, there were quarrels and arguments.
-  **Chorus:** Uh-oh!
-  **Narrator:** Now, the disagreements weren't so bad when they could be settled.
-  **Chorus:** But what if they couldn't?
-  **Narrator:** Then they would remember Jesus' teaching.
-  **Voice 1:** Jesus said if you have an argument with someone, go and talk to that person one-on-one. See if you can sort out the problem.
-  **Chorus:** And if that doesn't work?
-  **Narrator:** Don't give up!
-  **Voice 2:** Ask one or two other people from the church to help the two of you come to an agreement.
-  **Chorus:** And if that doesn't work?
-  **Narrator:** Don't give up!
-  **Voice 2:** Pray together until you come to an agreement.
-  **Voice 1:** This is Jesus' way.
-  **Chorus:** Keep on trying and never give up.



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; and 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. Respectfully accept all suggestions 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 encouraged newcomers to add their signatures.

