DEEP LOVE

Life Group Leaders Guide

Directions

This packet contains the background information, series information, and weekly curriculum you will need to lead a life group during our *Deep Love* series. Everything on this page is to help you stay connected to the series as a whole. Behind this page is the individual curriculum to help you point people to Jesus. The *Purpose* and *Move* sections of the curriculum are for the leader to read or paraphrase to the group. The *Notes and Commentary* section is for the leader to get background information and go deeper into the passages before leading the life group. The curriculum was designed with your freedom in mind. Read through the curriculum and decide what will work best for your group. SOAP the passages with the group, use only certain questions, write your own questions, or use the curriculum verbatim. As the leader, you know what will point your people to Jesus.

Series Overview

During our *Deep Love* series we will be turning our intention inward to focus on the specific things God has for His followers as a collective group. Most of the New Testament writings and sayings of Jesus are plural and intended for a group of Christians to act on together. In other words, Jesus and His word put a lot of emphasis on followers living out the truths of the bible as a group, not just individually. Sadly, many Christians and churches barely scratch the surface of the gift from God that is community. What we will see in this series is that showing up on Sunday for service only is not what God has in mind for his followers. Instead, he wants people that love each other deeply, forgive always, are marked by hospitality, and serve endlessly. We hope this series will be a way for you to dive deeper into the community God has placed around you.

Life Group Overview

During the *Deep Love* series our life group curriculum will cover the same topic that was covered from stage but using a different passage or set of passages. Each curriculum will begin with an unpacking of the previous Sunday’s service to help the leader open up the topic for the study and also see how people responded to the Sunday teaching.

*Deep Love* Series Schedule

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| **Week** | **Sermon Date** | **Topic of sermon** | **Topic of life group** |
| Week 1 | 9/17 | Priority | Matthew 18:21-35 |
| Week 2 | 9/24 | Hospitality | Genesis 18:1-8 |
| Week 3 | 10/1 | Service | John 13:1-20 |

The Point Church Life Group Curriculum
***Deep Love* - Week 1 - Matthew 18:21-35**

Purpose of Study

What we are seeing in the *Deep Love* series is that the end is near and therefore how Christians love each other is of extreme importance. Peter is clear that our love for one another will “cover a multitude of sins.” In this study we will see that the covering of sins, is most likely referring to forgiveness and that this is a key component of a healthy, thriving Christian community. To illustrate the importance of forgiveness we will visit Jesus’ teaching on it which concludes with a parable. The hope of the study is that God’s forgiveness of you would be magnified, which would free you to forgive others.

Flow of Study

**Optional Icebreaker:** When you hear the word “forgiveness” what comes to mind?

**Move #1:** Since the sermon series and life groups are covering the same topics, it might be a good idea (both for content and time) to begin the discussion with some unpacking questions from this Sunday’s sermon.

1. Did anything stand out to you from the sermon this weekend?
2. What is one thing from the sermon that you want to apply this week?
3. This weekend the main passage from 1 Peter said *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins* (1 Peter 4:8). What do you think the statement “love covers a multitude of sins means?”

**Move #2:** Most commentators agree that Peter’s “love covers a multitude of sins” is talking about forgiving one another. No one displayed or taught on forgiveness as clearly as Jesus. In the passage we are reading, Jesus is going to be asked a question that you have probably thought before. If forgiving people is the right thing to do, what do I do with people that constantly need to be forgiven? Is there ever a cap or quota on forgiveness? In the way only Jesus can, he will answer the question “how often should I forgive” and then back up his answer with a story that proves forgiving well is a necessary trait of a Christian. To begin, let’s start with the question he is asked and talk generally about the idea of forgiveness.

**Read Matthew 18:21-22 (NIV)**

 21Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” 22Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

1. What stands out to you from this passage?
2. Peter answers his own question with what he thinks is a gracious and amazing answer although Jesus blows his answer out of the water. The number 77 is not necessarily what Jesus was trying to imply but instead that you should forgive A LOT (see commentary section for more information). Why do you think forgiving the same brother or sister constantly is so difficult? What does this difficulty show about us and what we expect from other people?
3. What is Peter revealing about his understanding of forgiveness with the question “how often should I forgive?”
	1. **Hint:** The question shows that he is assuming forgiveness is for the benefit of the offender...not the offended. This is contrary to truth. Forgiveness is beneficial for both parties.
4. Do you think it is possible to over-forgive?
5. Why do you feel like forgiveness inside of a Christian community is so important?
6. The Lord’s Prayer (seen in Matthew 6:9-15 and Luke 11:2-4) states *forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.* Do you think there is a connection to forgiving others and God’s forgiveness of you?
7. The conversation makes clear that forgiveness is not something that a Christian MIGHT have to practice but instead something that they WILL have to practice inside of a community. What does a lack of forgiveness show about a community?
	1. **Hint:** A lack of forgiveness inside a community could show two things. One, that the people do not know one another well at all. If you only see people one day a week for an hour service it is hard for a situation that would require forgiveness to take place. Two, that people do not understand God’s forgiveness of them. Forgiven people forgive people.
8. Is forgiveness a discipline that comes naturally to you?

**Move #3:** Now that we have discussed forgiveness in general, let’s continue the passage and see the teaching story Jesus uses to illustrate his view on forgiveness to the disciples. Hopefully, this will make clear what forgiveness within a Christian community looks like.

**Read Matthew 18:23-27 (NIV)**

23 Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. 25Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. 26“At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ 27The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

1. What stands out to you from this passage?
2. Commentators have differing opinions over the amount that the servant owed but all agree that it was an amount that he would have never been able to pay back. Probably in the billions of dollars. With that in mind, in verse 26 the servant makes a promise. What is unique about this promise? What does this promise and the servants posture show?
	1. **Hint:** The amount the servant owed was probably in the billions therefore no amount of patience from the king would give the servant time to pay it back.
3. In this parable, the servant mentioned who owes the extreme debt is you and the king is God. In what ways are you just like the servant mentioned? In what ways is God just like the forgiving king?
4. Look at the king's response of mercy in verse 27. Notice how the king doesn’t grant the servant’s request of allowing time to pay back the debt, instead he completely cancels it. Why do you think this is the case? What does this show about the king?

**Read Matthew 18:28-35 (NIV)**

28“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. 29“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’ 30“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. 32“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ 34In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. 35“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

1. What stands out to you from this passage?
2. Look at the fellow servants response to the forgiven servant in verse 29. How is this similar to the servants response to the king earlier in the passage?
3. Not only does the servant not forgive the fellow servant's debt, he throws him in prison. How is this more severe than what the king was going to do to the servant before being merciful?
	1. **Hint:** In the beginning of the passage, the king was going to throw the servant and his family into slavery until they paid off what was own. Now, that same servant is throwing a person in prison until he pays it off. A person can pay off a debt in slavery; they cannot in prison. So, the forgiven servant is requiring a greater punishment for a smaller debt.
4. Reread verse 31. The forgiven servants lack of forgiveness is obvious to the world around him. Do you think this is true for us and our lack of forgiveness? What does a lack of forgiveness look like? What attributes have you noticed in a person that is needing to forgive someone?
5. Reread verse 33. The king makes clear to the servant that there is a connection between being forgiven and forgiving others. Perry Noble (a famous preacher) explains it by saying “forgiven people forgive others.” Have you seen the connection to this in your life?
6. Obviously, things do not end well for the forgiven servant. It could be possible for someone to read this story and think the moral of it is “forgive others or else you will be punished.” Do you think that is what Jesus was intending?
7. In verse 35, it mentions not just forgiving people but forgiving them from your heart. Have you noticed a difference between the two in your life?

**Move #4:** Learning about forgiveness is one thing, applying it to your life is another. In this next move we will talk about the theme of this passage from a more personal level.

1. What is something that stood out to you tonight that you are going to take with you?
2. Can you describe a time where you forgave a person (in light of how God has forgiven you)? What was that like?
3. Many people think forgiving someone is acknowledging that the offender did nothing wrong. How could you prove that wrong using this passage?
4. In simple terms, forgiveness is the decision to cancel the debt someone owes you. Do you think there is truth to this?
	1. **Hint:** Whenever someone hurts you they have, in a sense, taken something from you, thus creating a debt. This does not have to be financial. A person that gossips about you is stealing your good reputation. A boss that fires a worker unjustly is taken financial security. An abusive husband takes their wife's physical and emotional security.
5. Is there someone in your life that you feel like you need to forgive? How would a person know if they need to forgive someone? What emotions would result to lead someone to think that they need to forgive someone?
	1. **Hint:** Almost all anger comes from a lack of forgiveness. If we are angry with someone it usually boils down to us feeling like that person is in debt to us. If there is someone in your life that you are angry towards; it might be a sign that you need to forgive them.
6. It has also been said that not forgiving is “drinking poison hoping the other person will die.” Have you seen this in your life?
7. Why do you think abiding in God’s forgiveness of you is necessary before beginning to forgive others?

**Prayer:** End your study with a time of prayer where people can share prayer requests and be prayed for before they leave. If possible, please steer some prayer towards what your group talked about during this study.

1. It might be good to ask people if there is anyone they need to forgive and have them confess that to the group. Have the group pray over them and for the situation.

**Next Steps:** If people are struggling with anger and a lack of forgiveness, tt might be a good idea to challenge your group members with the following steps from *Enemies of the Heart* by Andy Stanley

1. **IDENTIFY WHO YOU ARE ANGRY WITH →** This should be easy to determine but if not. Ask a spouse who they think you are angry towards. Get alone with God and see if He reveals anyone to you.
2. **DETERMINE WHAT IS OWED →**  You know what the person did to you but what did they take from you? Make sure you can articulate what exactly they took. No matter how simple or selfish it sounds.
3. **CANCEL THE DEBT →** Decide that the person you identified does not owe you anything anymore. The following prayer script might be helpful.
	1. *Heavenly Father, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ has taken \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ from me. I have held on to this debt long enough. I choose to cancel the debt. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ doesn’t owe me anymore. Just as you forgive me, I forgive \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.*
4. **DISMISS THE CASE →** Sometimes feelings don’t follow decisions. When anger begins to rise back remind yourself that you have cancelled the debt and use situation as a way to thank God for his unrelenting forgiveness of you. Thanks be to Jesus that He does not go back on his forgiveness of us.

Notes and Commentary

The following are pieces of commentary, facts, and links based on the passages of this study in order. Use them to help supplement your group time or for your personal preparation.

**Matthew 18:21-22**

* Some of the lines of questioning and insights into the passage as well as the steps for forgiveness seen in the Next Steps section were adapted from a few chapters of *Enemies of the Heart* by Andy Stanley. This resource would be a great recommendation for your people to read on their own.
* The teaching within Judaism (based on [Amos 1:3](https://biblia.com/reference/Am1.3); [2:6](https://biblia.com/reference/Am2.6); [Job 33:29](https://biblia.com/reference/Job33.29), [30](https://biblia.com/reference/Job33.30)) is that three times was enough to show a forgiving spirit. Rabbinic Judaism recognized that repeat offenders may not really be repenting at all: “If a man commits a transgression, the first, second and third time he is forgiven, the fourth time he is not.”. The Mishnah is even less forgiving: “If a man said, ‘I will sin and repent, and sin again and repent,’ he will be given no chance to repent … for transgressions that are between a man and his fellow the Day of Atonement effects atonement only if he has appeased his fellow.” (Wilkins)
* Peter’s question appears to be following in that line, wondering how many times he should forgive a person who repeatedly sins against him. His offer to forgive the person seven times, more than double the above-mentioned statements, is magnanimous, reflecting a desire for completeness that the number seven usually evokes. But he wonders whether this is where the limit should be drawn on his generosity of spirit. (Wilkins)
* Jesus’ astonishing response is that Peter must forgive not the magnanimous number of seven but countless times: “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” The meaning of the number that Jesus uses is unclear. One can read “seventy-seven times,” which is the same wording found in the lxx of [Genesis 4:24](https://biblia.com/reference/Ge4.24), or the less likely “seventy times seven.”In essence, Jesus seems to be saying that the number doesn’t matter. Peter and the rest of the disciples are to continue to forgive without keeping count. The reason for such an unheard of thought is given in the parable that immediately follows—Peter should go on forgiving because the reality of his own forgiveness is demonstrated in the way in which God forgives others. (Wilkins)

**Matthew 18:23-35**

* The amount owed by one person (10,000 talents) was incomprehensible. This amount indicates hyperbolically the incalculable debt owed by the servant. Perhaps he was a governor of a region and collected taxes for the king but has squandered the amount. (Wilkins)
* The exact monetary value is difficult to determine, because the “talent” was not a coin but a unit of monetary reckoning. A silver talent was about seventy-five pounds, valued at six thousand denarii. Since a denarius was the equivalent of a day’s wage for a common laborer (see comments on [17:24–27](https://biblia.com/books/nivac61mt/Mt17.24-27)) and if we use the year 2001’s minimum wage of $5.15 an hour in the United States, a common laborer could expect $41.20 a day. A talent, therefore, would be worth approximately $247,200. Altogether, therefore, the man owes at least two and a half billion dollars. As extreme as those figures are, comparisons are difficult to appreciate since such a sum in first-century Palestine would be far more disproportionate to the same sum in modern times. Some estimate that the amount is the equivalent of hundreds of billions of dollars. In any case, the hyperbole of the parable is dramatic. (Wilkins)
* In this next scene, the servant who has been forgiven the unthinkable amount of ten thousand talents finds a fellow servant who owes him one hundred denarii. Using the same figures to compare the amount owed, the second slave owed just a little over four thousand dollars, a pittance in comparison to the billions owed by the first slave. But the one who has been forgiven so much does not respond with the same pity but rather the opposite. “He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.” The second servant pleads with almost the identical actions and words as the first servant used when begging for leniency from the king. But instead of reacting with the same compassion and grace, the first servant delivers physical punishment by choking him and, instead of selling him into slavery, throws him into the debtor’s prison, an even more severe punishment than that threatened him by the king, which made repaying the debt impossible ([18:29–30](https://biblia.com/reference/Mt18.29-30)). (Wilkins)
* The parable’s principle ([18:35](https://biblia.com/reference/Mt18.35)). The core of the meaning of the parable is found in the final verse: “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.” “Mercy” is not giving to a person what he deserves, while “grace” is giving to a person what he does not deserve. This takes us to a central principle of the kind of kingdom life that Jesus has inaugurated. A person who has truly experienced the mercy and grace of God by responding to the presence of his kingdom will be transformed into Jesus’ disciple, which, in a most fundamental way, means experiencing a transformed heart that produces a changed life that gives the same mercy and grace one has received from God (cf. [Isa. 40:2](https://biblia.com/reference/Is40.2)). (Wilkins)
* Such a transformation will be evident in the words and actions of a disciple’s life ([12:33–37](https://biblia.com/reference/Mt12.33-37); [13:8](https://biblia.com/reference/Mt13.8), [23](https://biblia.com/reference/Mt13.23); [15:17–20](https://biblia.com/reference/Mt15.17-20)). A person who has not truly experienced God’s grace and mercy will not experience his forgiveness. He will, like the first servant, accept the personal benefits, but it will be only superficial. It will not penetrate a hard and wicked heart to produce transformation. Such a person will thus experience eternal condemnation. Jesus’ disciples must be forgiving to others, for through God’s grace and mercy they have experienced his forgiveness. (Wilkins)