



# LORDSHIP GENEROSITY

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LEADER GUIDE | SESSION 4

*Stewarding Forgiveness & Reconciliation*



**SCRIPTURE TEXT** 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

**SESSION IN A SENTENCE** Those who have been reconciled to Christ have been given the ministry of reconciliation.

**BIBLE BACKGROUND** This is the second letter from Paul to the church at Corinth. This church had experienced significant strife and dysfunction. Paul addressed this in 1 Corinthians and spent the majority of 2 Corinthians encouraging them in their growth and repentance. The focus of chapter five centers around understanding our longing for our eternal home and proclaiming a message of reconciliation to those who do not know Christ so they may also experience eternal life in heaven.

**THE BIBLE SPEAKS TODAY** The term “reconciliation” can be used as an accounting term. It means to bring two sides of an account into order or compliance. While the term does have accounting principles, we should be quick to realize that our lives need to be reconciled. This does not mean that we need to bring in more funds than we spend annually. Instead, we need to acknowledge that we have a sin debt we cannot pay, and it needs to be reconciled to God through Christ. Once we have been reconciled to Him, then we need to understand that He has given us the ministry of reconciliation, proclaiming salvation in Christ to others.

# BIBLE STUDY

## Get Your Group Talking

**ASK:** “What’s the biggest debt you’ve ever paid off, and how did you feel afterwards?”

### Transition to the Bible Study

**SAY,** “It feels great to pay off debt, especially a big one! Each of us has a sin debt that must be paid, and the first thing we need to know is that we need to be forgiven and reconciled to Christ – our sin debt must be zeroed out. If we do not understand this point, we will miss the rest of the message in this passage.”

**INVITE** your group members to fill in the missing blanks on their listening guide as you share each of the three main points in this study.

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## POINT 1:

### WE MUST BE RECONCILED TO CHRIST

2 Corinthians 5:16-17

**ASK** a group member to **read 2 Corinthians 5:16-17 out loud.**

<sup>16</sup> From now on, then, we do not know anyone from a worldly perspective. Even if we have known Christ from a worldly perspective, yet now we no longer know him in this way. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!

**GUIDE** group members to understand the text by sharing some of the following commentary notes:

#### Commentary

Prior to coming to faith in Christ, we often view others through a worldly perspective. We see

people as a means to accomplish our own desired outcomes – they are means to an end in many cases. Once we are reconciled to God, we should no longer view others in this way. Instead, we see others as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, or as people who need reconciliation and forgiveness for their sins so they may become our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Prior to being reconciled to Christ, we also view Him from a different perspective. We may simply see Him as a good person or a great teacher. Before we come to faith in Christ, we are dead in our sins. Once we are reconciled to Him, we are a new creation; the old things have passed away and the new has come. This is the message of reconciliation, and it must begin with each of us. When we are reconciled to Christ, we are forgiven our sins and made new. There are several theological truths we can know from this passage.



The first truth is the phrase “in Christ.” The passage would be vastly different if it said being with Christ. Many of us either currently or have previously lived with family members. Even if our family is loving and close knit, we can only live with them. Living with our family means that the kids can go to school while mom and dad go to work. The passage we are studying does not say being with Jesus, but rather being in Christ. When someone is in Christ, reconciliation has been accomplished, and this cannot be undone.

Second, when someone is in Christ, that person is a new creation. The term new has significant meaning. If we were driving down the road and saw a refurbished 1965 Mustang next to a brand new off-the-showroom-floor Mustang, we would be right in saying that both are new. The classic Mustang would have been refurbished and made new. The term Paul used here is not a refurbished model of our old self. Instead, our forgiveness and reconciliation found in Christ is a brand-new self. Paul reiterates this truth when he said that the new has come. He once again used the same term for new as he did earlier in the verse. Because of this, the old has passed away.

We find another significant theological truth in the statement that the new has come. This phrase is a verb, which indicates an action. The Greek tense to this verb is known as the perfect tense. This tense indicates an action that has been completed in the past but still has future implications. When we are reconciled to Christ and made new, we have not finished our journey with Christ. Instead, we have merely begun our journey, and He has a new work in front of us.

**DISCUSS:** What might the implications be for someone who does not fully understand the difference between being with Christ and being in Christ?

**DO:** Take a moment to share the gospel. Even if you believe everyone in the class knows Jesus as Lord and Savior, you can still lead them through the message and encourage them to take notes. If, however, someone in the class does not know Jesus personally, this would be a great time for them to hear the gospel again.

**TRANSITION TO POINT 2:** Ask, “What would we do if you were given the cure to a dreadful disease? The simple answer is that we would share it with everyone. But, even if we were able to cure that disease, the truth is everyone would still die of something else. When we have forgiveness and reconciliation in Christ, we have more than a cure to a major disease; we have the means to defeat death. Our calling, therefore, is to offer the forgiveness that we have been given to others.”

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## POINT 2: WE ARE TO OFFER RECONCILIATION TO OTHERS

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

**ASK** a group member to **read 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 out loud.**

<sup>18</sup> Everything is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. <sup>19</sup> That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed the message of reconciliation to us.

**GUIDE** group members to understand the text by sharing some of the following commentary notes:



## Commentary

As a follower of Jesus, we know that we serve a good God. We find evidence for this truth in the cross and an empty tomb. No one took the life of Jesus; He laid His life down for us (John 15:13).

This passage also shows us in three distinct ways God displays His goodness for others to see.

First, we learn that God reconciled us to Himself through Christ. The phrasing here shows that God played an active part in our reconciliation. He did not wait for us to come to Him asking for reconciliation. Instead, He initiated this process. Yes, we are to respond to His prompting to be reconciled, but He is the One who actively pursues us. We can also see the consistent character of God in initiating a reconciled relationship with us as early as Genesis 3. Adam and Eve had sinned. They had tried to hide and yet God the He called out to them and began the conversation (Gen. 3:9).

The second truth to learn is that we are reconciled to God through Christ and not good works. This is the gospel message. The false gospel of today is that someone can be a good person and thereby obtain eternal life. In defining a good person, we compare ourselves to others we know and who are worse than us. This false belief leads to consistent worry in the hope of not being good enough. Yet, the gospel, as outlined in this passage, teaches us the good news that we are not reconciled through good behavior. Instead, we are reconciled through Christ and Christ alone.

Our final truth from verse 18 is that those who have been reconciled to God through Christ have been given the ministry of reconciliation. This ministry and been given and not earned. Since we are not good enough to earn our reconciliation, we are also not good enough to earn the ministry of reconciliation. Furthermore, this is more than a

job, it is a ministry.

To minister to someone means to have compassion for another and care for his or her needs. When someone experiences the reconciliation in Christ, that person will engage in sharing this ministry with others. Verse 19 echoes this truth in saying that God has committed the message of reconciliation to those who have been reconciled. The use of the word committed shows an intentional act from God to His children.

It needs to be noted that the passage is not teaching universalism when Paul said that God was reconciling the world to Himself. Universalism is the false doctrine that all people are saved no matter their relationship with Jesus. If this was the case, Jesus would have never taught on the topic of hell since everyone would be saved (universal salvation of all people). But Jesus did teach on hell, therefore everyone will not be saved.

Instead of supporting universalism, the verse reveals that God has provided the means of reconciliation to all people through Jesus. Jesus said that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). Salvation and reconciliation are offered to all through the sacrificial atonement found only in Christ, but not everyone will call on the name of the Lord and be saved.

**ASK:** What does it look like for a follower of Jesus to engage in the ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation actively and consistently?

**DO:** Ask someone to share a story in which they shared the gospel with someone. Lead the class to see the importance of offering the message of reconciliation as opposed to focusing on the person's response. Point out that our act of obedience is to share the message that God





wants to reconcile the person to Himself. God is responsible for the outcome; we are responsible for speaking the truth that Jesus saves.

**TRANSITION TO POINT 3:** Say, "Since we are giving the ministry of reconciliation God expects us to represent Him and this ministry within the context of our everyday lives. This is encouraging because He wants all His children to represent Him and His ministry."

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## POINT 3: WE ARE AMBASSADORS

2 Corinthians 5:20-21

**ASK** a group member to **read 2 Corinthians 5:20-21 out loud.**

<sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf, "Be reconciled to God." <sup>21</sup> He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**GUIDE** group members to understand the text by sharing some of the following commentary notes:

### Commentary

An ambassador is someone who represents a king on foreign soil. As followers of Jesus through the ministry of reconciliation, we are to represent Him in this fallen world. The passage indicates that we do this by pleading on Christ's behalf that others may be reconciled to God.

We can look for an example in how to live this out by studying the life of Christ. While Jesus was on the

cross paying for our sins, many people insulted and mocked Him. Yet even as He died, Jesus asked the Father to forgive the people who had crucified Him because they did not know what they were doing (Luke 23:34). Since Jesus offered forgiveness to those who were persecuting Him, we too can offer forgiveness and reconciliation to those who have hurt us.

Finally, we learn that we are to plead on Christ's behalf that others would be reconciled to Christ. The word plead means to beg or to ask with earnestness. We cannot fulfill the command as God intended and remain passive. It is important to note that this command is not merely written to pastors or leaders within the church. Paul wrote this letter, and therefore this passage, to the entire church body in the city of Corinth. The application, therefore, is for those who have been reconciled to God through Christ. We are to plead with others to come to Christ since we have been given this ministry.

**DISCUSS:** How can we strive to be more like Jesus and forgive those who have hurt us?

**DO:** Lead the class in a brief time of prayer. Thank God for giving His followers the ministry of reconciliation. Ask God to give everyone the faith and courage needed to offer forgiveness to those who have been hurt.

**TRANSITION TO NEXT STEPS:** The outcome of studying God's word is not merely to gain additional knowledge for the sake of knowing something. The outcome should be to study and apply God's word so that we can live transformational lives in the world and thereby test and prove God's perfect and pleasing will. The next steps listed below are ways to apply what we have learned in today's study.





## MY NEXT STEP

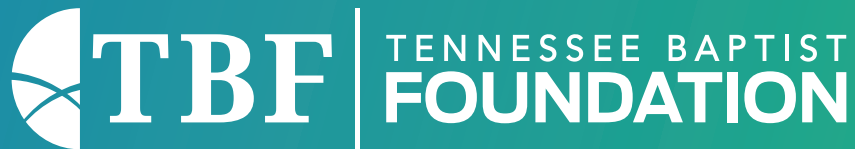
**GUIDE** group members to identify which of the following steps they will attempt before the group's next study. There is one step that is easiest, another that is more challenging, and a final one that will challenge even a spiritually mature group member. They are in random order in each session.

- 1. Write out your story of reconciliation** – If we have been reconciled to God in Christ, then we have a story of reconciliation. The story consists of who we were before we were reconciled, how we were reconciled, and how reconciliation to God has changed us. Take time this week to write out your personal story of reconciliation.
- 2. Share your story of reconciliation** – No good story should be left untold. If you have written out your story, it is time to share it with someone. Make a point to find someone with whom you can share your story of reconciliation. Do that this week and encourage your group by telling them what happened when you shared your story.
- 3. Forgive someone who has hurt you** – Not forgiving someone who has hurt us is harmful to us, and it hinders our witness to those around us. As Christ asked the Father to forgive those who persecuted Him, we too need to ask the Father to forgive those who have hurt us.

**SUMMARIZE the session:** Reconciliation is something we all need, and God in Christ has provided us the means to it. We cannot earn it and we do not deserve it, yet it is offered to the world. Once we accept the reconciliation that He has offered, we are to be His ambassadors and plead with others to experience the same forgiveness that we have and know.







TODAY'S PLANS.  
TOMORROW'S IMPACT.

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