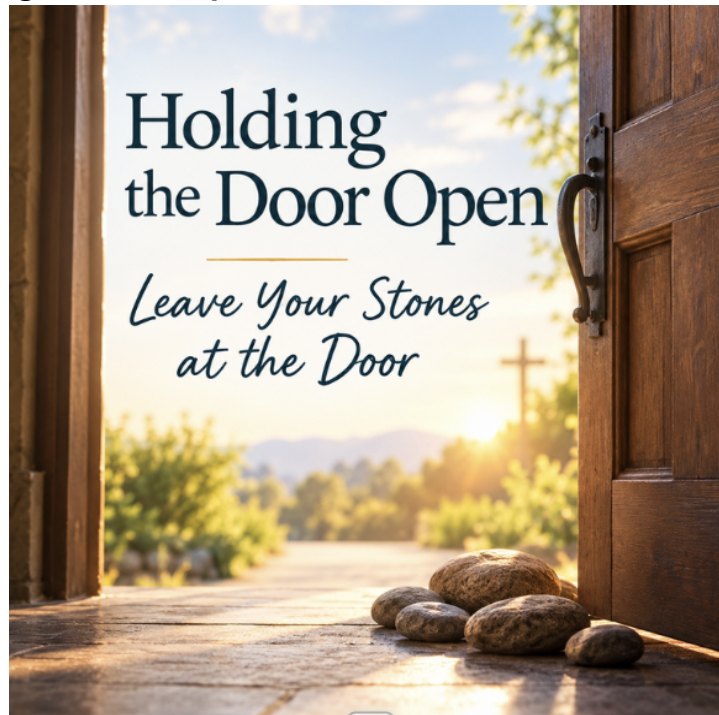


Faith Bible Study Guide
For the Week of September 13, 2026
16th Sunday in Pentecost
“Holding the Door Open...But Leave Your Stones at the Door”



Be still [2 Minutes]: As you hear these Centering Words, let us greet each other, greet the Holy Spirit, and begin with 1 minute of silence, breathing in the breath of God and allow the group to open themselves to the Holy Spirit today:

CENTERING WORDS/ WORDS TO PONDER:

“You are still hurt. But you are not carrying the stone.”

Forgiveness is a complex notion. Forgiving ourselves and forgiving others can be equally challenging, but even more so when oppression and injustice are part of the story. May God guide our forgiving and our living, to embrace the deeper truth of Christ’s teachings.

OPENING PRAYER:

Gracious God,

we gather today carrying many things. Some of us come carrying joy. Some come carrying grief. Some come carrying gratitude. Some come carrying questions.

And some of us are carrying stones—things we have been holding for a long time.

As we study your Word today, help us to listen not only with our minds, but with our hearts. Show us where your grace is already at work in us. Give us courage to name what we carry, wisdom to know what is ours to carry, and freedom to recognize what you may be inviting us to set down. May our conversation be honest, compassionate, and grounded in your love. In Christ's name, Amen.

Be present: [Being mindful of others and sharing time]

1. Take a moment. Breathe in deeply... and breathe out slowly. Allow yourself to simply be present. How is it with your soul today?
2. What are you carrying into this room today?
 - You don't have to explain it.
 - It might be a feeling, a relationship, a concern, a joy, or a question.
3. Where are you experiencing grace in your life right now?

4. Is there something you are carrying that feels heavier than it used to?
5. When you hear the phrase, "Leave your stones at the door," what is your first reaction?
 - Relief?
 - Resistance?
 - Curiosity?
 - Fear?
 - "Absolutely not!" 😊

Be the Word: Scripture Lesson: **Matthew 18:21-35**

What word, phrase, or image catches your attention? As you listen, don't try to figure out who the "bad guy" is. Instead, listen for the movement of the story:

- **What is received?**
- **What is released?**
- **What is refused?**
- **And what is carried?**

²¹ Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Should I forgive as many as seven times?"

²² Jesus said, "Not just seven times, but rather as many as seventy-seven times." ²³ Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he began to settle accounts, they brought to him a servant who owed him ten thousand bags of gold. ²⁵ Because the servant didn't have enough to pay it back, the master ordered that he should be sold, along with his wife and children and everything he had, and that the proceeds should be used as payment. ²⁶ But the servant fell down, kneeled before him, and said, 'Please, be patient with me, and I'll pay you back.' ²⁷ The master had compassion on that servant, released him, and forgave the loan.

²⁸ "When that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him one hundred coins." ²⁹ He grabbed him around the throat and said, 'Pay me back what you owe me.'

³⁰ "Then his fellow servant fell down and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I'll pay you back.' ³¹ But he refused. Instead, he threw him into prison until he paid back his debt.

³² "When his fellow servants saw what happened, they were deeply offended. They came and told their master all that happened. ³³ His master called the first servant and said, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you appealed to me. ³⁴ Shouldn't you also have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' ³⁵ His master was furious and handed him over to the guard responsible for punishing prisoners, until he had paid the whole debt.

³⁶ "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you if you don't forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

L: The Word of God for ALL People.

P: Thanks be to God.

What caught your attention?

- *What word or phrase stayed with you?*
- *Who do you identify with most in the story?*
- *What makes you uncomfortable?*
- *What surprised you?*

What do you think Jesus is trying to teach Peter?

Be rooted: [Bible Study]

The big picture for today: *What does it mean to receive God's grace deeply enough that we can begin to release what we have been carrying?*

Exegetical Reflections & Commentary

A. Peter Wants a Number

Peter asks: “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?”

Peter's question is fascinating because he isn't asking **whether** he should forgive. He already assumes forgiveness is required. He's asking: “**What's the limit?**” And seven sounds generous. Jesus responds: “Not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” Depending on the translation, this can also be rendered “**seventy times seven.**”

But the exact arithmetic isn't the point. In fact, the point is almost the opposite. Jesus is taking forgiveness out of the category of things we can **count**. Audrey West writes that Jesus moves forgiveness “out of the ‘countable’ category” and into “the realm of the incalculable.”

In other words: **Stop keeping score**. And there's an interesting connection to Genesis. In Genesis 4, Lamech boasts about vengeance being multiplied seventy-sevenfold. Jesus appears to echo that language—but turns it completely around.

Lamech says, essentially: “**Vengeance without limit.**” Jesus says: “**Forgiveness without limit.**” Biblical scholar Nicholas Schaser describes this as Jesus taking the numerical framework of Lamech's vengeance and turning it toward forgiveness.

Discussion Q

1. **What changes when forgiveness stops being something we count? And: Why do you think human beings are so tempted to keep score?**

B. Matthew 18 Is Not “Just Forgive and Forget”

This is particularly important for your group. Remember what comes immediately before this passage. Matthew 18:15–20 talks about addressing harm within the community. So Matthew puts **accountability and forgiveness next to each other**.

John T. Carroll notes that Matthew 18 holds together “humility,” “mercy or forgiveness,” and “accountability.” That's important because sometimes Christians have interpreted forgiveness in ways that actually silence people who have been harmed.

But Jesus doesn't say: “If someone hurts you, pretend it didn't happen.”

Matthew 18 first says: **Address the harm**. Then Peter asks: **How do I forgive?**

So Christian forgiveness is not the opposite of accountability. It is possible to say:

“**What happened was wrong.**” and “**I refuse to let hatred have the final word.**” Both can be true.

Discussion Qs

3. What is the difference between:

- forgiveness,
- reconciliation,
- trust,
- accountability,
- and forgetting?

4. Which of these require two people? Which can begin with one person?

One possible conclusion:

- **Forgiveness** can begin with one person.
- **Reconciliation** requires both people.
- **Trust** has to be rebuilt.
- **Accountability** may be necessary.
- **Forgetting** isn't required.

C. The Absurd Debt

Then we come to the parable. The first servant owes the king **10,000 talents**. The amount is intentionally outrageous. Nicholas Schaser notes that 10,000 talents represents an enormous, essentially impossible debt, while the second servant's 100 denarii is comparatively small. Audrey West emphasizes just how hyperbolic the number is: the first debt would be beyond any realistic possibility of repayment. So Jesus creates this enormous contrast: **Impossible debt**. Versus **Significant but manageable debt**.

The first servant receives extraordinary mercy. Then he refuses to extend mercy. And this is where I think your sermon phrase is especially helpful: **He has been released from a burden—and immediately picks up another one.**

The tragedy isn't simply that he is unforgiving. It's that **he has experienced grace but hasn't allowed grace to change him.**

D. Grace Is Supposed to Transform Us

The king doesn't merely cancel a financial obligation. He gives the servant a new future. That's what grace does. Grace doesn't simply say: "Your debt is gone."

Grace says: **"You are free to become someone different."** And that connects to the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

Matthew uses debt language repeatedly to talk about sin and forgiveness. Schaser notes that this financial metaphor was familiar in the Jewish context of Jesus' time, where sin could be understood metaphorically as a debt before God.

5. The question becomes: **What do we do with grace once we've received it?**

E. "From the Heart"

Jesus ends the parable with: "So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart." That phrase matters: **from your heart**. Jesus isn't asking for a superficial: "Fine. I forgive you." while we're still nurturing resentment underneath. But "from the heart" also doesn't mean: "I have to manufacture a warm feeling toward the person who hurt me." Forgiveness is often a process.

Audrey West makes this important pastoral observation: forgiveness can be difficult and long-term, especially when wounds are deep, and sometimes forgiveness may need to happen "from a distance." That is a very important word for the church.

Forgiveness is not always a moment. Sometimes it is a practice. Sometimes it is a decision we make again tomorrow. And the next day. And the next. Seventy-seven times.

F. The Stone

Think about holding a stone...At first your friend hurt you. But now it is the stone that is hurting you. But what happens when you let go of the stone? **You are still hurt. But you are not carrying the stone.**

6. **What do you think the difference is between "letting go" and "saying it didn't matter"?**

That's a really important theological question. Because Christian forgiveness does **not** require us to deny reality. We can say: "It mattered." "It hurt." "It was wrong." "I still need healing." And also: **"I don't want to carry this forever."**

G. The Hard Questions About Forgiveness

- *Are there things you think are genuinely difficult to forgive? Why?*
- *Does someone have to apologize before we can forgive them?*
- *Can you forgive someone who never admits they hurt you?*
- *Can forgiveness happen without reconciliation?*
- *Can you forgive someone and still maintain a boundary?*
- *What does forgiveness look like when the person who hurt you is no longer alive?*
- *What does forgiveness look like when the harm was systemic or generational rather than simply one person's action?*

Because sometimes the “stone” isn't one individual.

It may be: racism, historical trauma, family patterns, incarceration, displacement, war, injustice, prejudice.

And forgiveness must never become a way of saying:

“Never mind. It doesn't matter.”

Instead, forgiveness can become a refusal to allow the injustice to reproduce itself in us.

H. Intergenerational Question

7. What did you inherit from the generations before you that you are grateful for?

- *What are some things we inherit that we might not want to pass on?*
- *What would it mean to say, “This may have been handed to me, but it does not have to be handed to you”?*

This connects beautifully to the Genesis/Lamech connection. Lamech's violence becomes generational. Jesus interrupts that cycle.

Instead of: **hurt** → **vengeance** → **more hurt** → **more vengeance**

Jesus offers: **hurt** → **truth** → **grace** → **a different future**.

That is a powerful Wesleyan idea, too: grace is not simply pardon; grace is God's transforming work in us.

I. “How Is It With Your Soul?” — Second Check-In

Let's return to the Wesleyan question here. How is it with your soul?

1. Is there a stone I have been carrying for a long time?
2. Is this stone mine to carry?
3. Am I holding onto this stone because I believe putting it down means what happened didn't matter?
4. What would freedom look like if I didn't have to carry this anymore?
5. What might God be inviting me to do next?

Not necessarily: “**What do I need to forgive today?**” But: “**What is my next faithful step?**”

That might be: prayer, grief, a boundary, counseling, an apology, a conversation, seeking justice, asking for forgiveness, beginning to release resentment, or simply admitting to God: “*I am not ready yet.*” *That, too, can be an honest prayer.*

Be transformed: [Faith in Action Challenge]

Your SEVEN-day “Leave Your Stone at the Door” challenge.

This week:

Day 1 — Name it. Write down one thing you are carrying. You don't have to show anyone. Just name it.

Day 2 — Tell the truth. Write: "What happened was..." Tell the truth without minimizing it.

Day 3 — Ask what the stone is costing you. "What is carrying this anger/grief/regret costing me?"

Day 4 — Pray for freedom, not necessarily reconciliation. You don't have to pray: "God, make me love this person." Instead: **"God, free me from what is harming my soul."**

Day 5 — Identify one boundary or one faithful action. Maybe forgiveness requires a boundary. Maybe it requires a conversation. Maybe it requires professional help. Maybe it requires doing nothing yet.

Day 6 — Consider what you are passing on. Ask: "What do I want the next generation to inherit from me?"

Day 7 — Set something down. Physically place a stone somewhere meaningful. Or return your stone to the church planter. And say: **"I am still hurt. But I am not carrying the stone."**

Prayers & Concerns / Announcements:

*We lift up prayers for all of God's
Creation. Lord Hear our Prayers.*

continued prayers for Healing and Wholeness

Rev. Alan Mark	Rev. Gary Williams	Kaitlyn Sabedra
Alice Kajiya	Geri Shiraki	Karlynn Fernandez
Alvena & Tom Fukuhara	Glenn & Millie	Kay Saxton
Amy Higa	Shimizu	Kian Tehrani
Amy Holmes	Gordon Mark	Kiki Hashimoto
Anthony Anderson, Sr.	Grace Tochiara	Rev. Kim Montenegro
Apolosi Lokotui	Grant Hanada	Kelsey DeGracia
Arlene & Ernie Santiago	Harriet Tateyama	Kenny Medeiros
Austin Maeda	Harry Manaka,	Kyle Ichikawa
Barbara Tamura	Sansei Rocker	Larry Takumi
Betty Kobata	Harry & Ruth Takaki	Layne Nakasone
Bill Morris	Herb Aoyama	Linda Jung
Brian Okumura	Ingrid Peterson	Liz Harner
Cami Bruns	Irene Munesato	Lucas Yniguez
Christine Keim	Jack Honda	Marion Antoku
Claretta Foster	Jacqueline Wong	Maddie Sakurai-Lopez
Cory Williams	Jan Tanabe	Mae Nakakihara
Dan Segawa	Jayne Watanabe	Mary Jung
Dan Yamashita	Jehiel Vinluan	Mary & Bob Keily
Deron Tokishi	Jennie Shitakubo	(siblings)
Debbie Uyeshima Dillard	Joanne Sato	Mary Marchand
Diane & Destiny	Joelle Peelgreen	Mary Tamura
Ueda-Banda	Jordan Sasaki	Maxine Butcher
Dr. DoAnn Tsuneo	Joyce Matsubara	Rev. Mike Hiranuma
Kaneko	Joye Barker	Mutsuko Nishi
Elaine Yoshida	Julie Inouye	Nancy Matsushima
Eleanor Nagai	Juliet Koyanagi	Noah Miyagawa-Sue
Faith Tanaka		Oscar Phillip Bland Jr.
Florence Nakakura		Pam Fink
Frank Sato		Paul Mito

those in Community Living & Homecare

Emma Horiuchi
Faith Tanaka
Rev. Harry Fujimoto
Irene & Tak Ryono
Jane Kiyohara
Marion Antoku
Mary Jung
Nobie Shiokari
Ruth Hirata
Sets Asano
Sue Hasegawa
Jennie Shitakubo
Fred Oshiro
Audrey Goto

for our Worldwide Community

for the Leadership of our Country and our Churches

for the immigrants: migrants, refugees, asylees

for our siblings in Christ who struggle and in need of God's care

for those who live in through wars, unrest, and violence

for those suffering and rebuilding after national disasters and man-made catastrophes

for All Our Saints

Flora and Ken Lee on the passing of Flora's Father, Harry Hayashi (August 2, 2026).

Harriet Tateyama and the Hiroshima family, on the passing of Harold Hiroshima (August 29, 2026).

The Hirai, Shimatsu, and Watari family, on the passing of June Hirai (August 18, 2026).

Amy Higa, Miki & Jon Hayashida and family, on the passing of Ramsay Higa (July 10, 2026). A private family service has been held for Mr. Higa.

Neal, Lylas, and Elaine and the Miyake family, on the passing of Chieko "Chic" Miyake (June 15, 2026). A private family service has been held for Mrs. Miyake.

The Kato family, on the passing of Doris Kato (June 28, 2026)

Jane Matsumoto and Shohara-Matsumoto family, on the passing of Hisako Shohara (June 27, 2026). Mrs. Shohara's service has been held at on August 1, 2026 at Centenary UMC.

The Yasunaga family, on the passing of Harue Yasunaga (May 29, 2026)

UPDATED 9.11.2026

Prayers & Concerns / Announcements:

Prayers for the Community

September Birthdays:

- Jason Sasaki, 9-14-26
- Tak Ryono turned 99 on 9-6-26
- Claretta Foster turned 93 in August
- Cassie Iki, 9-14-26
- (Harry Takaki, 98, October 18)
- (Alice Kajiya, 99, November 26)

Prayer Concerns

- Kim Foster (meniscus tear)
- Alvena Fukuhara at Kei-Ai
- Sue Hamada at home recuperating
- Herb Aoyama is recovering at home
- Barbara Takumi
- Winnie Osaki at Kei-Ai
- Ken Ito (successful knee surgery)
- Doris Shigihara
- Arlene Santiago
- Bone Family* - Pam Fink (Christine's Mom), Liz Harner (Alan's Mom)
- Louise Sakamoto*
- Diane Ueda-Banda
- Victoria DelaTorre
- Hozue Miyasaka* (friend of Rev. Allison)

Absent from the Body, Present with the Lord.

- Larry Takumi passed on 9/15/26
- June Hirai passed away (Keith Watari) - Jane Shimatsu's sister
- Harold Hiroshima - Harriet Tateyama's brother-in-law

Prayers for the World:

- Hurricanes/Flooding, Earthquakes, Fires
- Wars and Harm
- Elections this Fall

And Know that He is God: Closing Prayer & Blessing

Church, (metaphorically) take one last look at your stones.

Every stone represents a story. Some we know. Most we don't.

But we know this: **We are not meant to carry everything forever.**

The door is open. And I think that is what grace looks like.

Grace is God holding the door open for us. We come carrying our failures, our regrets, our wounds, our questions— and God says: **Come in.** You still belong. There is still room. There is still a future. And perhaps forgiveness is learning how to hold that door open for someone else. Not by pretending the harm didn't happen. Not by abandoning justice. Not by removing boundaries. But by refusing to let our hurt have the final word.

So as we leave today, remember: **Some things can be remembered without being carried.**

Some things can be grieved without becoming hatred. Some relationships can be repaired. Some need boundaries. Some stones can be set down today. Some will take time.

But the invitation remains. **What are you carrying? What are you ready to set down?**

And perhaps most importantly: **What will you hand to the generation after you?**

The door is open. God's grace has made room for us. So come through the door.

And when you are ready— **leave your stones at the door.** Amen.