

FORGIVEN PEOPLE FORGIVE PEOPLE

Matthew 18:21-35

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. You will be mistreated in this life. You will be victimized. At some people you will be the victim of verbal abuse, physical abuse, theft, cheating, prejudice, discrimination, unfairness, etc.
2. How should you handle it when people mistreat you?
3. I'll tell you how most people handle it. They get even. If you say something mean to them, they will say something mean to you. If you hurt them, they will hurt you. They will take revenge.
4. But is that how Christians should behave? If you are a Christian, how does God want you to respond to people when they mistreat you?
5. We're in a sermon series right now on the parables of Jesus. When Jesus taught, He told stories called parables. A parable is an earthly story about heavenly realities. It is a story about material things that illustrates spiritual things.
6. Today I want us to look at the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant.

II. TEXT: Matthew 18:21-35

21 Then Peter approached him and asked, "Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? As many as seven times?"

22 "I tell you, not as many as seven," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven.

23 "For this reason, the kingdom of heaven can be compared to a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 When he began to settle accounts, one who owed ten thousand talents was brought before him.

25 Since he did not have the money to pay it back, his master commanded that he, his wife, his children, and everything he had be sold to pay the debt.

26 "At this, the servant fell facedown before him and said, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you everything.' 27 Then the master of that servant had compassion, released him, and forgave him the loan.

28 "That servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii., He grabbed him, started choking him, and said, 'Pay what you owe!'

29 "At this, his fellow servant fell down and began begging him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' 30 But he wasn't willing. Instead, he went and threw him into prison until he could pay what was owed. 31 When the other servants saw what had taken place, they were deeply distressed and went and reported to their master everything that had happened. 32 Then, after he had summoned him, his master said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 Shouldn't you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' 34 And because he was angry, his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he could pay everything that was owed. 35 So also my heavenly Father will do to you unless every one of you forgives his brother or sister from your heart."

III. EXPLANATION

1. The parable has three scenes:
 - i. First, the king forgives the huge debt of the servant.
 - ii. Second, the servant is unwilling to forgive the small debt of his fellow servant.
 - iii. Third, the king finds out about the wicked servant's behavior and throws him into jail.
2. In this parable Jesus teaches how to respond when you are mistreated. It's called forgiveness. And this story has four lessons about forgiveness.

IV. FOUR LESSONS ABOUT FORGIVENESS

1. **You must forgive.**
 - i. Before the parable, Peter asked Jesus a question. **Matthew 18:21** "Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? As many as seven times?"
 - ii. Peter didn't ask if he had to forgive, but how many times. He knew that God wants us to forgive. This is repeated over and over in Scripture.
 - iii. Jesus said that we must commit to forgiving others when we ask God to forgive us.
 - iv. **Matthew 6:12** And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
 - v. One way to interpret this is like this: "Lord, forgive us as we commit to forgiving others." A scarier way that some interpret it

is, “Lord, forgive us according to the proportion that we forgive others.” In other words, if this is correct, this is a prayer for God to not forgive you if you refuse to forgive others!

- vi. Jesus made it clear that when you refuse to forgive others, it hurts your relationship with God.
- vii. **Matthew 6:14-15** “14 For if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. 15 But if you don’t forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offenses.
- viii. This doesn’t mean that you will lose your salvation if you refuse to forgive. It is not talking about salvation forgiveness, but fellowship forgiveness. When I sin against my wife, it doesn’t break our marriage, but it breaks our fellowship; it breaks our intimacy. When you sin against God, it doesn’t break your salvation, it breaks your fellowship with God. And God will not forgive you and restore you until you first forgive others.
- ix. Forgiveness is a must. It is an obligation. You have no choice. It is a command.
- x. What does it mean to forgive? **Forgiveness is the decision to do good to your enemy and the willingness to be reconciled.**
- xi. There are two parts to this definition.
- xii. First, forgiveness is the decision to do good to your enemy.
 - 1. **Luke 6:27-28** “27 But I say to you who listen: Love your enemies, do what is good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”
 - 2. **Romans 12:19-20** Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God’s wrath, because it is written, Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord. 20 But If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
 - 3. Forgiveness is the decision to be loving and kind and nice and helpful to your enemy.
 - 4. Don’t seek revenge. Don’t yell at him. Don’t grumble and complain about him behind his back. But do good to him.
- xiii. Second, forgiveness is the willingness to reconcile.
 - 1. It is the willingness to restore the friendship.

2. Notice the word “willingness.” For the friendship to be restored, repentance is required.
3. **Luke 17:4** Be on your guard. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.
4. For total forgiveness to take place, the offender must confess and repent, and then you must be reconciled to them. But if they don’t repent, reconciliation is impossible.
5. You can’t force them to repent, but you must always be willing and ready for reconciliation.
6. What does this willingness look like? You must go to them and point out the offense (Mt 18:15). Many times people don’t know or understand their offense.
7. Let me clarify. Forgiveness is the decision to do good to your enemy and the willingness to be reconciled.
8. You must do this even if they refuse to repent. Even if they don’t repent, you must do good to them and be willing to reconcile. But reconciliation can only happen if they repent.

2. Your forgiveness must be unlimited.

- i. **Matthew 18:21** “Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? As many as seven times?”
- ii. The Jewish rabbis taught that you must forgive someone three times and no more. So Peter was being generous by offering to forgive as many as seven times. He probably expected Jesus to say, “Not that many times.” But Jesus said something shocking.
- iii. **Matthew 18:22** “I tell you, not as many as seven,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven.”
- iv. What is seventy times seven? 490. So, was Jesus saying that you need to forgive someone 490 times? No. Jesus was saying that your forgiveness must be unlimited. No matter how many times someone sins against you, you must forgive them. You must do good to them and be willing to reconcile with them.
- v. **Luke 17:3-4** 3 Be on your guard. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. 4 And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and comes back to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”

- vi. In this scenario you are dealing with someone who is unrepentant. They sinned against you seven times in one day, and all seven times they said, “I’m sorry; I’m going to stop.” After the third time you realize, they’re not really sorry; they’re just saying that. If they were repentant, they would stop. But still, even though they are unrepentant, even though they keep sinning against you, you must forgive them.

3. You have no right to withhold forgiveness.

- i. Let’s go back to the parable. To illustrate unlimited forgiveness, Jesus told the story of the unforgiving servant.
- ii. The king was ready to settle accounts with his servants. This represents the final judgment, when all of us will have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ to be judged.
- iii. One servant was brought before the king who owed ten thousand talents. How much was that? A talent was worth 6,000 denarii. A common laborer earned about one denarius per day. Let me explain this in modern terms. Let’s say a blue-collar worker makes \$15 an hour. At 2,000 hours per year, he would earn \$30,000 per year. One talent would equal \$600,000. So, ten thousand talents is the equivalent of \$6 billion in today’s terms. In other words, it was debt that was impossible to repay, and it represents your sin debt before God. You have sinned countless times against God, and the debt is too high to be repaid. You deserve to go to hell, and there’s nothing you can do to save yourself.
- iv. So, the king decides to sell the servant and his family to help offset some of the debt. But the servant begs for mercy and says, “Be patient with me, and I will repay everything.” But shockingly, the king doesn’t give him more time to pay off the debt; instead, he forgives the debt completely. That represents the forgiveness that God gives to you. Because Jesus died to pay for your sin debt, God forgives all your sins completely.
- v. But the story doesn’t end there, does it? Next, the servant goes to his fellow servant who owes him money and demands payment, but the debt was much smaller. It was only a hundred

denarii, which in today's terms would be about \$12,000. His fellow servant doesn't have the money, so he too begs for mercy. But he wasn't willing. Instead, he threw him into prison until he could pay his debt. This represents a spirit of unforgiveness. Now let's get to the end of the story.

- vi. The other servants saw what happened, and they reported it to the king. The king was very angry, and he summoned the servant. Let's go back to what he said.
- vii. **Matthew 18:32-33** 32 Then, after he had summoned him, his master said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 Shouldn't you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?'
- viii. The king told the servant, "Really? Are you serious? You've got to be kidding me! I forgave your debt of \$6 billion. Shouldn't you have forgiven your fellow servant's debt of \$12,000?" In other words, after what I've done for you, you have no right to not forgive others.
- ix. The parables illustrate a couple of important truths:
 - 1. First, the servant's debt to the king was far greater than his fellow servant's debt. In the same way, you have sinned more against God than anyone has ever sinned against you. Think about it. Every day you sin against God in multiple ways; you either do something you aren't supposed to do, or you don't do all that God wanted you to do. Every day. Your sin against God is far greater than anyone's sin against you.
 - 2. Second, the servant was the recipient of far more mercy than he was asked to give. He was forgiven a debt of \$6 billion, and all he was asked to forgive was a debt of \$12,000. In the same way, God has forgiven you more than you will ever be asked to forgive anyone else.
- x. With that in mind, the point of the parable is that you have no right to not forgive. It is extremely inappropriate, and immoral, and hypocritical to refuse to forgive others.
- xi. The apostle Paul put it like this.

- xii. **Colossians 3:13** Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive.
- xiii. In other words, you are morally bound and required to forgive others because of the immeasurable forgiveness you have received from God.

4. Your unforgiveness is dangerous.

- i. Let's go to the end of the parable.
- ii. **Matthew 18:34-35** "34 And because he was angry, his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he could pay everything that was owed. 35 So also my heavenly Father will do to you unless every one of you forgives his brother or sister from your heart."
- iii. First, let me be very clear on what this parable does not mean. It does not mean that if you refuse to forgive others, God will revoke your salvation and send you to hell. That would contradict what the Bible clearly teaches elsewhere, specifically that salvation is by grace through faith, not by works; and that you cannot lose your salvation.
- iv. So, how should these last two verses be interpreted? There are two possible interpretations, both of them pointing to the danger of unforgiveness.
- v. First, an unwillingness to forgive is a sign that you may not be saved in the first place.
 - 1. The text says that the servant was handed over to the jailers to be tortured until he could pay the last penny. Since there's no way he could ever pay back \$6 billion dollars, that means that he was thrown into jail forever. Thus, some see this as an illustration of eternal hell, and is a warning that if you refuse to forgive others, God will refuse to forgive you and you will go to hell.
 - 2. Since you can't lose your salvation (i.e., God will not take it back from you), then the implication is that the servant represents an unbeliever, someone who has never been saved.

3. In other words, forgiven people forgive people. If you have truly experienced the unlimited forgiveness of God, then you naturally treat others with the same mercy and compassion and patience and forgiveness.
 4. Therefore, if you are unwilling to forgive, then it is a sign that you have not been saved.
 5. It is not a sure thing. Just as it is possible for a truly saved Christian to commit all kinds of sins, it is possible for a Christian to struggle with unforgiveness. However, if you persist in that struggle and maintain a spirit of bitterness and unforgiveness over a prolonged period of time, then that is a sign that you are not saved.
- vi. Second, an unwillingness to forgive will result in the discipline of God.
1. As I said before, since you cannot lose your salvation, that is not what this passage is warning about.
 2. Instead, the passage is warning that unforgiveness is a sin for which God will discipline you.
 3. If God are God's child, then God will discipline you when you sin. The purpose of discipline is not to punish you; it is not to get back at you; the purpose is to teach you. The purpose of God's discipline is the same as parental discipline. When you discipline your child, it is to help them grow. God does the same with you.
 4. This passage is saying that if you refuse to forgive others, God will discipline you.

V. CONCLUSION

1. So, what have we learned today? At the risk of being redundant, I want to repeat the four lessons on forgiveness that are found in this story:
 - i. You must forgive.
 - ii. Your forgiveness must be unlimited.
 - iii. You have no right to withhold forgiveness.
 - iv. Your unforgiveness is dangerous.
2. On October 2, 2006, in Dacula, GA, Matt Swatzell was driving home from a 24-shift as a firefighter and EMS and he had only 30 minutes of sleep.

He was less than four miles from home when he heard what he calls “the most God awful sound I’ve ever heard.” Only twenty years old, he realized he had fallen asleep at the wheel and crashed. When he got out of the car, he saw the car of 30-year old June Fitzgerald. She was pregnant and with her 19-month old daughter Faith. Faith survived the crash, but her mother and unborn sibling passed away. As June’s husband, Erick, was grieving the loss of his wife and unborn child, a friend of his, a teenage girl, told him she couldn’t help but think of how the driver was feeling. He told her she was right, and he began to pray for him. When the time came for Swatzell’s sentencing, he was facing a felony and harsh time. But Fitzgerald went to the sentencing and pleaded with the judge for a lesser sentence. He said, “I didn’t see why this accident and tragedy needed to ruin any more lives.” As a result, Swatzell paid a fine and did community service. Then Fitzgerald, the husband, told the firefighter that he wanted to be a part of his life. The two started meeting every other week for meals and created a friendship. Fitzgerald helped Swatzell work through his grief as he became a father and started a family of his own. That’s forgiveness. In this story you see both the decision to do good and the willingness to be reconciled. Now I want you to listen to the justification for this forgiveness. Fitzgerald is a Christian, and this is what he said. “You forgive as you’ve been forgiven. It wasn’t an option. If you’ve been forgiven, then you need to extend that forgiveness.” (Source: [Today](#), by Ryann Blackshere, Feb 3, 2014.)

3. Let me close with some questions.
 - i. Do you need to forgive someone?
 - ii. Do you need to start doing good to someone who has mistreated you?
 - iii. Do you need to decide to be willing to be reconciled with someone who has hurt you?
 - iv. Do you need to reach out to someone and tell them that they have hurt you, so that the reconciliation process can begin?