

Forgiveness

Stories Jesus Told: Part 1

Discussion Questions

1. The message explains that a parable acts like a window, a mirror, and a doorway. When you look into the "mirror" of this story about forgiveness, what does it honestly show you about how you forgive others?
2. In Matthew 18:21, Peter approaches Jesus asking if he should forgive someone who sins against him "up to seven times?" Why do you think it is our human nature to want to place a strict limit or boundary on our grace?
3. Jesus counters Peter by stating we must forgive "seventy-seven times." How does this radical, seemingly limitless standard change the way we should handle recurring conflicts or ongoing offenses in our closest relationships?
4. The message outlines four things that forgiveness does *not* mean: instantly restoring trust, eliminating boundaries, removing consequences, or guaranteeing reconciliation. Why is it liberating to realize that you can fully forgive someone while still maintaining healthy, protective boundaries?
5. Compare the massive debt of the ten thousand bags of gold to the smaller debt of one hundred silver coins. How does actively remembering the unpayable debt that God has canceled for us change our perspective on the offenses others commit against us?
6. We learn that forgiveness is incredibly hard because it always costs something—specifically, choosing to absorb the wrong yourself. What does it practically look like to "absorb the wrong" in a situation rather than demanding retaliation or personal repayment?
7. Jesus warns that withholding forgiveness ultimately leads to a "tortured heart." Have you ever experienced the internal, emotional "torture" of holding onto a grudge? How did it affect your spiritual life and peace of mind?
8. The message suggests that persistent unforgiveness may reveal that a person has never truly understood or experienced the mercy and grace of God. Why is a deep, personal realization of God's grace a prerequisite to genuinely forgiving others from the heart?
9. Forgiveness is described as both an *event* (the initial decision to forgive) and a *process* (learning to walk in it over time). When you have made the definitive decision to forgive someone, what steps can you take to stay faithful to the *process* when old feelings of hurt or anger resurface?
10. When you choose to forgive, you make three profound commitments: not to bring the offense up to the offender, not to bring it up to other people, and not

to continually bring it up to yourself. Which of these three promises do you find the most challenging to uphold, and how can you rely on the Holy Spirit to help you keep it?

Summary

When Jesus shared a parable, He would intentionally place it alongside a spiritual truth to cause us to deeply reflect. A parable acts like a window, a mirror, and a doorway. It gives us a crucial glimpse into what God's kingdom is like, reflects something honest about us, and ultimately invites us into a process of true transformation.

We're diving into one of Jesus' most challenging parables—a message centered entirely on forgiveness. Far from a minor topic, forgiveness stands as one of the absolute essentials of the Christian life.

The Radical Measure of Forgiveness

The foundation for this teaching is laid out in Matthew 18:21-22, where Peter approaches Jesus with a question about the limits of grace. Peter asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

While Peter likely felt he was offering an incredibly generous standard, Jesus completely redefined the boundaries of human mercy. Jesus answered him, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

What Forgiveness Does Not Mean

Before we can fully understand how to extend this kind of grace, we must establish clear guardrails. There are several common misunderstandings surrounding this spiritual practice, and it helps to explicitly state **what forgiveness does not mean:**

- **Trust is instantly restored:** Granting forgiveness does not mean that relational trust is automatically or immediately rebuilt.
- **There are no boundaries:** Forgiveness does not require you to live without healthy, protective boundaries.
- **There are no consequences:** Choosing to forgive does not eliminate the real-world consequences of an action.
- **Reconciliation takes place:** Forgiveness is a personal mandate, but it does not mean mutual reconciliation will automatically occur.

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

To illustrate the reality of the kingdom, Jesus shares a vivid story in Matthew 18:23-25. He explains that the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As the settlement began, a man who owed the king an astronomical debt of ten thousand bags of gold was brought before him. Because the servant was entirely unable to pay, the master ordered that he, his wife, his children, and everything he owned be sold to repay the debt.

The narrative shifts dramatically in Matthew 18:26-27. At this terrible order, the servant fell on his knees before him, begging, "Be patient with me, and I will pay back everything." Moved by this display, the servant's master took pity on him, canceled the entire debt, and let him go free. For Jesus' audience listening to this story unfold, the message was instantly clear: this man had absolutely no hope of ever paying back what he owed on his own.

The Trap of Unforgiveness

However, the story takes a dark turn in Matthew 18:28. When that very same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a mere hundred silver coins. Instead of extending the immense grace he had just received, he grabbed the man, began to choke him, and demanded, "Pay back what you owe me!"

According to Matthew 18:29-30, his fellow servant fell to his knees and begged using the exact same words: "Be patient with me, and I will pay it back." But the first servant completely refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown directly into prison until he could pay back the debt.

This stark contrast highlights a profound truth: forgiveness is incredibly hard because it costs something. Whenever you choose to forgive, you are making the conscious choice to absorb the wrong yourself.

The Severe Warning of the Master

The narrative concludes with an accounting of this hypocrisy in Matthew 18:31-33.

When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went to tell their master everything. The master called the servant back in and said, "You wicked servant, I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?"

In Matthew 18:34-35, the final judgment is handed down. In open anger, his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

Jesus then applies this warning directly to us: "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

This is undeniably a difficult saying of Jesus, but He provides it to warn us of two critical

spiritual realities:

- **A tortured heart:** First, holding onto unforgiveness directly leads to a tortured heart.
- **An unmet grace:** Second, persistent unforgiveness may reveal that a person has never truly understood or experienced the mercy and grace of God in their own life.

Clothed in Compassion

How then are we instructed to live? Paul writes about this standard clearly in Colossians 3:12-13. As God's chosen people, who are holy and dearly loved, we are called to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. We must bear with each other and actively forgive one another if any of us has a grievance against someone. The ultimate standard remains absolute: we must forgive as the Lord forgave us.

The Path Forward: Event and Process

In daily practice, we must recognize that forgiveness operates in two distinct dimensions: it is both an event and a process.

- **The Event:** This is the initial, definitive decision to forgive.
- **The Process:** This is the ongoing journey of learning to walk in that forgiveness over time.

When you make the decision to forgive someone, you are committing to several profound promises:

- **First,** you promise not to bring the offense up to the offender.
- **Second,** you promise not to bring the offense up to other people.
- **Third,** you promise not to continually bring the offense up to yourself.