

# The Unforgiving Servant

Matthew 18:21-35

PPT Title

## The Unforgiving Servant

**Main Point:** We should forgive others because God has forgiven us.

**Key Verse:** *Be kind and tender to one another. Forgive each other, just as God forgave you because of what Christ has done.* - Ephesians 4:32

**Props:** Small sack of silver coins.

### BACKGROUND

**Say:** We have been looking at the parables, or stories with meaning, that Jesus told. Through the parables, we can learn a lot about the kingdom of God. Last week, we read the parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of great value. In these two parables, Jesus showed that the kingdom of God is more valuable than anything else in the world.

Today we will look at a parable about forgiveness. In it, Jesus teaches about God's forgiveness for us, and our forgiveness for others. Today we'll find answers to difficult questions like, "How many times should we forgive others who hurt us?" and "What happens if we don't forgive?" The Bible is God's Word, and it is always true. We should remember to look in the Bible for answers to every question! Turn with me to Matthew 18:21.

### FORGIVING KING

**Teacher Note:** We must be careful not to over-analyze the parables. The kingdom of God is very different from, and far superior to, the material world. Therefore, there is no perfect comparison between this life and kingdom life. Jesus is emphasizing only certain points, not *every* point, in which an earthly example is like the kingdom. For instance, we do not have to beg for forgiveness from God, like the servant begged his master in this parable. Further, the king cannot see into the man's heart as God can, and the king's spirit cannot enter the servant as God's Spirit enters into all who believe.



**Say:** *Peter came to Jesus. He asked, "Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"*

*Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but (seventy times seven)."* - Matthew 18:21-22

**Teacher Note:** Seventy times seven is a more accurate translation than 77 times.

Peter probably thought he was being very generous to suggest that he should forgive someone seven times, because the Jewish teachers taught that three times was the limit (Jewish Talmud Yoma 87a). But Jesus' ways, the ways of the kingdom of God, were very different than man's ways. Jesus gave a number that showed forgiveness without limit. Then Jesus told this story:



*The kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to collect all the money his servants owed him. As the king began to do it, a man who owed him millions of dollars was brought to him. The man was not able to pay. So his master gave an order. The man, his wife, his children, and all he owned had to be sold to pay back what he owed.* - Matthew 18:23-25

Millions of dollars is an **impossible** amount for a servant to repay. He had no more money than you do! Would you be able to pay a 10 million dollar debt? The servant who owed this money knew that he was in serious trouble. Have you ever owed somebody something that you could not repay? It is a very scary feeling to know that you are not able to pay. In this case, the man owed money to a very powerful king. The king could do whatever he wanted to the man. The king ordered that this man, his wife, and his children had to be SOLD as slaves to pay back what he owed. Can you imagine how shocking this would be to your family? Can you imagine how frightened and sad this man's wife and children must have been?

It's very interesting to note what the servant said next:



*The servant fell on his knees in front of him. "Give me time," he begged. "I'll pay everything back."* - Matthew 18:26

**Say:** This servant probably earned just a few cents per day. Even if he worked for the rest of his life, he could NEVER earn millions of dollars to pay off this debt. Millions of dollars was more money than he would ever have. This debt was **IMPOSSIBLE** to pay, but **the man did not understand how enormous his debt was**. He mistakenly thought he could pay it back, but the King knew better. The wise King knew that this was an IMPOSSIBLE amount. So look what the king did next:

*"The king felt sorry for him. He forgave him what he owed and let him go."* - Matthew 18:27

The King had all the power, and he certainly had the right to be paid back. But the king withheld his wrath. He did not punish the man; he did not sell the servant or his family as slaves; he didn't throw the man in prison. What is most amazing is that the King canceled the man's debt.



**This gift was not free for the King.** This gift cost the King millions of dollars. But it was absolutely free for the servant. Forgiveness is never free. It costs something for the one who is doing the forgiving. Out of grace, the king gave his servant something costly that the servant did not deserve.

WOW! Can you imagine owing millions of dollars to someone who was just about to sell you and your family as slaves and then suddenly being forgiven? That is AMAZING! Once this kind of forgiveness is offered, it should change the heart of the one it is offered to. This forgiveness should have changed the man from the inside out.

**Application:** This story is a parable, so we know there is more to it than just an interesting story. Jesus said that this is like the kingdom of God. The King in the story represents God, as you might guess. The servant is each of us. But what is the debt that was impossible to pay?

When someone does something wrong to you, that person owes you something. They may owe you payment because they took something from you, or they may owe you fixing what they broke, or at the very least, they owe you an apology. They owe you whatever it takes to undo the wrong.

Each one of us has done something wrong to God. We have each broken His rules. We have sinned against the perfect God who created us (Psalm 14:2-3). So in the story, the enormous debt is the sin debt that we owe to God. God is perfectly holy, and our sin makes us unholy. There is actually nothing we can do to undo our sin. Like the servant in the story who begged for more time to pay what he owed, we might **imagine** that we could somehow pay off this debt. We may want time to work harder and do good things to undo our wrongs. But we are even more in debt than the servant who owed 10 million dollars. No amount of money or good deeds could ever undo our sin (Isaiah 64:6). It is a debt that we cannot pay. It is the IMPOSSIBLE debt.

But just like the King in the story, our God knows we cannot pay our sin debt. He looks 2



at us with compassion like the King looked at his begging servant. God has all the power, and He has the right to punish us, but He chose to pay the cost Himself. He came, in the form of Jesus, to pay for our debt. When we put our faith in Jesus, not only are our sins forgiven, but we also receive new life and incredible blessings in God's kingdom. This is God's grace to us. His forgiveness is free to us, even though it cost Him dearly.

**Teacher Note:** When we forgive someone, we pay in full for his wrong. Since God is forgiving by nature, He pays in full for our sins. That is what Jesus Christ was doing on that cross. He was not a third party trying to get God and man together. **He was the offended One**, God in flesh, who came to earth to pay for man's forgiveness. As the Apostle Paul put it, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19). - Richard L. Strauss, *He Will Abundantly Pardon*, www.Bible.org.

How should we respond to this merciful gift? When forgiveness like this is offered to us, it should produce a change in our hearts. We should repent (or turn from) the wrongs we have done. We should put our trust in Jesus - accepting the amazing gift that He offers. We should feel complete relief and it should change us!

### UNFORGIVING SERVANT

**Say:** Jesus' parable does not end there.



*But then that servant went out and found one of the other servants who owed him a few dollars. He grabbed him and began to choke him. "Pay back what you owe me!" he said.*

*The other servant fell on his knees. "Give me time," he begged him. "I'll pay you back."*



*But the first servant refused. Instead, he went and had the man thrown into prison. The man would be held there until he could pay back what he owed. - Matthew 18:28-30*

**Say:** Instead of being really thankful to be set free from a HUGE debt, the servant went out to find a person who owed him just a few dollars. If you can imagine the room we are sitting in filled to the ceiling with gold, that's how much the servant owed the king.

**Teacher:** Hold up your few coins. Compare that to this small sack of silver, which is how much the servant was owed. This was a **small debt – one that easily could have been repaid**. When the man asked for more time to pay, the first servant refused and had him thrown into prison.



It may be that the first servant did not believe that his debt was truly forgiven. Maybe it seemed too good to be true. Perhaps he thought the king would change his mind and demand the money one day. The man may have demanded his few dollars because he did not grasp the finality of the king's decree, "Forgiven!"

Or perhaps the first servant was just acting in a terrible, selfish way. Maybe he did not appreciate what the King had done for him. Maybe he thought he could act any way he wanted, instead of following the example of his King. But either way, **his actions proved that he did not have a heart change** (1 John 3:10).

Think about the parable of the four soils that we studied. The first servant is like the **hard path or rocky soil**. He heard the truth of forgiveness from the King, but it did not sink in. It did not take root in his heart. It did not change him. If that truth had taken root, it would have produced the fruit of forgiveness in his life. He would have forgiven the man who owed him a little.



**Application:** Knowing that the king is a symbol for God, and the first servant stands for us, whom does the second servant stand for? *Anyone who hurts us or offends us*. Because we are sinful and God is perfectly holy, the wrongs we do to each other are very small compared to the wrongs we do to God.



When we truly understand how much God has forgiven us, our hearts will be like the **good soil**. Forgiveness will take root and produce the fruit of forgiveness for others. Those who don't forgive others truly do not understand how bad their own sin is. They do not understand the IMPOSSIBLE sin debt that they owe to God, which God Himself came to pay for.

## **PUNISHMENT**

**Say:** Finally, let's see what the King thought about the servant's actions.

*The other servants saw what had happened. It troubled them greatly. They went and told their master everything that had happened.*



*Then the master called the first servant in. "You evil servant," he said. "I forgave all that you owed me because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on the other servant just as I had mercy on you?" In anger his master turned him over to the jailers. He would be punished until he paid back everything he owed.*

(Jesus said,) *This is how My Father in heaven will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.* - Matthew 18:31-35

Here, Jesus makes the point that God is most concerned with the heart. The King in the story could see what was in the first servant's heart by seeing his actions. The man's actions gave proof that his heart was unwilling to forgive. God is NOT limited by what He can see on the outside. God sees the heart (Acts 1:24).

Jesus is NOT saying that God would ever take back His forgiveness from someone. The truth is that anyone who has realized the depth of his own sin (is poor in spirit) and humbly receives the forgiveness that God offers by grace will forgive others. If they don't forgive, it is proof that they are not part of God's kingdom (1 John 3:10, 2 Corinthians 13:5, 2 Peter 1:9-11).

Forgiveness is the key to the kingdom of God. We enter when our sin debt is forgiven. Who could enter eternal joy through forgiveness from the holy God, and then withhold forgiveness from someone else?

**Application:** Even so, sometimes it is really difficult to forgive. Sometimes someone has truly done something hurtful to you. When that is the case, spend some time thinking about Jesus. He had NEVER done anything wrong to ANYONE - NEVER one mean word or unkind act. Who among us could say that we had never done anything wrong? Yet Jesus WILLINGLY went to the cross. All the wrong things that you would ever do were placed on Him at that moment. He willingly died to pay your sin debt. The innocent one died for the guilty ones. And He FREELY gives His forgiveness. When we consider what Jesus did for us, is there ever a time when we cannot forgive? God's word links our forgiving others with His forgiveness of us (Matthew 7:2, Colossians 3:13, Matthew 5:7, 6:14-15).

### **PPT Key Verse**

*Be kind and tender to one another. Forgive each other, **just as God forgave you** because of what Christ has done.* - Ephesians 4:32

### **PPT Main Point**

**Main Point:** We should forgive others because God has forgiven us.

**Teacher Note:** The jailers in Matthew 18:34 would represent Satan and his demons. Consider the startling word picture in the NIV translation: *In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.* This would amount to eternal torture. James 2:13 says, "There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when He judges you." NLT