

## PARABLE OF THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT

### Matthew 18:21-31

#### Biblical Context

#### The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant Matthew 18:23-35

#### Big Picture Lessons

- My sin creates a huge debt to God that I could never pay.
- God's merciful, free gift of forgiveness has great, infinite value.  
John 3:16
- When we don't forgive others, at best, we are showing our ignorance of and ingratitude for being forgiven. At worst, we are demonstrating that we have never truly experienced God's forgiveness. We reveal the true condition of our heart by the way we treat others.

David Seamands in *Healing of Damaged Emotions*:

Many years ago, I was driven to the conclusion that the two major causes of emotional problems among evangelical Christians are these: the failure to understand, receive, and live out God's unconditional grace and forgiveness; and the failure to give out that unconditional love, forgiveness, and grace to other people. The failure to see and know and feel grace drives many Christians to the tragic treadmill of performing, achieving, and striving.

### Lesson on Forgiveness

#### Why should we forgive?

- Jesus commands it.
  - Mark 11:25
  - Luke 17:4
- Because God forgave us.
  - Ephesians 4:32
- So our relationship with God will not be hindered.
  - This doesn't mean we will lose our salvation, but our fellowship will be affected.
- Because it is necessary for the unity of the Church, Christ's Body.
  - So our fellowship with other Christians will not be hindered.
  - John 17:20, 21, 23
  - Hebrews 12:15

- For our own physical and emotional well-being.
  - Physicians tell us that many of our physical ailments we experience are directly related to unresolved bitterness – which results when we hold grudges and don't forgive.

Per WebMD: Besides the emotional toll, researchers in Scotland found that holding a grudge can also heighten feelings of physical pain, even if that pain has nothing to do with the incident in question. So, if your lower back is bothering you and you have the achiness of arthritis, your pain can feel worse if you're stewing over the grudge.

- It has been said that "Resentment is like a glass of poison that a man drinks, and then he sits down and waits for his enemy to die."
  - Psalm 73:21-22
  - Past unresolved hurts are attached to current ones and mole hills become mountains.
- To shine the spotlight on God.

### How to forgive

- Recognize who you need to forgive.
  - Lewis Smedes in *Forgive & Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve*: None of us wants to admit that we hate someone...When we deny our hate we detour around the crisis of forgiveness. We suppress our spite, make adjustments, and make believe we are too good to be hateful. But the truth is that we do not dare to risk admitting the hate we feel because we do not dare to risk forgiving the person we hate.
  - Periodically, we all need to take a spiritual assessment and ask the Lord if we have any unresolved forgiveness issues – whether I'm the offender or offended. Psalm 139:23-24
  - The offenses may be little or big. They may have happened a long time ago, or yesterday. But they need to be specific and directly attributable to individuals who wronged you.
  - They are not unmet expectations, i.e. when someone doesn't act in a way you wanted.
- Ask God to give you the power to forgive.
  - Forgiveness is really hard and requires strength we don't naturally possess. It is dying to our right to be angry and resentful. We are giving up the right to hurt the offender. This requires the power of the Holy Spirit.
  - Philippians 2:13 – For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

- Meditate on how much God has forgiven you.
  - Corrie ten Boom, who was imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II for hiding Jews went all over the world speaking of the importance of forgiveness. One night after the service concluded, a man approached her and she recognized him as one of the camp's guards, a beast she had despised. Here she was, the voice of forgiveness, and she was overwhelmed with hatred toward him.

She prayed, "Jesus, I can't forgive this man. Forgive me." At once, in some wonderful way that she was unprepared for, she felt forgiven. Forgiven for not forgiving. At that moment – in the power of the fundamental feeling – her hand went up, took the hand of her enemy, and released him. In her heart she freed him from his terrible past. And she freed herself from hers. The linkage between feeling forgiven and the power to forgive is the key to everything else.
  - Lewis Smedes: To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover the prisoner is you.
  - In the parable, the unforgiving servant is thrown into prison. The worst prison is being trapped with an unforgiving heart.
- Meditate on the fact God will not forgive us if we don't forgive others.
  - Lord's Prayer – Matthew 6:12
  - Matthew 6:14
- View the situation from God's perspective.
  - Genesis 50:20
  - Romans 8:28
  - Look for the good God brings into your life.
  - See the offender through God's eyes.
  - Martha Kirkpatrick: Forgiveness is accepting God's sovereign use of people and situations to strip you of self-importance, and humiliate your self-love.
- Realize that forgiveness is a process.
  - Requires laying our hurts before the Throne more than once.
  - We may need to go through the process of asking forgiveness for our unforgiveness.
  - God may lead you to show love in tangible ways to the offender.
  - Most of the time the forgiving process is subtle, like moving from childhood to adulthood. Not sure when it really happened, but one day we wake up and realize we don't have the same bad feelings toward the offender. We feel released.

- Recognize that forgiveness is not about feeling, but is an act of the will.
  - Jay Adams in *The Christian's Counselor's Manual*:  
Forgiveness means no longer continuing to dwell on the sin that was forgiven.  
Forgiveness is the promise not to raise the issue again to the offender, to others or to himself. Brooding is a violation of the promise made in granting forgiveness.
- Recognize that forgiveness is not contingent on the offender's asking for forgiveness, or even being sorry.
  - Our holding a grudge won't bring the offender to repentance faster.
  - Forgiveness is letting God be the one to dispense justice in the situation, in His timing.
  - Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation.
- Know that forgiveness does not absolve the offender from the consequences of his actions.
  - We do not say that the offense was okay.
  - Forgiveness does not necessarily result in absolution.
  - Pope John Paul II visited his would-be assassin soon after the shooting in 1981, but he did not issue a pardon until 2000, 19 years later.
- Assess if you need to confront the offender with the sin.
  - Pray.
  - If God leads you to confront the offender with his sin, use the Biblical process in Matthew 18:15-20.
  - God can use our forgiveness as a spark in the offender's reconciliation with God.
  - One of the evidences of true forgiveness is the ability to genuinely want God to work positively in the life of the offender.
- Leave the results to God.
  - Romans 12:19
  - II Timothy 4:14
  - I Peter 2:23

Lewis Smedes:

When we forgive, we come as close as any human being can to the essentially divine act of creation. For we create a new beginning out of past pain that never had a right to exist in the first place. We create healing for the future by changing a past that had no possibility in it for anything but sickness and death.

Martha Kilpatrick:

We are all on a life long journey and the core of its meaning, the terrible demand of its centrality, is forgiving and being forgiven.

Prayer: Lord, I ask for You to shine Your spotlight on my heart and show me any areas of bitterness resulting from grudges I am holding on to. Show me people who have wronged me, whom I need to forgive. I ask for the willingness to forgive and clear direction exactly what I need to do and say. Thank You for forgiving me the debt I could never pay and giving me the precious gift (eternal life) I could never earn. Help me to never forget and as a result, become one who quickly forgives. Amen

### **For Further Study**

1. What are your main takeaways from this Parable?
2. What does Mark 11:25 teach about the relationship between forgiveness and prayer?
3. “The important thing about prayer is not simply getting an answer, but being the kind of person whom God can trust with an answer.” What does this quote mean to you and how can you apply it?
4. How does the lack of forgiving each other affect the Church (Hebrews 12:15)? Give examples of when you have seen this.
5. How does God’s forgiveness relate to my forgiving someone who offended me?
6. How should you treat your offender according to the following verses?
  - Exodus 23:4
  - Proverbs 24:17-18
  - Matthew 5:44
  - Luke 23:34, Acts 7:60
  - Romans 12:20-21
7. What is the difference between being wronged and being offended because of unmet expectations? Give examples.
8. What are tangible ways you can show love to those who have offended you?
9. Some offenses require our confronting the offender, and some we should just extend mercy to the offender and let it go. How would you discern which path to take?