

# THE PARABLE OF THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

## DAY 1: FORGIVENESS (MATTHEW 18:21-22)

Because our lives are filled with relationships with other people, being hurt by someone is a fact of life. Since people have different ideas on how a relationship should work, they may respond differently to life's circumstances. Sometimes people accidentally hurt us and quickly apologize. Other times people hurt us intentionally or even repeatedly. Regardless of the specific circumstances, we have to decide whether or not to forgive the person who offends us.

Read Matthew 18:21-22. In typical fashion, Peter asked a question that the other disciples were likely thinking: "How many times do I have to forgive someone before I can walk away from the situation?" Peter thought he was going above and beyond the requirements taught by the Jewish religious leaders. Instead of forgiving someone three times, he expressed willingness to forgive someone seven times. However, Jesus presented an even greater understanding of forgiveness. Jesus used hyperbole, an expression of speech, to explain that Peter should forgive a person as many times as the person sinned against him.

When have you questioned how many times you should forgive someone? Do you forgive someone as often as they hurt you? Why is this such a difficult command to follow?

## DAY 2: CONSEQUENCES (MATTHEW 18:23-25)

One of my least favorite parts about growing up was getting in trouble. I had two brothers, and we all liked to roughhouse. Needless to say, we got in trouble quite a bit. We knew we would have consequences for our actions; we just thought our fun outweighed the punishment . . . sometimes. But then there were the times when the consequences far outweighed the momentary fun we'd had. Needless to say, as adults, we've realized that every decision we make has a consequence associated with it, both good and bad.

Read Matthew 18:23-25. In Jesus' parable, a king was ready to collect the money owed to him. One of his servants owed him a great deal. Because this servant had chosen to accrue debt without paying any of it off, he had amassed a debt so great that he had no hope of repaying it at all. The king had the right and ability to pronounce consequences on this man. Not only was this man facing serious consequences, his poor choices meant that the safety and wellbeing of every member of his family and all of his possessions were threatened. While his consequences may seem harsh, they were the normal ramifications for a person in debt.

Why is it important to think about the consequences your actions will bring? When have you have changed your actions because you did not want the negative consequences?

## DAY 3: BENDING THE KNEE (MATTHEW 18:26-27)

As much as we like to think we can take care of ourselves, eventually a time will come when we need a little help from someone: "If you help me move, I will . . ." or "If you pay this bill, I will . . ." When things seem hopeless, even a prideful person will put away his pride and beg for help when facing impossible circumstances.

Read Matthew 18:26-27. The man owed the king a huge amount of money and he had no real hope of repaying the debt. When the king called for him to settle his debt, even though he had nothing to offer the king, he still begged for more time to pay off his debts. He did not want to be a slave for the rest of his life; he did not want his family to be slaves for the rest of their lives; he did not want to lose all of his possessions. He was desperate, so he begged the king to give him time. Instead of giving him time, the king completely forgave his debt. The king went above and beyond what he was asked to do because he was a generous and forgiving king.

What circumstances have brought you to a point where you had to beg for help? How did you feel when you were given what you needed? When has the burden of your sin led you to plead with God for forgiveness? How did you feel when the sin was forgiven?

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## DAY 4: REPAYING KINDNESS WITH HARSHNESS (MATTHEW 18:28-30)

Have you ever gone out of your way to show kindness to someone only to have him or her hurt you? Maybe you bought lunch for a co-worker when his budget was tight, but then he took credit for your work on an important project. Maybe your teenager cleaned your neighbor's house when she was sick, and then later the neighbor accused her of stealing jewelry. Maybe you've even seen this tendency among little kids. One child shares his toy with another. When it is time to repay that kindness, the other child refuses to share her toy. Many people, deep down, have a selfish tendency.

Read Matthew 18:28-30. This man had been forgiven a debt so great that he would have never been able to earn enough to repay it. And yet, the kindness of the king had no effect on his selfish heart. He sought out someone who owed him a small amount of money in comparison, and then selfishly required to be paid in full immediately. When the man begged for more time, the forgiven servant showed no kindness to the one who owed him money. Instead he had him thrown in prison until the debt was paid.

Do you struggle with forgiving others? Does knowing and remembering that God sent Jesus to pay your debts impact how you treat others?

## DAY 5: FORGIVENESS MATTERS (MATTHEW 18:31-35)

Bitterness is a terrible feeling that often begins when we don't fully understand the need to forgive those who have hurt us. When we have something against another person and never deal with it, this bitterness will continue to grow within our hearts. Sooner or later, the bitterness affects everything. It determines how we interact with that person. It consumes our thoughts and actions. It even influences how we relate to other people who haven't hurt us. Bitterness can completely change us. If bitterness is such a powerful poison in our lives, what is the antidote?

Read Matthew 18:31-35. When people saw that the forgiven servant had refused to forgive others, they became greatly distressed. As a result, they went and told the king, and he became angry. The king believed that this man should practice forgiveness because he had received a great deal of forgiveness himself. Because he did not forgive, the king punished the man. God, likewise, punishes those who do not practice the forgiveness that they have been shown.

God has offered everyone forgiveness through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Because of this great gift, we are called to love and forgive the ones around us. Have you accepted the forgiveness that God offers? Are you living out that forgiveness by forgiving others?