

THE PARABLE OF THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

(15–20 minutes, easy setup)

Use this outline and the Biblical Commentary to prepare to share the truths of this passage with learners.

Encourage learners to take notes on their copies of the Learner Worksheet as you teach.

The underlined words in the Master Teacher Outline correspond to the blanks on the worksheet.

Introduction: What are some of the ways that people hurt or offend us? The offenses might be small (like failing to say hello or appreciate an act of kindness) or huge (like betraying a confidence or siding with an adversary against us). While we may easily forgive the occasional small slight, we find it more difficult to forgive repeated small offenses or even a single huge offense. In this lesson, we'll study Jesus' response to Peter's question: "How many times must I forgive someone?"

1. Believers are expected to generously forgive people who sin against them (Matthew 18:21-22).

- In his efforts to understand God's expectations for forgiveness, Peter offered to forgive someone seven times, which was more than twice the requirements of the Pharisees (v. 21).
- To emphasize that forgiveness should have no limits, Jesus prescribed "seventy-seven times" (ESV) or "seventy times seven" (NASB).

Illustration: Warren Wiersbe said: "By the time we have forgiven a brother that many times, we are in the habit of forgiving." He explained that when we choose to forgive, rather than condemn, a brother who repeatedly sins, "we create an atmosphere of love and forgiveness, we can help God bring out the best in him" (*Be Loyal*, kindle location 2332).

2. Believers have received extravagant and unmerited forgiveness from God (Matthew 18:23-27).

- To illustrate the magnitude of God's forgiveness, Jesus told a parable about a servant whose debt was so great that he could never repay it (vv. 23-24).
- Although the king could have ordered the servant to be sold into slavery, he responded mercifully to the servant's pleas for patience and forgave his enormous debt (vv. 25-27).

Reflective Questions: When did you become aware of the magnitude of your sin debt before God? How did you feel when you confessed those sins and received His extravagant and unmerited forgiveness?

3. Believers who refuse to forgive others will not receive God's forgiveness (Matthew 18:28-35).

- Even though the first servant had received unmerited forgiveness of his debt, he refused to forgive an insignificant debt by enforcing a severe punishment (vv. 28-30).
- When servants reported the forgiven servant's refusal to forgive another servant, the king condemned him to severe punishment (vv. 31-34).
- Because **People are God's Treasure**, God expects His children to forgive others as completely as He has forgiven them (v. 35).

Illustration: Debbie Przybylski acknowledged that "forgiving others is very hard," but went on to say: "The love of Christ is the only way we can set free those who have deeply wounded us. . . . There is perhaps no greater gift you can offer God than a heart that knows the power of forgiveness and decides to set others free. Forgiving shows that the love, grace, and mercy of Jesus are operating in our lives" (available from <http://www.crosswalk.com/faith/prayer/the-power-of-forgiveness.html>).

Conclusion: To heal and restore our relationship with Him, God extended His incredible forgiveness to us. As a result, we have both the privilege and obligation to restore relationships with others by extending forgiveness to those who offend us. If we choose to withhold forgiveness, our relationship with those people—and with God—will suffer.