

Fix Your Eyes on Jesus' Path to Reconciliation: "Released him and forgave"

Focus Passage: Matthew 18:21-35

Larger Context: Matthew 18:10-35

Other Passages Referenced: Luke 4:18-19; Romans 5:8; Ephesians 4:30-32; 1 Timothy 5:20

Sermon Recap

As a continuation to Jesus' teaching about going and talking gently and clearly with someone who has sinned against in hopes that they will hear God's call to repentance and not go astray—carefronting them rather than confronting them—Peter asks just how many times we are supposed to forgive the same person. It is natural to conclude that there is a limit to what our emotions and frustrations can bear.

Jesus responded to Peter's questions by essentially saying, "Stop counting and start forgiving." If we're counting the number of times we've needed to forgive, we need to learn more about how to forgive. If we're counting, we don't adequately understand how much we have been forgiven. To help Peter and us stop counting and start forgiving, Jesus offers a parable that will help us answer three questions about forgiveness: (1) What is forgiveness? (2) Why do we struggle with forgiveness? And (3) How do we forgive?

What is forgiveness? Forgiveness is releasing our claim on what we believe we are rightly owed. We release our claim on what we feel entitled to receive: the apology, the sympathy, the understanding, the help cleaning up the mess, the money, the years of your life we spent in the relationship. We release the other person from paying those debts. We also need to recognize what forgiveness is not. Forgiveness is not the same thing as reconciliation or restoration. Forgiveness does not remove all consequences, eliminate all pain, or negate the severity of the sin.

Why do we struggle to forgive? In the parable Jesus told, the man owed a debt never came to understand how great a debt he had been forgiven. Often, we struggle to forgive because we fail to understand the great debt we owed, that God has forgiven. That lack of understanding sometimes leads us to try to pay back the debt of our sins by our own efforts, when in reality Jesus' payment on our behalf is the only sufficient and acceptable payment to our Holy God.

How do we forgive? We must sincerely offer forgiveness from the heart. Recall Jesus' warning in the parable that the *unforgiving servant* became the *unforgiven servant*. Consider these four different approaches to forgiveness: (1) Reset button forgiveness, (2) Faith forgiveness, (3) Process forgiveness, and (4) Boundary forgiveness. (These models are elaborated at <https://wcchapel.org/sundayworship/>). We must fix our eye on Jesus the Forgiver. Jesus did not go to a debtor's prison to pay our penalty. He went to the cross and the grave to pay our debt. For that reason, the Apostle Paul instructs followers of Jesus, "As God in Christ forgave you, forgive one another."

In response to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18, to help you stop counting and start forgiving, ask yourself, "Who do I need to forgive? How am I going to forgive? (Perhaps one of the four approaches mentioned above will help you answer the "how" part).

Interpretive Helps

- One talent was the largest weight measurement known in their system at the time, the equivalent of 75 pounds. 10,000 was the largest number for which the Greek language had a word at the time. In

contrast, a denarius was the way for one day of a day-laborer. The proportional difference between the 10,000 talents and the 100 denarii has been estimated as high as 1,000,000 to 1.

Group Gathering

Group Check-in — Care, Celebration, Encouragement (About 1/3 of meeting time)

1. Informal conversation to allow individuals to catch up with one another.
2. Ask if anyone would share how they've been hearing and obeying God's direction.

Allow the Word to Speak — Be Hearers of the Word (About 1/3 of meeting time)

READ Matthew 18:21–35

1. What from the passage or sermon was most impactful to you?
2. Were you left with any questions or confusion about the passage or sermon?
3. What was the likelihood of the servant owing the 10,000 talents paying back his debt as he promised to do? How long would his sentence have been after being imprisoned according to Matt 18:34?

Put the Word into Practice — Be Doers of the Word (About 1/3 of meeting time)

1. We've seen that forgiveness means releasing someone from our claim on what we believe they rightly owe us in terms of apologies, restitution, etc. We've seen in Scripture that even after forgiving someone, there may be consequences for their sin. Forgiveness does not mean we remove all consequences. If a person stole money from you, forgiving him/her does not necessarily mean you won't expect them to give back the money. Or, if someone assaulted you, forgiveness does not mean they won't have to face legal penalties. However, forgiveness does mean that you are releasing them from wishing them harm. Ask the LORD to bring to mind anyone for whom you have not forgiven from your heart, even if you may have said you forgave them.
2. If someone came to mind in #1 above, what do you need to do to release that person in forgiveness.
3. How does the fact that Jesus extended forgiveness to you at great personal cost to Himself affect how you forgive others?
4. What do you think about the idea that we are called to forgive an offender even if he/she does not apologize or repent, but we are not always called to pursue reconciliation and restoration of the relationship without repentance?
5. Have you ever found yourself trying to repay the debt of your sin by your own efforts? If yes, what changed for you or are you still trying to pay your own tab to be forgiven?

The Big Question: What do you sense God's Spirit saying to you and what concrete action will you take in response? Share your answer with the group or another trusted Christian and ask them to pray for you.

SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES: Click [here](#) for some good opportunities to serve with your group.

Stop counting & Start Forgiving—Matt. 18:21-35

- **What is forgiveness?—vv.23-27**
- **Why do we struggle with forgiveness?—vv.26-30**
- **How do we forgive?—vv.31-35**

Stop counting & Start Forgiving—Matt. 18:21-35

- **What is forgiveness?—vv.23-27**
 - **A Release**

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Luke 4:18-19 (CSB)

But those elders who are sinning you are to reprove before everyone, so that the others may take warning.

1 Timothy 5:20 (NIV)

Forgiveness is not:

- **Reconciliation—Matt. 18:17**
- **Restoration—1 Tim. 5:20**

Forgiveness does not:

- **Remove all consequences**
- **Eliminate all pain**
- **Negate the severity of sin**

Stop counting & Start Forgiving—Matt. 18:21-35

- **What is forgiveness?—vv.23-27**
- **Why do we struggle with forgiveness?—vv.26-30**
 - **We don't grasp the severity of our debt**

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

Models for forgiveness—wcchapel.org/worship

- **Reset button forgiveness**
- **Faith forgiveness**
- **Process forgiveness**
- **Boundary forgiveness**

—Michael Simone, Altitude

Application—Matt. 18:21-35

- **Who do I need to forgive?**
- **How am I going to forgive them?**

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Ephesians 4:30-32