

Parable of an Unforgiving Servant

Scripture Reference: [Matthew 18:21-35](#)



Suggested Emphasis: God has forgiven us of very much. We should forgive people from our hearts.

Memory Verse: Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. [Ephesians 4:32](#)



Background Study



Story Introduction



Telling the Story



Review Questions



Songs



Learning Activities



Other Online Resources

Story Overview:

The servant in this parable was happy when his master did not require him to repay a debt of millions of dollars. Incredibly, the servant went straight to another servant and demanded that he pay him a few dollars that he owed him. When the second servant was unable to pay, the first servant threw him in prison. The master was furious.

Background Study:

This parable begins with a question from Peter. “How many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?” Peter did not say “if” a brother sins against him. He said “when” a brother sins against him. Peter knew that sooner or later, if he was in a close relationship with someone, it was inevitable that that person would hurt him in some way or another.

The question was not about the sin. This parable is not about enabling someone to continue in a sinful lifestyle by ignoring their sin problem. A person who has a problem with addictions like drugs, gambling, alcohol, promiscuity, etc. will not be helped by someone sweeping these things under the rug by “forgiving” them “seventy times seven”

times and letting them continue stumbling without professional help. This parable is not about the sin. This parable is about the forgiveness.

How do you want God to forgive you? Do you want him to keep reminding you of the sin? Do you want him to keep a record of the number of times you have asked forgiveness? No, we want God to forgive completely and to give us a clean slate on which to start all over again. This is that way we should forgive others.

How much forgiveness do you want from God? How often? Do you want him to forgive even your worst sin? Do you want him to forgive you even if you fall and do it again? How many times? That is how much and how often we should forgive others.

The servant in today's parable seems to be some kind of manager. The king would have had a number of managers handling different aspects of his kingdom. One might have managed shipping and another farming. The manager would have had charge over money and servants required to produce a profit for the king.

The king might have left the servants alone for a while. Finally, the time had come to do an "audit". The king wanted to see what the financial situation was and make sure all of the money was in the right hands. He found that one manager owed him "ten thousand talents". This was a huge debt. An average day's wages was one denarius. There were 3,000 denarii in a talent.

Jesus must have used this huge amount to emphasise that the servant could never pay off this debt. One would even wonder how he squandered such a large amount of money. At any rate, the king would probably not even regain his losses after selling the man and his family as slaves. Forgiving the debt was an incredible act of mercy.

The 100 denarii owed by the other servant was a much more manageable debt. It was still significant (100 day's wages) but the debt could probably be paid if the servant would have been patient. Instead, he did the very thing that he had begged the king not to do. He threw the man in prison. Judgement came to the unforgiving servant for what he had done.

Children are often much better at forgiveness than adults. They truly forgive and forget. They do not hold grudges. Chances are they will have a hard time thinking of examples of forgiveness because they have actually forgotten all about it. They truly forgive "from the heart" ([18:35](#)).

Other Scriptures concerning forgiveness: [Matthew 6:12-15](#); [Ephesians 4:32](#).



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Way to Introduce the Story:

Bring mail order or merchandise catalogues, newspapers or sales flyers to class today. Also have glue or tape, coloured paper, and markers available. Give the following instructions: 1. Find a picture of at least one inexpensive item you would like that you could buy for less than five dollars. Cut out the picture and glue it to your paper. 2. Find a picture of at least one item that is very costly, more than you can afford but something you would like (a stereo or dirt bike, for example). Cut out that picture and glue it to your paper. Write its price below the

picture also.

Discuss what it would be like if you owned the items and then lent them to friends. If the friends broke them would it be easy to forgive them? Would it be easier to forgive the friend that broke the big thing or the one that broke the little thing?

Today we are going to learn about a parable that Jesus told. He told a simple story so that people could understand a very important lesson about forgiveness.

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The Story:

Peter, one of Jesus' apostles came to him and asked him a question. "Lord, how many times should I forgive someone when they do something wrong to me?"

Jesus knew that we should always forgive someone if they are sorry for what they have done. Instead of saying "always" Jesus said, "Peter, you should forgive someone seventy-seven times!" Some versions of the bible even say "seventy times seven".

Then Jesus decided to tell Peter a parable to help him understand how important it is to forgive someone when they are sorry. A parable is a simple story that has a very important meaning. This is Jesus' parable:

Once there was a king who was very rich. He had many servants who worked for him. Some servants were in charge of lots of the king's money. They were also in charge of other servants.

The king decided to check to see if one of his servants was taking care of the money. When the king checked on the money he found out that his servant had not paid the bills but had borrowed the money for himself. It was not just a little money. The servant had borrowed thousands and thousands of dollars! He had borrowed so much money that he could never pay it back. This man had a huge debt.

At first the king decided the only way to get his money back was to sell the servant and all of his family as slaves. The servant was very upset. His wife and children would all have to go and live in different places. They might never see each other again. The servant begged the king to forgive him for what he had done. He begged and begged him to not sell his family as slaves.

The king felt sorry for the servant. He decided to forgive the servant for borrowing the thousands and thousands of dollars. He even told the servant that he would not have to pay the money back.

Do you think the servant was happy? Do you think that he was so happy that he treated everyone nice that day? No he did not.

As soon as the servant left the king he found another servant who owed him money. The servant only owed this man a few dollars. His debt was very small. Even though the king had been nice to him, the servant grabbed this man and began to choke him. He told him that he would throw him in prison until he paid back the few dollars.

Some of the other servants heard what had happened and went and told the king. What do you think the king thought? He had forgiven the servant a huge debt but the servant could not forgive another even a small debt.

The king was very angry and threw the man in prison. He would have to stay in prison until the debt was paid.

Do you think Peter understood the parable that Jesus told him about forgiveness? The parable means that God has forgiven us for everything we have ever done wrong to him. He has forgiven us a huge debt! Now he wants us to forgive people when they are sorry for the bad things they do to us. God forgave us a huge debt like the king in

the parable did and we should forgive others for their small debts against us. That's what the servant in the parable should have done.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection, student interaction and/or emotion. [Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

[Click here to download these illustrations and slideshow.](#) Be selective. Each teacher is unique so only use the illustrations that best relate to the way YOU are telling the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Review Questions:

1. How many times did Jesus say we should forgive someone when they sin against us? 77 times (in other words, over and over) Some versions of the bible say "seventy times seven".
2. In the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, the king forgave his servant and did not make him pay back a huge debt. Then the servant found out that another servant owed him a little money. Did he forgive the servant that owed him a small debt? No, he tried to choke him and then threw him in prison.
3. Why was the king angry with the unforgiving servant? The king forgave the servant and did not make him pay back a huge debt. The least the servant could have done was to forgive someone else when they owed him just a little money.

Song Suggestions:

- [Love is Something If You Give It Away Song](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more options.

Learning Activities and Crafts:

[\(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation\)](#)

Activities:

- This is a great story to act out. If you have only a few children in class then divide the parable into four scenes and let everyone act out the parable one scene at a time. Scene 1- the servant before the king, Scene 2- the servant with the second servant, Scene 3- the servants telling the king, and Scene 4- the servant before the king again. It would be fun to take photos or video clips of each scene and use the pictures next week for review.
- One fun way to tell this story is to have the servant tell the story from his point of view. Use a cardboard box (like the ones that refrigerators come in) to make a "prison". The servant can sit inside and tell what happened to him. Make sure you point out that this was not a true event. It was a parable that Jesus told.
- Memory Tool: Every time you say the word "forgive" hold up four fingers as if you are saying "4-give". Children will enjoy the novelty but they will also be more likely to remember to 4-give. If you happen to be teaching 4-year-olds this is particularly fun.
- Have the children find songs in the church songbook, which mention forgiveness.
- Before class write some situations on cards. Let the children draw a card and act out the situation showing

forgiveness or not. Other children will guess if the children acted out the situation in a forgiving or unforgiving way. This works best if the children are in groups of two or three.

- **Forgiveness Practice:** This requires imagination and play-acting. As the teacher you can start out by apologising to a child for some imaginary wrongdoing and then asking for forgiveness. After the child has said, "I forgive you" then everyone can clap or tell them 'good job!'. Use age appropriate scenarios that make sense in the actual daily life of the children you are teaching. Children can also practice using their own made-up scenarios. Here are some examples:
 - "Gracie, I have to tell you something sad. When you were outside I went into your room and played with your beautiful doll. When I was playing I caught the doll's pink dress on the corner of the drawer and tore it. Gracie, I am so sorry. Will you please forgive me?"
 - "Mum, I am sorry I did obey you and clean my room this morning. Will you please forgive me? I am going to go clean it right now."
 - "James, it was wrong of me to send that text to you. My words were hurtful and I know you must feel really bad. I will do my best not to send texts like that to you or anyone again. I hope you can forgive me."

Crafts:

- Make a poster using the words from the memory verse. Try using something different like glitter or paints.

Check the [Teaching Ideas](#) page on this website for ideas that are adaptable to any lesson.



[Click here for "Parable of Unforgiving Servant" printables to print on A4 size paper](#)
[Click here for "Parable of Unforgiving Servant" to print on Letter size paper \(USA\)](#)
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Other Online Resources

- [Cartoon video from "My Wonder Studio" that re-tells the story in a more modern setting and then makes application \(5 1/2 minutes long\).](#)

<https://www.pinterest.com/marynnz/jesus-parables-teachings/>
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