

Parable of an Unforgiving Servant



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

Suggested Theme: God has forgiven us very much. In the same way, we should forgive people from our hearts.

Memory Verse: “Be kind and loving to each other. Forgive each other just as God forgave you in Christ.”
[Ephesians 4:32, ICB](#)

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 could not pay, the first servant threw him in prison. When the master heard, he was furious. Now, the first servant was sent to prison. Jesus said that our Heavenly Father would feel the same towards us if we did not forgive others from the heart.

Background Study:

[Information about teaching the Parables](#)

This parable begins with Peter’s question. “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 somehow.

The question was not about sin. This parable is not about enabling someone to continue a sinful lifestyle by ignoring their sin problem. A person with 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 sin. This parable is about 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 for forgiveness? No, we want God to forgive completely and give us a fresh start. This is the 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 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 the financial situation and ensure all 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 repay 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 days’ wages), but the debt could probably have been paid if the servant had been patient. Instead, he did what 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 forgotten all about it. They truly forgive “from the heart” ([18:35](#)).

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

Way to Introduce the Story:

Collect mail order or merchandise catalogues, newspapers or sales flyers. Provide the children with these as well as glue or tape, coloured paper, and markers. Give the following instructions:

1. Find a picture of at least one inexpensive item you would like to buy for less than five dollars. Cut out the picture and glue it to your paper.
2. Find a picture of at least one very costly item, 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 who broke the big thing or the one who broke the little thing?

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

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 told 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 very rich king. 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 checked to see if one of his servants cared for the money. When the king checked on the money, he discovered 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 not to sell his family as slaves.

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

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

When 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 threw the man in prison and told him he would have to stay 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.

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 or other group participation.

[Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

[Click here to download the slideshow](#), or [click here to download the pictures to print](#).

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how you tell 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 and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story, while reflection questions encourage them to internalize its meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. [Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.](#)

Review:

1. How often did Jesus say we should forgive someone when they sin against us? (Seventy-seven times (in other words, over and over). Some versions of the bible use the phrase “seventy times seven.”)
2. In the parable, what did the servant do when the king said everything he owned would be sold? (He fell to his knees and begged the king to be patient with him)
3. What did the king do after the servant begged? (He forgave his debt and said he didn’t have to pay anything)
4. 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 who owed him a small debt? (No, he tried to choke him and then threw him in prison)
5. 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)
6. What did the king do to the unforgiving servant when he heard he didn’t forgive the other servant? (The king made the unforgiving servant stay in jail until he paid back all he owed)
7. What is forgiveness?

Reflection:

1. What is something you wonder about in this story?
2. How do you think the unforgiving servant felt when he heard his wife and children would have to be sold?
3. How do you think the unforgiving servant felt when the king forgave him and said he didn’t have to pay any money?
4. Why do you think the unforgiving servant didn’t forgive the person who owed him a little money?
5. Why is it important to forgive people, including ourselves?
6. What did this parable show us about forgiveness?
7. Who has forgiven you?
8. Does forgiving someone make their sinful actions or words okay? (No. They still did something wrong, and it is okay to feel hurt. But, we must forgive them, and give God our hurt, letting Him take care of our heart)
9. Sometimes it is hard to forgive someone else. Why might it be hard to forgive someone?
10. What can we do when it’s hard to forgive someone? (suggestion: pray and ask God to help change our heart, know that God cares when we are hurt, and that He is the best judge)

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. [A variety of prayer methods are found here.](#)

Song Suggestions:

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

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 a small number of children, divide the parable into four scenes and let everyone act out the parable one scene at a time. With a larger group, assign a group of children to each scene.
 - Scene 1- the servant before the king,
 - Scene 2- the servant with the second servant,
 - Scene 3- the servants tell 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 will 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 hymnal that mention forgiveness.
- Before you gather, write some situations on cards. Direct children to draw the cards and act out the situation. They will choose to act out the situation using forgiveness or no forgiveness. The other children will watch and then guess which version the child used. 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 by apologising to a child for imaginary wrongdoing and then asking for forgiveness. After the child says, “I forgive you”, 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 not obey you. I didn’t 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 have felt terrible. I will do my best not to send texts like that to you or anyone again. I hope you can forgive me.”



Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. [Free printables for this story.](#)

Crafts:

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

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Print bookmarks, trading cards or timelines ([printable pages](#)).

- Visit the [Teaching Ideas](#) page for additional activities and crafts.

Other Online Resources:

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

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