

**Matthew 18:21-35**

21 Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy- seven times. 23 "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; 25 and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. 26 So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' 27 And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' 29 Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' 30 But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. 31 When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. 32 Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' 34 And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. 35 So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Of all the books in the Bible I love the gospels the most because they are about the words and actions of Jesus. His word is always congruent with the life he lived. The Scripture for today is a wonderful real life story. Peter wants to inquire about forgiveness and thinks that he might impress Jesus by forgiving more than once. The response from Jesus is that's not good enough; forgiveness is infinite, you can never forgive too much. Stories serve to help us understand things more clearly and help us to remember things.

To drive home the message Jesus tells a story. Jesus teaches what the kingdom of heaven is like. A king was owed a debt that a man could not pay. So, he issues a decree to sell the property, and to sell the man as well as his family into slavery in order to settle the debt. The man pleaded for the king to have compassion. The king forgave the debt. However, the man was presented with the same opportunity when he came across someone that owed him but refused to show the same degree of kindness and refused to forgive the debt. The king found out about this and punished the man because he was shown mercy and refused to show the same mercy.

The lesson indicates a condition of salvation. Many preach all you have to do is believe. The appeal of responding to your faith with minimum effort and reflection is pervasive in our culture. We learn from Jesus that there is more to belief. There is a requirement of obedience, devotion, and following the divine example. God will forgive you according to how much you forgive. The king handed the man over to be tortured. God forgives us. We are to pay it forward. The condition of forgiveness is that it has to come from your heart. There is no half hearted forgiveness. Your forgiveness has to be sincere. Forgiveness is tethered to the love of God. It is because God loves the world that God gives us Jesus for our salvation and forgiveness of our debts. Forgiveness is given to us by the all powerful creator. God is all good, the ultimate good. Forgiveness coming to us from the goodness of God is a very kind and special gift. We choose

Jesus, God, love and goodness. We pledge to do good things and to think good thoughts and to be good but we are not perfect. God, out of goodness, chooses forgiveness and gives us grace. The beauty of the gift is that we get to stay in a relationship with God.

I had this life I lived that has shame and guilt and so many times I have felt unworthy. It is a life that was hiding guilt and shame from the world. But the true forgiveness that God gives us erases all of that. True forgiveness from God allows me to forgive myself. With true forgiveness there is no guilt or shame from the past life. With the spiritual fortitude that comes from developing our faith in the love of God we are in position to forgive others. Forgiveness contains the word *give*. Forgiveness is a gift that you give to others and to yourself. It is all divine love which is sincere and loves you as you are. Since God loves you as you are, you can do the same for others. You can take great pride in your value as a child of God, worthy of God's love, and able to love others in a divine and spiritual fashion. The love of Jesus fills unmet emotional needs. Spiritual love replaces temptation because temptation comes from our own desires, our wants and need to feel good. The love of Jesus causes us to feel good.

The world is full of temptation but since you have divine love, the pure love of the Lord is in your heart, and then you have motivation to do good things and are no longer motivated to live a life of self indulgence and pleasure seeking. We have the strength and power of the Holy Spirit in us. We have the strength to fight temptation. With Jesus we are victorious over temptation and can take great pride in our ability to be a conqueror of evil. The Christian thinks with the mind of Jesus, loves with the heart of Jesus, and shares in his pain and cares in his love. Forgiveness is a cleansing mechanism for the soul leaving us with good feelings of the Lord's blessing and replacing bad feelings of anger, resentment, injustice, and vengeance. When we release forgiveness, we release a burden which results in improved health, relationships, and spiritual formation. Our own happiness and satisfaction increases significantly.

At the heart of the lesson is the contrast between God and humanity – a God that gives and a humanity that takes. When Jesus is on the cross of Calvary, he prays for his enemies. He prayed for them while they were intent on his death. As we forgive others, God forgives us. The debtor faces temptation. The debtor has the debt forgiven and faces the temptation of failing to forgive because he is selfish and wants God's way for himself but not for another.

Forgiveness comes from the heart of God. It is out of love that God offers forgiveness. Sometimes, we have to forgive ourselves in order to have spiritual healing and develop faith formation. God's way is for all. God's way is for you, me, and everyone else. My guilt, sin, and shame, are forgiven. I have confessed to God and have been forgiven by God. That is a beautiful picture – unlimited forgiveness. A quality of compassion is that there is no keeping score of offenses. Our standard of behavior is Christ's behavior. As God has forgiven us, we are to forgive others.