



THE STORIES JESUS TOLD

JULY 27 | THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

GATHER

AS YOU BEGIN, PRAY TOGETHER.

Read God's holy Word.

MATTHEW 18:21-35 (NRSV)

"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? Jesus said to him, *'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.*

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

'For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; 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. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. 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." Then his fellow-slave fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. 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. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, "You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?" And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'

HEARING WHAT JESUS SAID

You often hear parents say that it took becoming a parent themselves to really have grace for their own parents. Once they experience the challenges of raising children, they are more able to offer the grace and understanding for their own parents. Is it too little, too late? In this parable, we see clearly that just because you are shown mercy doesn't mean you fully grasp the gift, or are in turn able to offer it to others freely. The first servant receives mercy but fails to let that mercy shape his future actions. The dissonance

it creates tells us that he never truly grasped the grace he was given. Forgiveness must flow **through a person, not just to them**. Otherwise, the inner life remains untouched by grace.

EQUIP

TAKE A GROUP PAUSE AND THEN CONSIDER THE QUESTIONS TOGETHER AS A GROUP.

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- Can you recall an experience in which you were shown mercy by someone in your life? Consider sharing it with the group. How did this experience shape you? Share why it was formative for you.
- Is there someone in your life whom it is hard for you to forgive? What makes you feel justified in your lack of forgiveness for this person or the situation?
- As readers of the story, it might seem easy for us to spot the fault and wonder, “How could he not just forgive the fellow servant?!” If someone were to look in on your life in the same way, what might they notice that you may not be able to see? Take some time to reflect on this.

Re-read Matthew 18:30–35 and think through which character you most identify with and why. What feelings do you identify with when you imagine yourself as this character? Consider sharing with the group.

“I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger, his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

- How do you think you can differentiate between superficial forgiveness and forgiveness that comes from the heart? What does living out the forgiveness that God has shown you look like?
- What does it look like for mercy to flow freely from you? What keeps you from this? How are you preoccupied with the ways that you have been wronged?
- Forgiveness is not a simple act of will, but oftentimes we are unsure how to forgive. Share some of your ideas about true forgiveness with the group.

ENGAGE

CONSIDER THESE PRACTICAL NEXT STEPS IN THE WEEK AHEAD. SHARE WITH YOUR GROUP NEXT WEEK ABOUT HOW THESE PRACTICES HELPED OR HINDERED YOUR UNDERSTANDING.

- Think of something you’ve done wrong—something you perhaps do not feel forgiven for doing. Now close your eyes and think of it in God’s presence. Say aloud this paraphrase of 1 John 1:9: “In the name of Jesus Christ, I am forgiven.” Sit quietly and soak in that truth. How does it feel to truly know you have been forgiven?
- Over the next several days, pray and ask God to show you someone in your life that you are

struggling to truly forgive. Think of them in God's presence. Then say aloud the paraphrase of 1 John 1:9 from above. If you feel compelled, consider adding a prayer for yourself: "Help me to forgive this person as well." What is holding you back from releasing this person who wronged you? How would it help you?

- Often, fellow believers are the hardest people to forgive because we hold higher expectations for these relationships. We think: "Surely they wouldn't do that to me because they love Jesus like I do..." However, we are all sinners and make mistakes that create rifts in relationships. Take some time to evaluate your relationships and consider places that might need you to take the first step towards the healing and restoration of the relationship.

PRAY TOGETHER

Dear Jesus, thank you for forgiving us and showing us mercy—let it shape how we live in relationship with others. May the words of 1 John take root in our hearts. In hearing and repeating it, might we fully believe. We pray that Your forgiveness will not stop at us but will flow through us towards others. Give us the wisdom we need to forgive those who have wronged us. Help us release these offenders and not be preoccupied with hurt. Let us be a people who show grace towards others because of the grace You have shown us.

