

FORGIVENESS

Deciding that someone who has wronged you doesn't have to pay

Unmerciful Servant

Matthew 18:21-35

MEMORY VERSE | Colossians 3:13

Peter was one of Jesus' most passionate followers and closest friends. But even he didn't always understand that following God isn't about rules; it's about your heart.

One day, Peter came to Jesus with a burning question. Perhaps he'd just had a fight with his brother Andrew. Or maybe he and Judas had argued over who should be in charge of the money. Whatever the case, Peter needed to know: *"Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"*

Peter probably thought being willing to forgive seven times made him pretty awesome stuff. But Jesus had a different answer.

"I tell you," Jesus said, *"not seven times, but 77 times."*

Jesus didn't actually mean we should stop forgiving after 77 times. He simply meant that it's not about numbers; we should forgive as many times as it takes. In fact, He told a story to explain. If He told that story today, it might sound something like this.

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THERE ONCE WAS A KING who lived in a glorious palace. One afternoon, he called for his bookkeeper and demanded to know the state of his accounts.

"Tell me, good man," the king demanded. "How do they look?"

“Let’s just say you could purchase whatever you wish, as much as you wish, whenever you wish,” the bookkeeper replied.

“So my books are in perfect order!” the king announced.

“Not quite, Your Majesty,” the bookkeeper cautioned. “There’s that servant of yours, Larry. You’ve lent him approximately 29 million dollars and six cents. Give or a take a few million.”

“Jumping geraniums!” the king exclaimed. “That much? He must pay it back!”

The king called Larry to come before him. Larry smiled uneasily and bowed low.

“It appears you owe me quite a lot of money,” the king pointed out.

“Oh. Well, um. Yes,” Larry admitted. “But I can’t exactly pay it back at the moment . . .”

***“I’ll pay everything
back, I promise!
Every last penny!”***

The king was livid. “Can’t pay?!” he shouted. “Guards! Sell everything this man owns. Then hire him and his family out to work for the rest of their lives until he can pay me what he owes!”

The guards closed in on Larry, but he fell to his knees and pleaded. “No, no. Please! Give me time!” he begged. “I’ll pay everything back, I promise! Every last penny!”

The king nodded to the guards, who backed off.

“All right then,” the king said. “You don’t have to pay right now. In fact, you don’t have to pay ever. You can go.”

"Really?" Larry asked in amazement. "Wow. That totally rocks!"

Larry leapt to his feet and did a happy dance all the way out of the palace. But along the road home, he came across another servant. We'll call him Mo.

"Hey! Mo!" he called. "Don't you owe me some money?"

"Oh. Well, um. Yes," Mo admitted. "A couple hundred dollars, right?"

"You gotta pay me back right now," Larry demanded.

"I, um, can't pay right now," Mo told him. "Just give me a little time. I'll have it next week!"



***"You evil servant!"
exclaimed
the king.***

Larry was livid. He ignored Mo's pleas and had him thrown in prison until he could pay. But Larry had made such a fuss, the other servants saw what happened. They went and told the king.

"Jumping jellybeans!" the king fumed. "Get Larry back in here!"

Larry arrived, still pleased with himself for showing Mo who was boss.

"You evil servant!" exclaimed the king.

"Er . . . excuse me?" asked Larry, taken aback.

*"I forgave all that you owed me because you begged me to," said the king.
"Shouldn't you have had mercy on the other servant just as I had mercy on you?"*

“Humph,” grumbled Larry. “None of your beeswax.”

“Guards!” the king commanded. “Throw this man in prison. Punish him until he’s paid back every single buck he owes!”

Larry protested and begged again, but this time, the guards grabbed him and locked him away in prison.

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AS JESUS FINISHED THE STORY, He studied Peter and His other friends and followers who had gathered to listen. “This is how my Father in heaven will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart,” Jesus explained.

Jesus’ meaning was clear. God has forgiven us of so much. He wants us to forgive others in the same way—even if we have to forgive over and over and over.



Let's
Talk!

Share the last time someone really hurt you—whether it was something they said or did. Did you choose to forgive them? If you did, was it hard?

Forgiving others does not come easily. It’s not our natural response. It’s much easier to think, “Well, they hurt me, so it’s only fair for me to hurt them back.” But the truth is, none of us deserves to be forgiven. We’ve all broken God’s laws and caused Him pain. And yet, He forgives us of everything we’ve ever done the moment we ask! That’s not fair, either, is it? God’s forgiveness is a huge, amazing gift. And because He’s forgiven us of so much, He wants us to forgive others. We don’t even have to do it on our own; we can ask God for His help. If there’s someone you need to forgive right now, pray together and ask God to give you the grace and strength to forgive, just as He’s forgiven you. If you can’t think of anyone you need to forgive right now, pray that God will always make you quick to pass His grace and forgiveness on to others.