

## Forgiveness Matthew 18:21-35

When Shannon Ethridge was just 16 years old, an act of forgiveness and love changed her life forever. While driving to her high school one day, Ethridge ran over Marjorie Jarstfar, a woman who was riding her bicycle along a country road. Marjorie died as a result, and Ethridge, who was found completely at fault by authorities, was consumed by intense guilt. She contemplated suicide several times, but she never took her life because of the healing response of one man: Gary, Marjorie's husband.

Gary forgave the 16-year-old and asked the attorney to drop all charges against her, saving her from a guilty verdict. Instead, he simply asked that Ethridge continue on in the Godly footsteps that his wife had taken. "You can't let this ruin your life," Gary told her more than 20 years ago. "God wants to strengthen you through this. In fact, I am passing Marjorie's love for Jesus to you."

Gary's act of forgiveness showed Ethridge the amazing love of God. Today, Ethridge is a popular Christian author. Her books help women overcome guilt-ridden, wounded lives.

Every time we pray the Lord's prayer we ask God to forgive us our sins.....as we forgive others their sins

### **In Matthew 18:21**

Peter comes to Jesus and probably said, "Someone hurt me. He's done me wrong; and not just once. Lord, I know I'm your disciple, and I know that I'm supposed to forgive the person who hurt me, but it feels unfair. Why should I be

the one who is always forgiving people? How often do I have to forgive him? Do I forgive him up to seven times?"

Rabbinic teaching during Jesus' time was to forgive someone up to three times and then after that you could seek revenge.

If you've ever been hurt and call yourself a Christian, you know in your head that you're called to be a forgiver.

Jesus tells Peter to forgive not just seven times but seventy times seven times.

Imagine Peter's surprise when Jesus goes way beyond Peter's offer of forgiving seven times.

When it comes to life and relationships there are two paths to go down. We can choose the Law of Lamech, which is the law of revenge or, we can choose Jesus' call to forgiveness. Lamech killed a man for wounding him and then said that he would seek revenge 77 times over against anyone who hurts him. That became known as the Law of Lamech. As

disciples we are called to forgive. Perhaps we should start with considering what forgiveness is not.

***Forgiveness is not excusing.*** We excuse small children for misbehaving in the grocery store. When an action is excusable, it doesn't require forgiveness.

***Forgiveness is not forgetting.*** Sometimes I forget where I placed my keys, that's a lapse of my memory. That's very different from forgetting a serious hurt that someone has caused us. We may still remember the hurt even if we've forgiven someone. We can find the power to forgive what we still remember.

***Forgiveness is not always reconciling.*** Reconciliation is always the best case

scenario that happens after people hurt each other and then sit down, talk it out, take responsibility, and apologize. Reconciliation takes place in good marriages, good families, and good churches when all is forgiven and relationships are restored. Sometimes you can have forgiveness without a restored relationship, especially if the experience was life-shattering and trust is removed.

C.S. Lewis said he finally forgave the schoolmaster who abused both he and his brother, but it was 30 years after the schoolmaster died. For Lewis, reconciliation wasn't possible because reconciliation requires the rebuilding of trust and good faith on the part of both parties.

### **So what forgiveness is**

Having seen that forgiveness is not excusing, forgetting, or necessarily reconciling, let's look at what forgiveness is. **Forgiveness is a decision, an act of the will by the grace of God.**

You may find yourself saying, "This person really hurt me. I want to forgive this person. Lord, please give me the grace to do that." You could say, "She ripped me off. My heart is broken. Lord, heal my heart, and give me the grace to let her off the hook." You may say, "They took that precious item from me.

Lord, that was a big loss, but please give me the mercy to forgive them."

To forgive, you begin to let go of the desire for vengeance.

A young boy in Korea was a houseboy for some American soldiers. Sometimes they thought it was funny to play harmless jokes on him. They would tease him. They would tie his shoe laces together. They would lock him out of the house. Eventually they realized that their practical jokes were not viewed as funny by the boy so they apologized. He said, "That's okay, I will stop spitting in your soup now."

Forgiveness means giving away the right for revenge because God is the judge; we're not. It means we don't try to get even.

Over time you will be able to pray for the person.

**In Matthew 18:23-26** the king represents God, and we're represented by the servant who owes 10,000 talents. A talent was a measure of wealth.

Jesus' point is that because of our sin, we all owe God an unpayable moral and spiritual debt. Under the law, the rule was "We owe" therefore "We pay."

God however loves us so much, he knows there's no way we could ever get out of our spiritual dilemma on our own, so he cancelled our debt when Jesus died on the cross. That's why the cross always has been and always will be at the heart of Christianity.

God's kingdom is founded on grace. This is available to us, to forgive those who are in debt to us. "Forgiven people forgive because they've experienced the gracious forgiveness of God."

**In Matthew 18:28-30** The servant has received amazing grace, and he owes his life, his freedom, his family, his possessions, and everything he has to the grace of the master.

But the servant goes out and finds a man who owes him a debt of around \$100; it's repayable. Unlike the king, the servant thinks, "I'm not going to make the same mistake as the silly old king. This man who owes me is going pay what he owes!"

Here's the problem: We have a strong tendency to think we can receive forgiveness from God but not give it to others.

*The Journal of Adult Development* says: 75 percent of people surveyed believe they have been forgiven by God for past sins, mistakes, and wrong-doing but only 52 percent say they have forgiven others. Even fewer, 43 percent, say they have sought forgiveness for a wrong they did to someone else. Jesus doesn't call the idea that we think we can get forgiveness from God without giving forgiveness to others a bad idea, insufficient theology, or weak thinking; he calls it impossible.

*Matthew 18:31-34* Word gets through the royal court about the servant's bad behaviour and eventually gets to the king. He calls the servant in and says, "You just don't get it, do you? You thought grace meant that I was a fuzzy-minded, incompetent old fool who would let you get away with whatever you want and then go and abuse whomever you want." The king said, "I offered you a huge amount of grace and forgiveness, but you wouldn't live in it. You wanted to receive it for yourself and then selfishly deny it to others."

That's not how it works here and Jesus would now say, the same today "That's not how it works in my kingdom!"

The king turned to the guards and said, "Take this servant away and throw him in prison; leave him there until he pays back the unpayable debt." Jesus ends with this statement in verse 35: "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother and sister from your heart."

Jesus isn't saying that if you fail to forgive you'll be thrown into a torture chamber forever. Jesus is saying that not showing forgiveness means that forgiveness is unknown! Jesus is telling us that if we're not willing to forgive it reveals we have never received the grace and forgiveness of the Father.

Conclusion: Tim Keller says, "We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope."

Our sins are innumerable, but God's grace in Christ washes away each one if we'll receive it. If his grace takes root in our hearts we will, by the power of his Spirit, forgive those who have hurt us because forgiven people forgive.

That's not always easy; it takes prayer and asking Jesus for help.

It will probably take time.

Lewis Smedes says, "To forgive is to set a prisoner free.....and only to finally discover that the PRISONER, WAS YOU!"