

BIBLE LIFE MESSAGES

# The Secret of Forgiveness

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Matthew 18:21-35

**1** What is the secret to forgiveness? Our Bible passage today from Matthew, chapter 18, verses 21 through 35 examines this question by answering two of its component questions. We will look at what is the right attitude about forgiveness and what is the wrong attitude about forgiveness. **2**

But first, let's examine . . .

## **I. What was the Situation? - v21-22**

What was the situation? **3** Verses 21 and 22 tell us, **Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.** **4**

**Asking for forgiveness** may have been implied here. **5** In fact, this question may have been in response to the Lord's statement **So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him."** **1 6**

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 17:3-4.

When Peter asked this question he might have had in mind seven times a day. <sup>7</sup> The Jewish Talmud, the religious authority used at that time, said you only needed to forgive three times a day. <sup>8</sup>

But the Lord's answer, in verse 22, <sup>2</sup> was 77, or more likely 490 times! <sup>3</sup> Whatever the intended number, the Lord was talking about unlimited forgiveness here! <sup>9</sup>

**Is unconditional forgiveness even emotionally possible?** The normal Christian response is often, "I'll forgive you this time, but I'll not forget. Don't let it happen again!" <sup>10</sup>

But with the power of God's Holy Spirit in your life you can forgive unconditionally! Corrie ten Boom, a Dutch watchmaker, was arrested and sent to Ravensbruck concentration camp with her sister for aiding Jewish neighbors during the Nazi occupation of her country. Her sister died there. <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> v22 - I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

<sup>3</sup> 70 times 7!

<sup>4</sup> The Hiding Place, Chosen Books, Nov 1971.

After her release, she established a rehabilitation center for former concentration camp survivors and toured the world for speaking events. At one event in Germany a woman approached her to ask her forgiveness. Ms. ten Boom recognized her as the cruelest woman guard at Ravensbruck. Expressing forgiveness was very difficult but enabled through the power of the Holy Spirit she was able to genuinely do it! <sup>11</sup>

The secret seems to be related to **the pride vs. humility issue**. <sup>12</sup>

Peter's question, though generous, was legalistic. Pride, not humbleness, is fostered in legalism. Islam, for instance, proclaims that we are right, everyone else is wrong. You don't even deserve to live unless you agree with us! Some Christian churches even proclaim, "We are the true church". "You must agree with our doctrines in order to be right with God." <sup>13</sup>

In verse 21 <sup>5</sup> we discover that this question rose from self righteousness, “I am the offended party”. <sup>14</sup> This brings to mind the Lord’s story about the stark contrast between the Pharisee and the tax collector as they were praying in the Temple. <sup>6</sup> The Pharisee’s prayer was a reminder to God of how much of a goodie goodie he was. The tax collector’s prayer was a desperate plea for forgiveness. <sup>15</sup> How the Lord must have wished that Peter’s question would have been, “How can I be reconciled to a brother I have sinned against?”

So, what is the Bible’s answer here? <sup>16</sup> **The Golden Rule!** We all fall short of God’s standards for us. <sup>17</sup> **For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.** <sup>7</sup> <sup>18</sup>

How often would you want the Lord to forgive you? Only seven times? Only 490 times? <sup>19</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> v21 - Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?

<sup>6</sup> Luke 18:9-14.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 3:23.

What are the consequences for this type of forgiveness? <sup>20</sup>

The Lord said, **For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.** <sup>8</sup> <sup>21</sup> Then Colossians, chapter 3, verse 13, reminds us, **Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.**

<sup>22</sup>

Now that you are aware of the situation, this passage continues with . . .

## II. What is the Right Attitude About Forgiveness? - v23-27

What is the right attitude about forgiveness? <sup>23</sup>

Let's start with **the reckoning**; verses 23 through 25, **Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he**

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew 6:14-15.

**began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.** <sup>24</sup>

**These servants were the king's stewards, managers of his property.** <sup>9</sup> <sup>25</sup> In verse 24, a talent was 600 denarii. A denarius was a day's wage. So ten thousand talents equaled about sixty million denarii! That's more than a lifetime of daily wages! <sup>26</sup>

**The word "sold" in the original language <sup>10</sup> means to be carried across the sea for the purpose of selling. It was the common word used for selling slaves. This was merciful because the alternative would have been debtor's prison where torture could be involved.** <sup>27</sup>

**What happened next in the story was **the reaction.** Verse 26 continues, **The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will****

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<sup>9</sup> v23 & 25.

<sup>10</sup> πιπράσκω.

**pay back everything.'** This was impossible, and everybody knew it. He would have had to be a genius on Wall Street and, obviously, money management wasn't one of his gifts! <sup>28</sup>

The king's **response**. Verse 27, **The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go . . .**

<sup>29</sup> The phrase "took pity" <sup>11</sup> is usually translated "compassionate". It literally means that the king was so overcome emotionally it made him sick. <sup>30</sup> The king suspended the sentence and pardoned the debt in full!

Before God you stand condemned for your sins. However, because of your acceptance of the cross, you are considered by God "not guilty". That's awesome! You, and the forgiven steward, should be so grateful that it would have a beneficial impact on your life. right? <sup>31</sup>

But that's not the end of the story. As we read on with verses 28 through 36, we discover . . .

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<sup>11</sup> σπλαγχνίζομαι.



### III. What is the Wrong Attitude About Forgiveness? - v28-35

What is the wrong attitude about forgiveness? <sup>32</sup>

Again we have **the reckoning**. Verse 28 says, **But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.** <sup>33</sup>

Where the king only commended, this steward grabbed by the throat! <sup>34</sup> What was owed here? Just one hundred denarii; less than four month’s wages. That’s doable. <sup>35</sup>

Now **the reaction** in verse 29, **His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’** <sup>36</sup> This response was identical to the steward’s response except he didn’t use the word “all”! <sup>37</sup> This man didn’t promise what he couldn’t deliver. <sup>38</sup>

Notice the contrast in **the responses** between the king and the forgiven steward in verses 27 and 30, **The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go . . . But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.** <sup>39</sup> The king suspended the steward's sentence and pardoned his complete debt. <sup>40</sup> But in the forgiven steward's response, he dragged the other servant by the throat to court and threw him violently into debtor's prison. <sup>41</sup>

Verses 32 through 34 record how the king felt when he found out about it, **Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'** In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. <sup>42</sup>

What can we take away from . . .

## IV. The Message of This Parable

The message of this parable?

**God is the King!** <sup>43</sup>

**God wants you to be like the King.** He wants you to be like God in your attitude towards others. <sup>44</sup>

One of God's purposes for you is to become a carbon copy of Him! You were "created in His image and likeness". <sup>12</sup> <sup>45</sup>

God wants His light to shine through your godly attitudes, so He could be honored through you! The Lord said, . . . let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. <sup>13</sup> <sup>46</sup>

**Honor God by forgiving others as He was willing to forgive you!**

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<sup>12</sup> Genesis 1:26-27 - Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 5:16.

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