

Matt 18:21-35 Parable of the Unforgiving Servant Pentecost 16 BPUC 15.9.20

²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone^[a] who sins against me? Seven times?" ²² "No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven!^[a]

²³ "Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. ²⁴ In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. ²⁵ He couldn't pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt. ²⁶ "But the man fell down before his master and begged him, 'Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.' ²⁷ Then his master was filled with compassion for him, and he released him and forgave his debt.

²⁸ "But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few hundred dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. ²⁹ "His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it,' he pleaded. ³⁰ But his creditor wouldn't wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full. ³¹ "When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. ³² Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be punished until he had paid his entire debt.

³⁵ "That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters^[a] from your heart."

Q.1. Speculate – why has Peter come to Jesus with a question about forgiveness?
V.21

Q.2. Does Peter believe '7 times' would be commended by Jesus? Why?

Q.3. What does Jesus' answer to Peter suggest about forgiveness among his followers?

Q.4. Why did Jesus feel the need to illustrate his answer by a parable in vv.22-34? How do stories like this help us understand tough topics?

Q.5. Describe the king in the parable. Suggest 5 ways in which God is like the king?

Q.6. What is the one key point of the parable?

Q.7. In the end the 1st servant ended up 'unforgiven' v.34, why?

Application: for reflection, prayer and action

Q.8. Do we earn God's forgiveness by forgiving others? If not, why should we forgive others?

Q.9. If we don't forgive others what does that say about our forgiveness by God?

Q.10. What should the relationship be between consequences for bad behaviour and forgiveness?

Q.11. What is the connection between forgiveness, well-being and wholeness? Is 'self-forgiveness' important?

Matt 18:21-35 (my suggested answers)

NB. Please answer the questions yourself. We all have different ways of answering; God may give you greater insights than mine. Put '*John thinks*' ... before each answer.

A.1. Your answer – maybe Peter was prompted following the discussion on 'reconciliation' in Matt 18:15-20, or maybe he is speaking about an experience he has faced in the past.

A.2. In those days the Rabbis suggested people forgive 3 times. So probably Peter was trying to be more compassionate. 7x seem a lot

A.3. For Jesus' people he suggests that there should be no limit to forgiveness. Of course the forgiveness of others is based on God's forgiveness of us. See Ephesians 4:31 Col 3:13

A.4. Because 'unlimited' forgiveness sounds unworkable Jesus illustrates what he means. Stories help us visualise answers to tough issues. Jesus told lots of stories.

A.5. The King is like God: i. He is interested in us, his servants, and what's happening in our lives; ii. He listens to our circumstance when we talk to him (in prayer); iii. He is full of mercy, compassion and forgiveness for his needy people; iv. He expects his forgiveness will be reciprocated; v. He takes action to judge unmerciful behaviour.

A.6. The key point is 'God's forgiveness should lead us to forgive others, as often as they ask us (In genuine repentance).'

A.7. He was mean and unforgiving of the 2nd servant; so the king reversed his forgiveness.

A.8. No, God forgives in grace & mercy; We should forgive in gratitude for our forgiveness by God – as A.3 above

A.9. If we don't forgive others, we reveal that God's forgiveness of us is skin-deep and not heart-felt.

A.10. There should always be consequences for sin if possible. However, for the sake of reconciliation sometimes we can suspend the consequences and directly forgive. Each circumstance is different, and the timing will matter.

A.11. There is a strong connection between forgiveness and well-being. When we are wronged, we naturally want justice or at least repentance by the person who has wronged us. But that is often difficult and may never happen.

For our own well-being it is best to forgive (as God has forgiven us, to pray for reconciliation Matt 18:15-20 and to ask for God's guidance for the steps forward). Living with bitterness, grudges, pain and/or the desire for revenge is very unhealthy for us. Our wholeness will come when we forgive (even ourselves, for our part) and move forward.